Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies

2017

Polyfidelity and the Dynamics of Group Romantic Relationships

Jeff R. Peterson
Walden University

Walden University

College of Counselor Education & Supervision

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Jeff Peterson

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Jason Patton, Committee Chairperson, Counselor Education and Supervision Faculty
Dr. Joy Whitman, Committee Member, Counselor Education and Supervision Faculty
Dr. Laura Haddock, University Reviewer, Clinical Mental Health Counseling Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2016

Abstract

Polyfidelity and the Dynamics of Group Romantic Relationships

by

Jeff Peterson

MA, Walden University, 2012

BA, University of Iowa, 1995

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision: Counseling and Social Change

Walden University

December 2016

Abstract

Monogamy is considered the romantic norm for establishing family and kinship. Alternative relationships such as polyfidelity, that is, a group romantic relationship, often face prejudice and social stigma resulting in a greater need for mental health counseling services compared to those who are not stigmatized. Yet counselors and counselor educators lack both understanding and cultural competency for serving this population. The purpose of this study was to better understand the dynamics of a polyfidelity relationship, as well as how a counselor might better serve the needs of individuals engaged in this type of relationship. In this study, 14 participants described what it was like to be in a polyfidelitous relationship. A combined theoretical framework—based on relational cultural theory, social constructionism, and queer theory was used to reveal the challenges, as well as the strengths, of such a relationship. It was discovered that there are an exponential number of relationship combinations when introducing an additional member into an existing 2-person relationship. As a result the relational component in counseling becomes compounded. For example, a 3-person relationship has 4 unique relationships, a 4-person relationship has 11 unique relationships, and a 5-person relationship has 26 unique relationship combinations. In addition, members of group relationships often use their group dynamics to check and balance one another, resolve conflict, and better express aspects of each partner's personality. The implications for social change are multifold in both furthering mental health professional's understanding of alternative families, as well as identifying the advantages and pitfalls of engaging in a polyfidelitous relationship.

Polyfidelity and the Dynamics of Group Romantic Relationships

by

Jeff Peterson

MA, Walden University, 2012

BA, University of Iowa, 1995

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision: Counseling and Social Change

Walden University

December 2016

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Jason Patton, for his ongoing support, encouragement, and collegial respect. I would also like to thank my committee member, Dr. Joy Whitman, for coming to bat last minute with a friendly smile, sound guidance, and helpful encouragement. In addition, I would like to thank two of my Walden faculty mentors who truly believed in me during my master's program, Dr. Stacee Reicherzer and Dr. Matthew Buckley.

Dr. Reicherzer provided me research opportunities, encouraged me to attain a Walden scholarship, and introduced me to Walden's Ph.D. program in Social Change. Dr. Buckley instilled a deeper understanding of what it means to be a teacher and provided wisdom for becoming a better leader. His most memorable moment was when he modeled how to affect social change by advocating for LGBT civil rights in my local community.

I would also like to thank Dr. Elizabeth Sheff for her guidance, networking, and leadership in researching stigmatized cultures. In addition, I would like to thank my colleague Mary Wolf, who provided me access to rare historic artifacts documenting the earlier days of polyfidelity and the Kerista commune. I would like to thank my former boss and Argosy University program chair, Dr. Justin Brogan, for his continual phone calls checking in on the progress of my dissertation. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Susan Chilton, for being there as a friend and mentor through thick and thin. To those that I have not listed, including my family, friends, and co-workers, please know that I am grateful for your assistance and support along the way.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In this chapter I will explore the background of polyfidelity, as well as the origins and power structures supporting monogamy as a social norm. Polyfidelity is essentially a committed group relationship of three or more consensual adults and is differentiated from polyamory or solopoly by its focus on family rather than the individual (Easton & Hardy, 2011). Unlike a similar concept referred to as polygamy, polyfidelity denotes an egalitarian and reciprocal spirit where all members benefit from the relationship in a nonexploitive manner (Kerista, 1984; Lano & Perry, 1995; Nearing, 1993; Pines & Aronson, 1981).

Polyfidelity is an underresearched and systemically erased (unrecognized as a valid relationship) phenomenon that is often stigmatized, mythologized, and pathologized by dominant culture (Lano & Perry, 1995; Sheff, 2014; Trau, Hartel & Hartel, 2013; Veaux & Rickert, 2014). As a result, the research community lacks—or is often unaware of—the language necessary to describe the complex dynamics of such relationships. Therefore, this chapter includes operational definitions of terminology that are less known in both academia and the dominant culture.

I will discuss the purpose of the study, as well as guiding research questions aimed at better understanding the phenomenology of this culture. I will review the theoretical and conceptual framework for my approach, as well as limitations and delimitations. Finally, I will discuss the significance of this study, which has the potential for helping counselors better understand and better help polyfidelitous individuals

capitalize on the strengths and overcome the weaknesses in their own polyfidelitous relationship.

Background of the Study

The dynamics of a monogamous relationship have traditionally been based in philosophical, anthropological, and theological ideals of sexual, social and marital exclusivity between two individuals (Finn, 2012). Because of this, monogamy has been the established historical norm for the majority of romantic relationships (Dow & Eff, 2013; Howe, 2011). Classic concepts of family and kinship have been historically defined within the parameters of monogamous reproductive pair-bonding (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Dow & Eff, 2013; Frank & DeLamater, 2010). Dominant culture translated this into the idea that legitimate relationships only exist within a binary framework rather than a group framework and that the only valid familial pair-bonding exists as a binary relationship between two heterosexuals (Sheff, 2011).

Rich (1994) described how society has classically conceptualized romantic relationships through the phenomenon known as compulsory heterosexuality. This is the pressure placed on an individual in society to automatically assume a heterosexual identity regardless of the individual's feelings. Heckert (2010) and other contemporary researchers have described a similar phenomenon regarding compulsory monogamy, in which individuals respond to social pressure to live in a monogamous relationship even when an individual is oriented towards other types of relationship constructs (Parsons, Starks, Gamarel, & Grove, 2012; Ritchie & Barker, 2006; Tweedy, 2011).

The definition of monogamous and even polyamorous relationships based on the sole possibility of a binary connection omits or systematically erases the legitimacy of a large variety of alternative relationship constructs, including nonbinary polyfidelity relationships (Cherlin, 2010). It limits researcher's understanding of the lived experiences of those with alternative forms of sexual and gender identity because dominant cultural norms are based in binary (polarized) opposites (male or female, gay or straight, monogamous or promiscuous). Therefore, from an ontological perspective, how a society defines a romantic relationship can confine or limit the ability to understand the diversity behind human sexuality.

As a result, many relationships that exist outside of a monogamous framework are subject to social stigmatization and legal prejudice (Duff, 2010; Fry, 2010; Sheff, 2011). A polyamorous relationship, for example, is subject to the legal prejudice of being defined as adultery. Such a definition could have significant consequences for one or more members of the relationship, including the threat of losing custody of a child or loss of income (Parsons, Starks, Gamarel, & Grove, 2012; Tweedy, 2011). A polyfidelitous relationship, in the same way, runs the risk of being legally defined as polygamy, in which case individuals in the relationship could be subject to criminal investigation, legal fees, and removal of children from their home (Ashbee & Chapman, 2010; Zoe, 2010).

Recent research has suggested that significant benefits are associated with nonmonogamous, open-relationships, such as enhanced need fulfillment, stronger communication skills, and an increased ability to negotiate differences (Finn, Tunariu, & Lee, 2012; Mitchell, Bartholomew, & Cobb, 2014; Strauss, 2012). However, most of this

research focuses on binary relationships that involve multiple one-on-one romantic relationships. After an extensive search of the literature, I was unable to identify much research on the dynamics of a multiple-person closed relationship or group romantic relationship (Lano & Perry, 1995; Nearing, 1993; Pines & Aronson, 1981; West, 1996).

Pines and Aronson (1981) historically defined a group romantic relationship as polyfidelity, a consensual synchronous romantic relationship between three or more individuals based on the behaviors observed in the San Francisco Kerista Village commune in the early 1970s. Today, the Polyamory Society (polyamorysociety.org) describes the term *polyfidelity*, also referred to as polyfaithful or polyexclusive, as a synchronous closed group romantic relationship, which includes polygamy. There is a significant gap, however, in understanding polyfidelity defined as a closed egalitarian group relationship. Polyfidelity includes the concept of egalitarian polygamy, in which all individuals are romantically involved with one another and all members have equal consideration (Kerista, 1984; Nearing, 1993; Pines & Aronson, 1981).

Therefore, polyfidelity is unique from classic polygamy such as polygyny or polyandry, which often connotes an unequal relationship of possession (Koktvedgaard Zeitzen, 2008; Strauss, 2012). For example, polygyny refers to a man who possesses multiple wives. The wives in this type of relationship are often not considered to be on an equal level as the husband and are usually not romantically involved with one another. While polyfidelity is part of the larger polyamory community, polyfidelity is unique from classic polyamory since it often involves a closed, synchronous group relationship in

which members are romantically or affectively involved with one another (Strauss, 2012).

In a polyamorous relationship, each member of the relationship may be romantically involved asynchronously with an open group of other individuals who are not involved with one another. Polyamory is often defined within the classic construct of binary relationships, in which each individual has multiple two-person relationships but is not necessarily engaging in a synchronous group relationship (Bettinger, 2005; Bonello & Cross, 2010; Strauss, 2012). For example, in an open polyamorous primary relationship between a man and woman, both the man and/or the woman may have secondary, tertiary, and so forth, relationships with other individuals. These additional relationships could be closed or open, but the woman in this relationship will most likely not have a simultaneous relationship with the same group of individuals as the man (Chapman, 2010; Sheff, 2014).

Polyfidelity is often described as an intentional community in which sexual and relational dynamics extend beyond reproductive pair bonding (Berry & Barker, 2014; Nearing, 1992; Sartorius, 2004; Schilling, 2012; Strauss, 2012). These types of relationships have the potential to challenge classic concepts of sexual orientation and gender identity. For example, the spiritual beliefs behind the Komaja community, a contemporary Swiss polyfidelity commune (Komaja, 2015), is that gender is an illusion and the act of self-realization involves getting in touch with both female and male traits (Satrorius, 2004). The Komaja community's concept of group marriage is based in freedom of sexual and gender expression (Makaja, 2003).

Another example of how polyfidelity challenges binary gender revolves around the philosophy and group dynamics associated with group relationships. While relationships may occur between cisgender males and females, where biological sex and perceived gender are similar, this does not necessarily define how each individual perceives or experiences his or her gender in terms of expression and existential place in the world (Sartorius, 2004). Individuals in these types of relationships often do not view their sexual orientation or gender identity with such rigidity (MacDowall, 2009). In a polyfidelitous relationship, bonding occurs not only on a binary level, but also on a group level. Therefore, a nomothetic (the validation of a group of individuals) understanding of lived polyfidelity experiences could help shape a new way of understanding sexual orientation and gender identity outside of the binary norm of gay/straight or male/female (Ferrer, 2007; Kolesar, 2011; McLean, 2011).

There is a growing body of literature on open nonmonogamous relationships defined as *polyaomory*, as this continues to become more popular in contemporary society. However there is still a significant gap in understanding the unique dynamics of closed group relationships defined as *polyfidelitous* (Barker, 2005; Ferrer, 2007; Sartorius, 2004; Sheff, 2014; Strauss, 2012). Most of the literature that I found was either out of date or was specific to particular orientations or genders (Adams, 1980; Lano & Parry, 1995; Nearing, 1992; Tabi, Doster, & Cheney, 2010; West, 1996).

The fact that it was difficult to find research on this population suggests a significant need for a study to help counselor educators better understand the dynamics of group romantic relationships. The more counselor educators are able to understand the

dynamics and challenges of negotiating and sustaining polyfidelitous relationships, the more prepared they will be to train counselors on how to treat the needs of this population (Berry & Barker, 2014; Pawlicki & Larson, 2011; Pincus, 2011, Weitzman, Davidson, & Phillips, 2010). The results of this study could also help inform a better understanding of all community-based relationships (nonromantic group relationships) that exist under the polyamory umbrella.

Problem Statement

Group relationships are more complex than one-on-one relationships, which suggest that individuals in a polyfidelitous relationship might seek counseling services at a higher rate than their monogamous counterparts (Strauss, 2012). But counselor educators and supervisors are limited in their ability to properly train counselors on how to appropriately treat this population (Weitzman, Davidson, & Phillips, 2010). There is a significant deficit in research, data, and evidence-based practices for treating this population. There is also a significant amount of social stigma and legal prejudice surrounding nonmonogamous relationships, largely due to a lack of understanding (Sheff, 2011; Strauss, 2012; Tweedy, 2011; Whitehurst, 2011). Therefore, counselors may need to develop a more sophisticated understanding and openness to new experiences in order to be better prepared to adequately understand and treat the needs of individuals who engage in these types of romantic relationships.

As nonmonogamous relationships such as polyamory and polyfidelity continue to increase in number, counselors and counselor educators will need to become better equipped at understanding the challenges, benefits, and lived experiences of those who

engage in such relationships (Keppel, 2006; Pincus, 2011; Sheff, 2011). But counselor educators have very little information on the strengths or weaknesses of a nonmonogamous relationship. Counselor educators face a shortage of resources for training counselors to meet the counseling needs of individuals engaged in polyfidelity relationships.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand the dynamics of a polyfidelity relationship, as well as to better address the counseling needs of individuals engaged in such relationships. I sought to develop a common language for understanding the dynamics of a multiperson relationship by evaluating the lived experiences of individuals who are in such relationships. This study could also influence a new paradigm of how individuals experience, interpret, and understand human sexuality.

When adequately prepared with significant data, counselor educators will have the opportunity to affect social change by dispelling historical prejudice and increasing society's understanding of this population. The literature was used to demonstrate the power dynamics that influence dominant culture's definition of what is considered a valid relationship in the context of the phenomenology of a multiperson relationship. (See Chapter 3 and Appendix B for the research methodology and data collection techniques.)

Guiding Research Questions

Because of the limitations of research on polyfidelity, and group relationship dynamics in particular, the guiding questions for this study were fairly broad. The goal was to reveal key themes for further exploration, to describe the lived experiences of

those who have engaged in a group relationship, and to highlight some of the resiliency factors that strengthen these types of relationships, as well as the internal and external challenges that might threaten them. The following guiding questions were central to this study:

RQ1: What does it mean to be polyfidelitous?

RQ2: What are the lived experiences of polyfidelitous individuals?

SQA: What are the dynamics that challenge a group relationship?

SQB: What are the dynamics that support a group relationship?

SQC: How do individuals in these relationships successfully negotiate these challenges?

SQD: How do individuals in these relationships capitalize on relationship strengths?

Theoretical Framework

Post-structuralist thinkers such as Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes laid the foundation for better understanding plural realities that are foundational to social constructionism (SC). In SC, language is central to how individuals describe and rationalize the world in which they live (McNamee & Hosking, 2012). In a divergence from essentialist thought, SC views truth in terms of what is constructed as socially acceptable (Efran, McNamee, Warren, & Rasking, 2014). SC allows a place for alternative relationships to exist by challenging empirical thinking and allowing multiple truths to co-exist (McNamee & Hosking, 2012). This approach also paved the way for contemporary post-structuralist variations such as queer theory.

In Foucault's (1976) seminal book, *The History of Sexuality*, queer theory emerged as a way to understand how an individual's personal identities, including gender and sexuality, are constructed. The *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) framed the various power structures behind these identities and how those power structures influence cultural definitions of what society considers normal. A post-structuralist framework like queer theory helps individuals recognize how meaning is constructed through the lens of a culture's worldview (Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990). Historically this has been helpful in deconstructing prejudice and cultural bias towards populations that continue to be marginalized.

Queer theory was also useful for studying polyamory and polyfidelity, largely because it can help researchers better understand how power structures have influenced the defining and validating of sexual relationships, as well as kinship. Queer theory demonstrates how language frames what individuals think. For example, the term *illegal immigrants* dehumanizes the individual as being other or alien rather than a behavior of illegally entering the country (Warner, 2004). In the same way, the wording *couple's therapy* implies that two people comprise the only legitimate romantic relationship construct. Thus queer theory can help reorient how an individual thinks by deconstructing language within a cultural context.

Queer theory was supported by relational-cultural theory (RCT, Miller, 1976; Jordan, 2010). This theory focuses on how individualistic societies versus collective societies tend to devalue community and the importance of social connection, focusing solely on the individual self (Jordan, 2011). According to Frey (2013), Downie and

Llewellyn (2011), and Walker (2010), RCT is also a culturally and contextually relevant strategy for considering the relational context of an individual's lived experiences. Problems manifest in relationships with others and RCT practitioners posit that through growth-fostering relationships researchers can learn how to develop more positive outcomes (Headley & Sangganjanavanich, 2014; Walker, 2010).

RCT could also help reveal some of the reasoning behind why dominant culture gravitates towards monogamy. Does individualistic society devalue collectivist ideals? The stigma behind communism or socialism has often blurred concepts of communal living (Aguilar, 2013). However, modern intentional communities are often the epitome of a true democratic process (Bennett, 2009). Could an emic approach help us better understand the internal characteristics of nonmonogamies? Using RCT to develop a culturally contextual understanding of a pluralistic society could at least help counselor educators better deconstruct the power structures working against legitimizing nonmonogamous relationships.

Conceptual Framework

Impett, Muise, and Peragine (2014) highlighted the fact that the study of relationships is a branch of research in its own paradigm. The term *poly relationship* is used throughout this paper to draw from the commonalities between polyfidelity and polyamory in general. The more researchers know about the dynamics of a relationship the easier it is to understand how individuals are most likely orientated towards predisposed constructs (Ashbee, 2007; Chapman, 2010; Melloy, 2010; Tweedy, 2011). The concept of relationship structures, as orientations, was discussed in Chapter 2.

Multicultural research has demonstrated that an understanding of differing cultures begins with an understanding of the development of an individual's own culture (Arredondo & Tovar-Blank, 2014; Inman & Ladany, 2014). Therefore, this research on alternative relationships begins by assessing the cultural context of what is considered normal monogamy.

An analysis of the literature began with a brief overview of the history, philosophical underpinnings, American institution of, and developmental themes of monogamy. This was followed by an assessment of mythologies relating to both monogamous and poly relationships, as well as an assessment of the systemic challenges in researching and understanding poly relationships. After parsing a significant amount of literature from a variety of disciplines and sources, I was able to discern themes about the benefits and challenges of a poly relationship. Finally, I conducted an assessment of common counseling themes, strategies to protect a poly relationship, and poly-affirmative counseling interventions that are most prevalent in the literature.

In *The History of Sexuality* (1976) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault deconstructed the essentialist thinking that pervaded modernity and challenged the idea that an individual's's identity in Western culture has become increasingly tied to sexuality and relationships. Sexuality is therefore understood through the analytics of the negotiation of power. Finn (2012) described the dyadic monogamous couple as an enclosed extension of American autonomy. The individual is a dyadic unit that is fixed and regulated, free from the external chaos of a hedonistic underworld. The regulating compulsory monogamy is central to understanding the historic significance of the

development of monogamy as a social institution over time (Heckert, 2010; Ritchie &

Barker, 2006).

Therefore, anything other than monogamy—such as group relationships based on

egalitarian ideology—fall into the realm of counterculture. Pallotta-Chiarolli and Pease

(2014) highlighted the fact that subjectivity, or lived personal experiences, are essential to

affecting social change and bridging understanding between counterculture and

mainstream. The authors argued that when working to overcome an existing power

regime, the interplay between the subject and social norm through an individual's's lived

experiences determined the movement towards new ideas. In this case, a more in-depth

understanding of the lived experiences of those who are in a group relationship could

help researchers better understand the contention that exists between monogamous and

nonmonogamous culture.

Prejudice against alternative sexual and gender identities are often based in binary

notions of gender and sexuality, such as male/female and gay/straight (Strauss, 2012;

Swan, 2015). Yet binary thinking oftentimes polarizes an individual's perceived reality,

which then becomes ill equipped to explain the true phenomenology behind sexual and

gender expression (Sedgwick, 1990; UC Davis, 2007). The more researchers understand

polyfidelitous relationships, the more likely they are to develop a richer, more

comprehensive understanding of the complexity of various forms of sexuality, gender,

and relationship constructs, including the relationship and sexual fluidity (Frank &

DeLamater, 2010).

There is a dearth of understanding about the dynamics of group polyfidelity relationships (Strauss, 2012). Therefore, the guiding questions centered on creating a three-dimensional assessment of the complexity of these relationships. For example, what does it mean to be polyfidelitous? What are the lived experiences of these individuals? What dynamics challenge or support such a relationship? And how do individuals navigate such challenges or capitalize on such strengths? The answers to these questions helped determine what sociocultural influences might be strengthening or challenging the initiation and longevity of such relationships. They will also help researchers and clinicians better understand the development of relationships in general.

While much of the literature was out of date or focused primarily on open polyamorous relationships, there are a number of translatable themes that could serve as a strong foundation for developing strong instrumentation and as a foundation for better understanding the phenomenology of nonmonogamous relationships. In the end, findings from this study could contribute to the development of a language and clinical understanding of how all relationships function in society. This data could also contribute to new ways of defining sexual orientation, gender identity, and relationship constructs.

Nature of the Study

The research methodology for this study was based on a phenomenological emergent design, grounded in post-structuralist queer theory. A queer theory framework provides a lens that reveals how individuals define, develop, and construct their polyfidelity relationships. This framework also helped draw out the influences and differences due to social stigma, class, privilege, and gender identity. Kolesar (2011)

found that bisexual/pansexual identities tended to be more likely tied to polyamory. This suggests that as sexual identities continue to evolve in modern society, the complexities of these relationships are also evolving towards more polyamorous constructs that could include polyfidelity.

Baseline egalitarian character traits were identified within polyfidelitous relationships and are described in further detail in Chapter 2. For example, Sartorius (2004) identified some of these traits, such as nonpossessive love, emphasis on autonomy, free choice, compersion, self-realization, and fluid gender roles. Emergent or chain sampling methods (information that unfolded in the field) were used to assist in identifying these traits. Additional defining characteristics for determining a robust sample included gender identity, sexual identity, race, and education.

Definitions

When devising operational definitions it is important to examine the context in which such definitions exist. Most of the terminology below is helpful at identifying the limitations of a culture-bound language rooted in binary, often polarized oppositions (Kolesar, 2011; MacDowall, 2009; McLean, 2011; Sedgwick, 1990). For example, the term *nonmonogamy* is contextualized in a binary framework of two-person monogamy. The term *male* is commonly referred to as the opposite of female. By default, the term *straight* is often referred to as the opposite of *gay* or *lesbian* (leaving bisexuality somewhere between these polarized opposites), and the term *monogamous* is often inferred as being the opposite of promiscuous, which is often mistakenly referred to as polyamorous (MacDowall, 2009; McLean, 2011; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2014).

These binary definitions have been historically rooted in a binary male-female model based on reproduction (Sedgwick, 1990). For example, these definitions are in context of the idea of only two genders: man and woman (based on the biological sex of male and female. Koktvedgaard Zeitzen, 2008; McDermott, 2011), only two sexual orientations: heterosexual and nonheterosexual (with bisexuality being a watered down version of one or the other), and only two relationship constructs: monogamous and nonmonogamous (often referred to as promiscuous, Erickson-Schrotha & Mitchell, 2009). The very language being used to describe human sexual relationships contributes to a systematic erasure of the legitimacy of relationships other than monogamous, sexual orientations other than heterosexual, and gender identities other than man or woman (Bennion, 2012; McLean, 2011; Sweet, 2013).

Not only do these definitions contribute to the cultural biases discussed above, but they are also based on the assumption that sexuality and reproduction are the same phenomenon. Broadly, reproduction is a binary concept, in which the phenomenon occurs when combining male and female elements. However, the psychological concepts of sexuality and kinship are far more nuanced than the binary terminology that currently describes such phenomena (Diamond, 2006; Sedgwick, 1990).

Bisexuality (aka Ambisexual, Omnisexual): a sexual orientation describing an individual who has the capacity of being sexually or romantically attracted to more than one gender. This has been historically defined through the lens of binary genders (man/woman) in which an individual is attracted toward both sexes: females and males, yet not necessarily in equal proportion. For example, a bisexual male might be in a long-

term relationship with a female, having never explored sexual activity or relationships with men, even though he has the potential to be attracted towards men (MacDowall, 2009). The terms *heteroflexible* and *homoflexible* differentiate a skewed preference (AIB, 2014).

Chosen Family (aka Family of Choice, Choice Family, aka Intentional Family, aka Intentional Community, Domestic Group): a colloquial term used to describe a group of people that have intentionally or consciously chosen each other as family versus birth of origin (Weston, 1997).

Companionate Marriage: originally introduced in a banned 1928 film by the title, it is a term used to describe a romantic union between two individuals for the purpose of companionship rather than for the purpose of child-rearing or financial dependency (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996).

Compersion: is a term used by the polyfidelity community to describe taking joy in the joyful pleasures of a loved one. Compersion is the antonym of jealousy (Pines & Aronson, 1981).

Compulsory Heterosexuality & Compulsory Monogamy: is a term used to describe the social power structure leading to individuals conforming to the social expectation of a heterosexual sexual orientation (Rich, 1994). Compulsory monogamy is a similar concept in which individuals conform to a monogamous relationship construct out of social expectation (Heckert, 2010).

Dyads, Triads, Trouple, Quads, Quins, Circles: are terms used to describe two, three, four and five person primary relationship connections (Pines, 1987). Circles are a

group of sexual connections connoting noninterfering connections in respect of one another's space. An individual engaged in a circle considers them self a free agent (Veaux & Rickert, 2014; West, 1996).

Economy of Scale: an economic term used to describe increased efficiency when there is an increase in size. One example included buying groceries in bulk resulting in greater savings per unit (Hindle, 2012). In terms of living situations, economy of scale refers to primary costs that are similar whether shared between two people or multiple people. This included utilities, rent, and household goods.

Emotional Monogamy (aka Emotional Fidelity): a concept used with open consensual nonmonogamous relationships in which partners in the relationship agree to remain emotionally committed to only one other individual (Bonello & Cross, 2010).

Gender Queer (Gender Bender): a colloquial term used to describe an individual that does not proscribe to a binary gender system and identifies outside of a male and female gender norm (http://genderqueerid.com).

Hir, Ze, They (vs.) Him, Her: for the sake of economy of language, a binary gender system such as him or her is often used in lieu of the complex spectrum of gender identities that may exist. One way to fully encompass the multiplicity of gender experience would be to use gender-neutral pronouns such as "ze" or "hir." The singular use of the word They is also an alternative gender neutral pronoun.

Monogamy (also Monoamory, Exclusive Relationship): The etymology comes from the Greek term *monos* (one) and *gamos* (marriage). Monogamy is classically divided into four realms: marital monogamy: closed long term relationship between two

people; social monogamy: two partners engaging in martial monogamous behavior but outside of the institution of marriage; sexual monogamy: two partners who are sexually active with only one another over a particular time span; genetic monogamy: a sexually monogamous relationship resulting in offspring from the same parents (Betzig, 1992; Chapais, 2013).

Mono-normative (also Mononormativity): a term recognizing the marginalization of nonmonogamous relationships due to the privileged assumptions behind that a monogamous relationship is the only legitimate or normal relationship orientation (Barker & Landridge, 2010).

Monosexism: A belief that negates the legitimacy of bisexuality, in which exclusive opposite sex or same sex attraction is deemed superior (UC Davis LGBT Resource Center, 2007).

Multilateral Marriage (aka Group Marriage, Complex Marriage, aka Plural Marriage, Corporate Marriage, Line Marriage, Co-Husband): An agreed upon marriage between three or more individuals (Constantine, 1973). A corporate marriage is a union between adults via legal incorporation. Co-husband or co-spouse denotes one of the partners within the group relationship (Veaux & Rickert, 2014).

New Relationship Energy (aka Zest, Limerence): Zest is the energy derived from the sense of well-being when experiencing an interaction with another person and is not necessarily sexual in nature (Jean Baker Miller Training Institute, 2015). New Relationship Energy is not necessarily sexual in nature; it is a physical high from being

under the hormonal influence (theorized as oxytocin and vasopressin) of sexual lust while engaging in a new sexual or romantic interest (Hall, 2012).

Nonmonogamy (aka consensually nonmonogamous CNM relationships): An all-encompassing term that describes relationship orientations that involve multiple and/or simultaneous sexual or romantic bonds between more than two individuals. Nonmonogamies are often divided between open nonmonogamies and closed nonmonogamies. When denoted by the term consensual all parties involved in the relationship agree upon the concept of nonmonogamy (Conley, Ziegler, Moors, Matsick, Valentine, 2012b).

Nonmonosexual: A potentially problematic term, as it describes what individuals are not versus what they are, that is used as an all-encompassing term that describes relationship orientations such as pansexual, omnisexual, bisexual, and ambisexual. This term supports the concept of queer culture, respecting the legitimacy of personal choice when it comes to sexual and gender identities (UC Davis LGBT Resource Center, 2007).

Ostensible Monogamy: A term describing the appearance or perception of exclusive mutual monogamy when this is not necessarily the case (infidelity) (Calsyn, Campbell, Tross, Hatch-Maillette, 2011).

Pansexuality (aka Polysexuality, Omnisexuality, Panamory): is a term used to describe a sexual or romantic desire towards an individual of any sex, gender, or sexual orientation. All three terms could be used in lieu of the term bisexual in an effort to disempower the notion of binary gender identities or deemphasize the need to define the

gender an individual is attracted to (MacDowall, 2009; Washington State University, 2014).

Polyaffective (aka Intimate Network, Metamour): is a term describing chosen kinship based on nonsexual relationships among members of the group (who sometimes share a lover). This is characterized by emotional intimacy, companionship, and reciprocal support and differs from friendship in terms of devotion, primacy of import, and cohabitation (Sheff, 2009).

Polyamory (aka Poly Relationship, Ethical Slut, Responsible NonMonogamy) *(Open, Closed, or Combined)*: an all-encompassing term to describe any poly relationship. It is generally defined as the practice, desire, or acceptance of having more than one intimate relationship at a time with the knowledge and consent of everyone involved. This could include long-term, short-term, serial, or swinging romantic and sexual connections. It may or may not include polysexuality (attraction towards multiple genders and/or sexes). Polyamory is usually divided into three categories: open, closed, or a combination of the two. An example of an *open polyamorous relationship* is when one or both partners of a primary dyad have individual nonexclusive romantic or sexual connections with partners outside of the dyad. An example of a *closed polyamorous relationshi*p is polyfidelity, in which more than two individuals have an exclusive romantic or sexual connection with one another simultaneously (a group relationship). An example of a *combined polyamorous relationship* is when one or both partners of a primary dyad have closed individual romantic or sexual connections with a set number of partners outside of the dyad (http://www.lovemore.com).

Polycule: is a colloquial term used to describe the connections between nonmonogamous partners. It is a combination of the words polyamory and molecule (Veaux & Rickert, 2014).

Polyfidelity (aka Polyfi, Polyexclusivity, aka Egalitarian Polygamy, Complex Marriage, Plural Marriage, Group Marriage, Closed Group Marriage): a form of closed nonmonogamy, often described as a group relationship or group marriage between three or more individuals. While the relationship dynamics might not be equal, this is often described as a form of polyamory in which all members have equal consideration, are considered equal partners, and have agreements in place surrounding whether or not sexual activity is allowed outside of the closed group (Nearing, 1992; Strauss, 2012).

Polygamy (aka Plural Marriage): is defined in binary terms of one person having multiple mates. It is often described as a conjoint marriage in which an individual has more than one romantic partner. Polygamy is often defined within a binary gender construct: *polygyny* is the most prominent form of polygamy (classically described as a harem) and is defined as a man who has more than one wife; and *polyandry* is the less prominent form of polygamy and is defined as a woman who has more than one husband. Polygamy is often associated as part of a social codification in contrast to polyamory, which is viewed as being based on the preferences of the participants involved. Polygyny has historically been the most common form of socialized polygamy, in which sexual partners (often female) are often viewed as possessions of the primary partner (often male). In many polygamist relationships partners of the primary individual are often not

romantically involved with one another and are often ranked in terms of priority, purpose, and role.

Promiscuous: is defined according to a particular social culture, with gender-codified standards that are often different for men than women. In general, the term refers to sexual activity that occurs outside of any other defined relationship purely for the engagement of a sexual interaction (outside of friendship, dating, monogamy, polyamory, etc). In Western culture, promiscuity has been defined as sexual activity that occurs outside of a monogamous marriage.

Relationship Anarchy (Anarchist, aka Solo Poly, Solopoly, Free Agent): is a colloquial term used to describe the philosophy of individual choice to engage in any relationship without limitations or the confinement of a definition. An emphasis is focused on having individual autonomous or often segmented relationships (Crosswell, 2014; Veaux & Rickert, 2014).

Relationship Orientation: is a colloquial term used to describe the philosophy of an individual having a pre-disposed, whether developed or innate, inclination towards a particular relationship style ranging from monogamy to polyamory (Veaux & Rickert, 2014).

Serial Monogamy & Digamy (aka Sequential Social Monogamy): is a term used to describe a relationship in which one partner is in a closed romantic or sexual relationship with only one other partner throughout the duration of that relationship. This is compared to the historic definition of monogamy that describes an individual who has only been

romantically or sexually involved with only one partner throughout his or her lifetime (Reichard, 2003). Digamy is the act of ending one marriage to start another (West, 1996).

Swinging (aka Wife Swapping or Partner Swapping): is a term used in context of monogamy that describes the sexual behavior of partners in a committed relationship who engage in sexual activity with one another as a social or recreational activity (Bergstrand & Blevins Sinski, 2010).

Unicorn (Unicorn Hunter, aka Pet, aka Flavor of the Month): is a colloquial term used to describe an attractive bisexual female who enters a relationship with a couple and is restricted to engaging the couple only when both are present. The word unicorn is used because of the rarity in finding someone willing to engage in this type of relationship and is philosophically divergent from the idea of egalitarian polyamory or polyfidelity (Veaux & Rickert, 2014).

Assumptions

In qualitative research, assumptions are identified as a specific set of beliefs or cultural values that inform how a researcher frames his or her approach to a particular research design that are believed to be true but that have not been demonstrated as such (Nolen & Talbert, 2011; Pistrang, 2012). This included identifying specific theories or beliefs that act as foundational knowledge for the researcher's approach (Hays & Wood, 2011). Sandelowski (2012) highlighted the importance of devising an interpretive framework in order to better understand the philosophical viewpoint from which the researcher approached the study. The following assumptions were made in order to preserve the meaningfulness of this study:

- Individuals will feel safe enough to fully disclose their life experiences and will do so in an honest and open manner;

- access to polyfidelity individuals may be difficult due to stigma invisibility associated with nonbinary relationships;

- nonexploitive relationships was the defining feature between polyfidelity and polygamy. Polygamy literature will not be reviewed if exploitation is evident;

- the complexity of group relationships suggests that participants might access mental health services at a higher rate than participants in nongroup relationships.

Scope and Delimitations

In order to address the overarching dearth of literature on polyfidelity, the focus of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of polyfidelitous individuals. This included defining what a polyfidelity relationship means to each individual, identifying themes that may emerge from the experiences of those in a polyfidelity relationship, identifying factors that contribute to challenging as well as supporting a polyfidelity relationship, and investigating how individuals in these relationships capitalize on the strengths of their relationship and overcome its hurdles.

The definition of polyfidelity varies and therefore this study will not include participants engaged in a noncommitted group relationship. The participants included in this study were, or once were, engaged in a romantic relationship with two or more adults, in which each individual in the relationship was romantically involved with one another and had equal consideration within the group. This study did not focus on unequal polygamous relationships, polyamorous open relationships, and other forms of

polyamory that may include synchronous dyadic committed relationships absent a group dynamic.

Theories about organizational dynamics were not investigated, nor were the cultural frameworks of societies that have historically practiced equal or unequal polygamy. The study addressed the systemic erasure of polyfidelity relationships, as well as group romantic relationships in general. It drew from similar themes inherent to all nonmonogamies including open polyamory and investigated only the dynamics of polyfidelity as defined above.

The information gained from this study is expected to better identify themes specific to nonmonogamous relationships in the context of providing better counseling services to these clients. The information derived from the lived experiences of polyfidelity individuals is also transferable to better serving the counseling needs of other types of polyamorous or nonmonogamous relationships. The results of this study could also transfer to understanding the culture of monogamy and how monogamous relationships differ and align with nonmonogamous relationships.

Limitations

Limitations in a qualitative study are influences, or design or methodological weaknesses that could influence the study's findings (Pistrang, 2012). A study's methodology imposes inherent limitations on how the collected data might be applied in the field. Such limitations could also constrict the generalizability of a study and therefore limit when, where, and how such findings could be used (Hays & Wood, 2011). I have identified the following limitations in this study:

- Confidentiality limitations of working with a family unit means that barriers of entry and consent from one member of the family may prevent others from ethically being able to participate;

- purposive-criterion-based sampling may limit the transferability of study (including limitations in socioeconomic, race/ethnicity, age/generational acceptance and knowledge of polyamory);

- the study is also limited in scope regarding relationship progression and evolution such as break-ups, changes in romantic status, and changes in relationship dynamics (e.g. gender transition);

- the lack of an established language and standard definitions made data collection more susceptible to false assumptions or improper interpretations;

- the results of the study were limited to a specific class of individuals in the United States.

Significance of the Study

It was my goal to pioneer an understanding of group-based relationship dynamics, which could lead to further understanding the counseling needs of nonmonogamous populations. The complexity of such relationships alone would require the need for assistance in communication and relationship processing. In addition, the social rewarding of compulsory monogamy in contrast to the stigmatization resulting from nonhetero-normativity demonstrably leads to an increase in marginalization and oppression (Heckert, 2010).

Therefore this population, like other minority populations, suffers from challenges surrounding minority stress. This suggests that nonmonogamous populations most likely turn to mental healthcare services more often than average (Berry & Barker, 2014; Strauss, 2012; Sheff, 2014; Weitzman, Davidson, & Phillips, 2010). The more counselor educators know about the challenges faced by this population, as well as the strengths used to overcome such challenges, the more likely they would be able to better train counselors in providing appropriate care for those seeking mental healthcare services.

Very few counselors who are equipped or culturally competent to serve this population (Barker & Langdridge, 2010a; Brandon, 2011). Not only that, but counselor educators and supervisors do not know enough about the population to properly train clinicians on how to meet their needs. In turn, the knowledge gained from this study could help educators better train counselors on how to address challenges faced by those in a multiperson relationship.

I focused on affecting positive social change in this study by reframing how researchers measure legitimate relationship constructs. This included developing a detailed understanding of the characteristics unique to polyfidelity, as well as the characteristics that are common to monogamy and other nonmonogamies. I attempted to detail the differences and commonalities of monogamous versus nonmonogamous relationships, including the specific dynamics of a nondyadic or group relationship construct. These similarities and differences could have significant implications for how shifting social norms towards polyamory might change the field of relationship counseling and counselors' understanding of conventional families in larger society.

Significance to Practice

It is believed that this population often requires mental healthcare services due to the inherent complexity of these types of relationships (Berry & Barker, 2014; Shaw et al., 2012; Weitzman, Davidson, & Phillips, 2010). There are very few counselors who are equipped or culturally competent for serving this population (Finn, Tunariu, & Lee, 2012; Pincus, 2011). Not only that, but counselor educators and supervisors do not know enough about the population to properly train mental health providers on meeting their needs (Weitzman, Davidson, & Phillips, 2010). Researchers and counselors could also learn from polyfidelity relationships.

Sheff (2014) pointed out that polyamorists use unique strategies for negotiating complex relationships. Learning about these strategies, as well as the power structures and ecologies that influence binary thinking, could benefit not only sexual and gender minorities but also those in monogamous relationships, as well as communication strategies for all interpersonal relationships (Ferrer, 2007).

Significance to Theory

While some literature is beginning to emerge that addresses nonmonogamies in general, there is still a significant gap in the literature on polyfidelity (Klesse, 2013). The field of counseling has relatively little knowledge on the dynamics of polyfidelitous families (Weitzman, Davidson, & Phillips, 2010). As a result, counselors may not be properly trained to address the complexities of these types of relationships.

Data from this study could increase the knowledge of the counseling profession about working with polyamorous and polyfidelitous families. The study could lay a broad

foundation of the lived experiences of this population. Future research would then be able to draw on this knowledge to devise themes pertinent to best counseling practices. Research on the culture of polyfidelity may also serve as a reference for differentiating between problematic behaviors and behaviors that may be in response to systemic or social oppression.

A phenomenological exploration of those who negotiate and sustain a polyfidelity relationship could broaden how queer theory could be applied to study any counterculture (Erickson-Schrotha & Mitchell, 2009). Polyfidelity is also focused on egalitarian relationship connections, which is in contrast to traditional polygamous inequalities (Strauss, 2012). There has been very little exploration of egalitarian group relationships, as well as nondyadic relationships in general. Therefore, information from this study may serve not only to better understand how to counsel alternative relationships but could also serve to better understand the dynamics of group romantic relationships in general.

Significance to Social Change

It is clear that nonmonogamous relationships struggle from higher rates of social stigma and lack of institutional support. This is compounded by the healthcare system's systemic erasure of such identities and lack of training for working with polyamorous populations. Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) added cultural competency training as part of the American Counseling Association's ethical best practices. As part of their research, a systems-based framework was recommended for deconstructing social prejudice and culture-bound practices in the counseling profession. A systems approach

beings by critically analyzing an individual's own cultural framework and understanding of the lived experiences of those who faced greater social prejudice.

Mental health advocacy soon emerged as a core component to an ethical mental health practice. Organizations dedicated to social change soon emerged. Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR, 2014) highlighted several themes that could influence social change in mental healthcare, including eliminating the us-versus-them mindsets; focusing on the longer-term collective welfare of society; correcting misunderstandings, false information, and historical prejudice; and fostering the healing of past wounds and despair due to disparaging social attitudes. The organization's mission is to "advance peace and social justice through the ethical use of psychological knowledge" (para. 1).

The mission of Counselors for Social Justice (CSJ, 2015) focuses on "confronting oppressive systems of power and privilege that affect professional counselors and our clients" (para. 1). CSJ adopted the advocacy competencies of Lewis, Arnold, House, and Toporek (2002), which identified core advocacy domains in education, clinical practice, and the greater community. The authors pointed out that effective advocacy requires empowerment strategies and an understanding of the lived experiences of those in disparaging situations.

The Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development (AMCD, 2014) mission is to expand racial and ethnic empathy and understanding in the counseling profession. This could also translate to expanding and understanding of diverse cultures in general. The AMCD Multicultural Counseling Competencies (2014) standard 2.B.1 states that "Culturally skilled counselors possess specific knowledge and information

about the particular group with which they are working" (p. 2). The American

Counseling Association (ACA, 2014). Code of Ethics standard. E.5.c. stated, "Counselors

recognize historical and social prejudices in the misdiagnosis and pathologizing of certain

individuals and groups and strive to become aware of and address such biases in

themselves or others" (p. 11).

The results from this study could help lay a greater foundation for understanding

the strengths and challenges that individuals face when initiating, negotiating, and

maintaining a polyfidelity relationship. It was also an attempt to help counselors

recognize the historic prejudice and daily legal challenges faced by those in

nonmonogamous relationships. For example, a counselor who better understands the

systemic challenges faced by those in a polyfidelity relationship, would be able to

delineate between a client's interpersonal/intrapersonal problems and the problems that

were the result of systemic oppression (Lewis, Arnold, House, & Toporek, 2002).

Diamond and Huebner (2012) argued that sexual health focused on understanding

the depth and significance of sexuality continues to go overlooked by those in mental

health research. The authors stated that as psychology continues to focus on mental health

promotion, clinicians need to better understand the health-promoting benefits of a variety

of different sexual relationships. Thus, information from this study could improve

understanding of the benefits and challenges of nonmonogamy, which in turn could

contribute to researchers' understanding of healthy versus nonhealthy relationship

behaviors (Sheff, 2011).

Summary and Transition

In summary, in this study I attempted to identify how the institution of monogamy has shaped dominant culture's perception of the legitimacy of relationships. By studying the phenomenology of those engaged in a polyfidelity group relationship themes emerged that will contribute to the development of a better language and framework for understanding the diversity inherent in alternative relationship constructs. It was the hope of this researcher that such a study will spur a deeper interest in understanding nonmonogamies and how such relationships influence social values.

There is a significant lack of understanding surrounding the complexity of group polyfidelity dynamics. While many alternative families may present for counseling, there is little information supporting the efficacy or treatment protocols often used by counselors. I focused on deconstructing the power structures behind compulsory monogamy and revealing both the strengths and challenges inherent in nonmonogamous polyfidelity constructs.

A review of the literature demonstrated only a basic level of counseling educators' understanding of nonmonogamous relationships, with very little understanding of a polyfidelitous group relationship in particular. The literature focused on legitimizing alternative or nonmonogamous relationships in the context of significant social stigma. Although the base of literature assessed primarily falls within the broader polyamorous family, it was clear that polyamorous relationships face a greater burden due to legal and social stigma. From the literature researchers know that nonmonogamous relationships

face greater struggles both intra and interpersonally. However, what researchers do not know is the best way to counsel and affirm these types of relationships.

In Chapter 2 I review current literature and describe the development of researchers' understanding of nonmonogamous relationships. I provide examples of limitations in current research on polyfidelity and how such research might benefit the counseling profession. In Chapter 3 I discuss the research methodology including the nature of qualitative inquiry, sampling methods, and how the data was collected, as well as analyzed. In Chapter 4 I review the results of the study and identify themes by providing specific examples from participant narratives. In Chapter 5 I provide an interpretation of my findings and discuss the significance of this study in terms of affecting social change.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

I established a context for understanding the nature of nonmonogamous relationships in Chapter I. In this chapter I will attempt to establish a better understanding of why this population needs further research and support from the counseling community. Researchers across many fields have established that contemporary romantic relationships are increasingly moving towards nonmonogamous and nondyadic frameworks (Anapol, 2010a; Anapol, 2010b; Barker, 2005; Barker & Langdridge, 2010b; Bennet, 2009; Chapais, 2013; Chapman, 2010; Ferrer, 2008; Howe, 2011; Luscombe, 2012; Zoe, 2010).

As these relationships continue to grow in society counselors will need to be better prepared for understanding, conceptualizing, and communicating the dynamics that may occur in such relationships (Sheff, 2014). Currently counselors are ill equipped to conceptualize, let alone deconstruct the complexities of such relationships (Pallotta-Chiarolli, Haydon, & Hunter, 2013; Pincus, 2011; Sheff, 2014; Weitzman, Davidson, & Phillips, 2010).

Therefore the findings from this study may assist in developing a common language for better understanding the phenomenology of a particular type of nonmonogamous relationship based in synchronous group dynamics versus asynchronous dyadic relationships. I focused on better understanding the phenomenon of polyfidelity, as well as the lived experiences of individuals who are engaged in such relationships. I also revealed the dynamics of such relationships in order to understand how to better address the challenges these individuals might face when presenting for therapy.

The ability to analyze alternative relationships was oftentimes difficult due to a lack of language, conceptual frameworks, and the ability to quantifiably study such phenomena. I was unable to find any quantifiable literature surrounding polyfidelity as a phenomenon. Therefore this literature review was focused on deriving key ideas congruent to understanding polyfidelity based on a comprehensive review of the literature from other stigmatized social issues such as gender, sexual orientation, and nonmonogamies. There was also a significant limitation of research regarding nonmonogamous relationships in general. Because of this, the term poly relationships was used to describe elements that are common to nonmonogamous relationships in general, as well as elements that could specifically pertain to polyfidelity group relationships.

Literature Search Strategy

For this study, over two dozen searches were carried out. The 45 keywords are given in Table 1. I used a Boolean/phrase broad search with no combined categories unless the search fields were differentiated. The following databases were used: PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Counseling and Psychotherapy Transcripts, Client Narratives, and Reference Works, Counseling and Therapy in Video, SocINDEX with Full Text, LGBT Life with Full Text, ERIC – Educational Information Resource Center, EBSCO ebooks, CINAHL & MEDLINE Simultaneous Search, Academic Search Complete, Expanded Academic ASAP, ProQuest Central, LexisNexis Academic, Thoreau, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text, Dissertations & Theses at Walden

University, Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) Datasets, and Google Scholar.

Literature was then parsed by title of document, date of publication, and relevance based on the information found in the abstract. Because there was very little literature on polyfidelity, polyexclusivity, or group marriage, I broadened the search for common group relationship dynamics found in articles with these keywords: polyamory, polygamy, big love, modern love, swingers, and other keywords listed in Table 1. This included searching for articles on monogamy and its perceived benefits. I reviewed the literature for dynamics that might also exist in a polyfidelitous relationship, such as legal challenges, social stigma, negotiating differences, and foundational challenges directed toward monogamous relationships.

It was difficult to find evidence-based studies or scientific research on polyfidelity or closed group relationships (Barker & Langridge, 2010b; Lano & Perry, 1995; Pines & Aronson, 1981; Sheff, 2014). Therefore, I examined existing research on polyamory (often open binary relationships) and polygamy (often synchronous group relationships) to draw out common experiences in an attempt to better understand the possible dynamics of a polyfidelity relationship. I also examined nonscientific articles, such as newspaper editorials, news stories, public commentaries, legal proceedings, forums and workshops, symposiums, blogs, and literary works in order to better understand the issues that group relationship members face and to derive common dynamics for further exploration.

Table 1

Keyword Search Terms Listed Alphabetically

A-L	L-P	P-T
Alternative Lifestyles	Loving More	Polyluv
Alternative Relationships	Marriage Of Many	Polynormativity
Alternative Sexuality	Modern Love	Polyamory
Beyond Bisexuality	Monogamy, Benefits Of	Polyamory Clan
Big Gay Love	Multilateral Marriage	Polyamory Continuum
Big Love	Multiple Loving	Polyamory Pod
Compersion	Multiple Partners	Polyandry
Concurrent Sexual	Multiple Spouse	Polyexclusivity
Connubial Communism	Multiply Partnered People	Polyfidelity
Ethical Slut	Non-Monogamies	Polygamy
Free Love	Open Liaisons	Polygyny
Future Of Sex	Open Marriage	Queer Relationships
Gateway Sex	Open Relationships	Sexual Communes
Group Marriage	Paraphilias	Sexual Communities
Group Relationships	Plural Families	Sexual Nonexclusivity
Group Romantic	Plural Marriage	Swingers
Kink	Poly Family	Swinging
Love Triangles	Poly People	Tantrism
Love Without Limits	Polyamorist	Trinogamy

Theoretical Foundation

Some theorists argue that modernist thinking, often associated with the

predominant monotheistic belief system in Western culture, continues to influence

modern-day social norms (Clark, 2011; Sedgwick, 1990; Strauss, 2012; Swan, 2015). In

some ways modern society may be suffering from a crisis of perception, influenced by the Cartesian concept of the division between mankind and nature (Descartes, 1641). This type of thinking is rooted in essentialist thought, in which all things have a specific predetermined truth that underlies their existence (Morandini, Blaszcyzynski, Ross, Costa, & Dar-Nimrod, 2015). This is often articulated in binary dualities such as male or female, heaven or hell, and dark or light.

In contrast, post-structuralist philosophers such as Derrida (1979) laid the foundation for post-modern deconstructive thinking. Deconstructive thought is helpful for assessing how cultural values, biases, and power structures play a role in societal norms. This is particularly useful for deconstructing monogamy and the social rite of passage that it represents (Frank & DeLamater, 2010; Sweet, 2013). While postmodernism is often criticized for its obscurity (Foucault, 1969; Ryan & Jetha, 2010), it has been helpful in facilitating a philosophical understanding of the concept of plurality, or multiple truths, which is foundational to multiculturalism and in turn understanding alternatives to social norms. This theoretical framework is also helpful for better understanding polyfidelity relationships, since these types of relationships are often conceptually outside of dominant culture's framework of understanding.

Monogamy is rooted in the essentialist belief of rigid roles, often in opposition or compliment to one another (Stacey, 2011; Sweet, 2013; Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008). For example, essentialist thinking conceptualizes that the only legitimate gender is either male or female, with specific roles and expectations placed on each. Also, the only legitimate sexuality is heterosexual, while everything else is considered pathological or

deviant (Frank & DeLamater, 2010). In this model there is only one legitimate relationship orientation, which is monogamy, and everything else is considered a failure or deviation from what is socially expected (Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008). Ironically, many argue that the large incidence of infidelity points to the idea that perhaps monogamy is far from what should be considered normal human behavior (Anderson, 2010; Ryan & Jetha, 2010).

There are additional ideas surrounding the establishment of monogamy as the social norm. Some authors have suggested that monogamy is integrated into the socio-economic fabric of Western nations. For example, Sweet (2013) pointed out that monogamy is most likely attributed to nation building and the progression of women's rights in Canada, as well as much of the Western world. Ashbee (2007) deconstructed the power dynamics of protestant fundamentalism in the United States in terms of the social rights of a family system in a society biased towards monogamy.

Ashbee (2007) helped to contextualize how relationship constructs could be culture-bound or prejudicial towards a particular worldview or set of values, in this case monogamy. The pressures of conforming to a monogamous relationship orientation can be quite impactful to those who do not fit in such a model (Barker, 2005). Family constructs outside of traditional nondominant culture are potentially subject to the same types of minority stress as other oppressed or undervalued cultures (Sheff, 2014; Sweet, 2013).

Developmental Theory

Classical developmental theorists such as Freud, Erickson, Piaget, and Kohlberg were paradigmatically rooted in the belief that a monogamous relationship is the only mature or valid form of enduring romantic connection with others (Landridge, 2008). Freud posited that human sexuality is primarily libidinal in nature, described as polymorphously perverse, in which humans could become fixated on a variety of objectified sources of pleasure (Freud, 1920). In this theoretical approach to relationship development, a mature ego is described as one that had come to recognize the proper use of sexual energy via reproductive pair bonding (Gabrinetti & Ozler, 2014). The child's parents modeled appropriate sexual or affective interactions and inappropriate sexual feelings were repressed over time.

In this case the phenomenon of reproduction is considered parallel to the phenomenon of sexual expression (Downing & Gillett, 2010). Freud even hinted to the idea that sexual partner selection is highly influenced by the child's relational development with his or her parents (Freud, 1922; Gabrinetti & Ozler, 2014). This theory is so rooted in monogamy or at the very least a primary binary relationship, that there is no consideration that an individual might want to sexually express themselves in context of a group of others (Hall, 2009). Freud is often criticized for his lack of relational-cultural understanding of diversity in families or kinship (Walker, 2010). Legitimate sexual pair-bonding posits that the only legitimate sexual orientation is a monogamous connection between a man and a woman (Newbigin, 2013).

In contrast, Piaget's theory of cognitive development and social theory is rooted in a progressive stage-like model, in which children gradually mentally mature through parental modeling and surrounding social experiences (Pallini & Barcaccia, 2014). This transformative approach to maturity is again rooted in the paradigm of a monogamous adult relationship. An individual's development involves the processes of assimilation and accommodation (Lefmann & Combs-Orme, 2013). This involves changing one's perceptions or schemas to match new information and assimilate previous information already modeled (Dale, 2013). This approach could give clues to better understanding how compulsory heterosexuality or compulsory monogamy may have developed over time.

In Piaget's theory a child developed over time from adult-child relationship to a more self-regulated adult relationship (Lefmann & Combs-Orme, 2013). Maturity is characterized by cognitive co-operation modeled by social morality. Parents and society modeled monogamy as a primary moral domain (Pallini & Barcaccia, 2014). Disequilibrated exchanges, such as marriages that fail were described as the result of incongruent values (Lefmann & Combs-Orme, 2013). While not explicitly articulated, compulsory monogamy is paradigmatically an overarching developmental relationship goal (Downing & Gillett, 2010).

In a similar way to Piaget and Freud, Erikson (1950) posited that psychosocial development consisted of eight successive stages. While each stage did not require mastery, there is developmental resiliency that aided in the development of each successive stage (Bennett & Douglass, 2013). In the fifth and six stages in particular,

identity versus role confusion and intimacy versus isolation, individuals mimic appropriate relationship behaviors based on previous modeled relationships. Conflict emerges if the individual is unable to successfully conform to appropriate roles (Erikson, 1950). Those who do not fit within a heterosexual norm may find themselves conflicted or at odds in a homoprejudice society (Bennett & Douglass). While Erikson's theory does not explicitly state that monogamy is the only healthy form of intimacy, it does suggest that monogamous marriage is perhaps the most successful and enriching form of intimacy (Kimmel, 2015).

Like Piaget, Freud, and Erikson, Kohlberg introduced a six stage model of development based on moral domains. Conventional stages of moral development as directed in stage three and four, good intentions via social consensus and obedience via social authority, are often the highest stages achieved by the majority of individuals (Kohlberg & Power, 1981). In these stages, morality based on conformity to social standards dictates the appropriate modeled relationship behavior (Kohlberg, 1984). Because monogamous marriage is paradigmatic, nonmonogamies are often systemically erased, as well as nonconforming sexual or gender identities (Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2013). The assumed appropriate relationship framework is rooted in monogamous pair-bonding (Barker & Langdridge, 2010a).

Kohlberg's later stages, five and six, are based on individuation and adaptive social compromise (Kohlberg, 1984). This could include abstract moral reasoning based on interpretations of universal ethical principles. In this case morality is culturally contextualized and based on each individual's social ecology (Kohlberg & Power, 1981).

However, there are often still conventional paradigms that influence the universality of what is considered ethical behavior. Like many other developmental theories, Kohlberg's developmental stages perhaps struggle because of their inability to differentiate between moral convention and moral conviction, not to mention that the focus is primarily through the lens of male moral development (Dale, 2013).

Because classic developmental theories are essentially paradigmatically-bound (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007) it may be necessary to use a Heideggerian or Jungian hermeneutical methodology for understanding the ontology of nonmonogamous relationships in general (Finlay, 2012; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). This is because understanding alternative meaning behind human sexuality and romantic relationship, perhaps one that extends beyond reproductive pair-bonding, may require this type of phenomenological analysis of the ontology of alternative human relationships (Smythe & Baydala, 2012). Specific theories can assist in this type of analysis such as relational cultural, social constructionist, and queer theory (Downing & Gillett, 2010).

Relational Cultural Theory

Relational-cultural theory (RCT) is rooted in feminist and systems theory, largely based on the work of Jean Baker Miller and social justice theory. According to Jordan (2010b), RCT views relationships as a primary human need intrinsic to self-worth, existential connection, and overall mental health. It is assumed that all individuals are naturally driven toward building and maintaining relationships rooted in secure attachment. An individual's mental health is therefore largely dependant on their ability to foster and sustain what is described as mutual growth-fostering-relationships, in which

all individuals in the relationship have significance and importance (Eldridge, Surrey, Rosen, & Miller, 2010).

Headley and Sangganjanavanich (2014) described five core tenets of a growth-fostering-relationship. The first is an increase in an individual's's sense of self-worth as a result of a positive mutually valued relationship. The second is a sense of zest described by Miller as the sense of well being experienced by an individual when successfully connecting with another person. The third is a deeper understanding of both self and the other person derived as a result of a mutually empathic relationship. The fourth is an increase in efficacy or the motivation and ability to take action in all relationships. Finally, individuals involved in a relationship characterized by empathic connection and empowerment tend to have a stronger desire to continue building connections with others (Frey, 2013).

RCT is particularly helpful for understanding both the contextual and dynamic nature of relationships since the theory views relationships as continually in motion (Eldridge, Surrey, Rosen, & Miller, 2010). Individuals naturally move in and out of various levels of connection throughout the span of a relationship (Mereish & Poteat, 2015a). Conflict arises when an individual feels vulnerable or fears disconnection, and confidence results from empathic awareness and reconnection. Conflict is resolved through a variety of strategies, including awareness development by naming the perceived disconnection, communicating that with all partners involved, fostering self-efficacy to make change in a relationship, and capitalizing on resilience provided by others in an individual's's social circle (Headley & Sangganjanavanich, 2014).

RCT can be helpful for better understanding nonmonogamous relationships because of its focus on relational awareness and social power structures (Downie & Llewellyn, 2011). It challenges classic developmental theories based on the idea that individuals move from dependency to autonomy (Erikson, 1950) and instead suggests individuals are continually shaped by their connections or disconnections with others (Lenz, 2014). RCT also challenges the oppressive nature of normalizing how individuals relate opening the door for a variety of acceptable relationship constructs, including polyfidelity (Frey, 2013). From a therapeutic perspective, RCT focuses on growth-fostering-relationships rather than relationship roles (Eldridge et al., 2010). This shift in thinking could help mental health clinicians better serve a variety of clients in nonmonogamous or nontraditional relationships (Szymanski, Ikizler, & Dunn, 2015).

Social Constructionist Theory

Social constructionism (SC), similar to constructivism, is based on the idea that sociological knowledge is contextualized by constructed understandings in coordination with other cultures (McNamee & Hosking, 2012). Language becomes a central component to this theory, as it is foundational to how an individual rationalizes and describes his or her lived experiences of the social world. This is in direct contrast to essentialist thought, where there are essential forms or natural ubiquitous truths. SC focuses on revealing how a culture determines what is socially acceptable and therefore considered truth (Efran et al., 2014).

Social constructionism is a theoretical framework that challenges contemporary positivistic or empirical thinking, as it frames all knowledge as socially constructed and

therefore bound to a particular culture (McNamee & Hosking, 2012). As a result the concept of plurality emerges, allowing for multiple truths and alternatives to traditional relational constructs (McNamee & Hosking). It is in this realm that alternative relationships are given the space to exist. However, the barriers inherent in an individual's language to describe such phenomenology continue to plague the ability to change how researchers perceive and therefore understand multiculturalism and diversity (Downing & Gillett, 2010).

Contemporary counselor educators, psychologists, and sociologists have utilized SC theory to better understand the constructed truths of a particular society, especially when those truths result in discrimination and prejudice towards those outside of the perceived norm (Greenwood, 2014). For example in the study of gender, theorists such as Diamond and Butterworth (2008) deconstruct how society has created the idea of man and woman in terms of social roles, iconic tradition, and the power dynamics of those who defined such labels in the first place.

Social constructionism has been criticized as disempowering the individual's ability to supersede social convention or as purely influenced by nurture with little to no influence of nature or disposition. Constructivism also runs the risk of over abstraction. Researchers such as Winkielman et al. (2015) incorporate the ideas of constructivism in relation to an individual's physical body as a perceiving subjective element interpreting how social connections are experienced and understood. In this way, constructivism could be useful as a phenomenological tool for generating a language of lived experiences of those outside of social convention.

Queer Theory

The word queer originated as a derogatory slang term describing homosexuality or something that is considered unnatural. Queer theory focuses primarily on the socially constructed aspects of sexuality and gender (Downing & Gillett, 2010). Like feminism, queer theory takes into account the power structures that dictate what is considered conventional or ethical in dominant society (Halberstam, 2014). Queer culture has often been defined in context of what is considered antithetical to heternormative culture. However, queer theory is also helpful as a post-structuralist tool for examining other nonconventional aspects of an individual's's affectional or relational culture (Zeeman, Aranda, & Grant, 2014).

Queer theory challenges social concepts of what is considered normal and therefore helps redefine or recategorize behavior (Downing & Gillett, 2010). It originated from sociopolitical activism and other forms of social advocacy that challenged essentialist thought (Better, 2014). Queer theory has recently been expanded as a strategic approach to deconstructing a variety of conventional beliefs (Chevrette, 2013; Green, 2014). While queer theory has limitations, often working within an existing paradigm, it can be useful for creating frameworks and language that might potentially transcend conventional paradigms (Halberstam, 2012).

Conceptual Framework

In order to better understand the dynamics of polyfidelity it might first be helpful to develop a better understanding of the dynamics of monogamy. One of the more popular theories is the idea that monogamy has been historically well suited to social

inheritance and practicality. Betzig (1992) suggested that monogamy became morally

codified within the social institution of marriage under rule of the first Roman emperor

Augustus. During this time inheritance and wealth was defined from the position of the

male in a relationship. It was not uncommon for men to engage in polygynous mating, in

which men had children with a variety of different women. Yet these children were

deemed as illegitimate, avoiding the payout of an inheritance, since mating occurred

outside of wedlock.

Betzig (1992) stated families often attempted to increase their inheritance by

differentiating between legitimate and illegitimate children. Female virginity and chastity

were encouraged, in which remarriage and adoption were discouraged. Because the

concentration of inheritances began to off-balance economic diversity, Betzig argued that

monogamous marriage, which has been commonly viewed as moral legislation to

preserve moral purity, was actually an act to help enforce reproductive and social

diversity. Monogamy, from the very beginning, was rooted in the concept of reproductive

pair bonding, completely discounting the legitimacy of sexual expression outside of the

role of reproduction (Chapais, 2013).

Another popular theoretical paradigm is based in comparison to the animal

phylum, in which female primates are thought to have found refuge through a

monogamous relationship with a male who would protect her from the threats of other

potentially infanticidal males while child rearing. Much of the research conducted by

Opie, Atkinson, Dunbar, and Shultz (2013) regarding monogamy as a social norm among

primates was based on bird observation, in which this patriarchal concept suggested that a

pair-bonded male is necessary for the survival of a female's eggs due to outside predatory males.

In contrast, Lukas and Clutton-Brock (2013) refuted such claims that infanticide was a driving force behind monogamy and instead suggested that monogamy is largely due to the social system surrounding breeding. This included the idea that only select mates were ideally paired based on social stratification such as resources, education, and culture. McLeod and Day (2014) presented another contrasting argument suggesting that sexually transmitted infections might have influenced social behavior to focus on single-mate or serial monogamous connections due to the health risks associated with open sexual behaviors.

While there is an understanding of the influencing factors that contributed to monogamy taking a dominant position the exact manner in which monogamy became the only acceptable social institution is still in question. There are most likely a number of factors that contributed to the stronghold of monogamy among humans including economic, philosophical, religious, and social factors (Strauss, 2012). It would seem in both the animal and human world that the origins of monogamy are also likely rooted in the perception of physical and emotional safety (Fletcher, Simpson, Campbell, & Overall, 2015), the competition for limited resources (Lukas & Clutton-Brock, 2013), and the quest for social control (Chapais, 2013).

Cherlin (2010) pointed out that the American institution of marriage is tied to Western values of male autonomy and a man's ability to possess a spouse. Sweet (2013) argued the same applies to Canadian law, in which monogamy is central to the nation's

identity. In Western nations such as the United States and Canada, monogamous marriage is viewed as a cultural ideology and is a critical component of what many might describe the American individualist dream (Brandon, 2011). Strauss (2012) argued that monogamy is a construct for social, legal, and moral relations essential to Western concepts of individualization, autonomy, and the nuclear family.

For example, President Obama's argument for legitimizing same-sex marriage was rooted in the ideology of his exposure to gay hetero-normative monogamous couples (Stein, 2012). The ideals of American individualism are also in competition with monogamous marriage, creating a dichotomy that is deeply rooted in American law and religion (Strauss, 2012). Sweet (2013) pointed out that recent Canadian legal battles regarding polygamy have used the argument that monogamous relationships are a central "tenet of nation building in Canada" (p. 1) and are an institution that protects the rights of women. While early concepts of monogamy may have centered on possession, later concepts appear to preserve the notion that only one woman may be possessed at a time (Bailey, Baines, Amani, & Kaufman, 2006).

In contrast, group relationships are based on collectivist ideals (Pines, 1987). Communal living by its definition could be viewed at odds with the idea of American individualism (Aguilar, 2013). Howe (2011) described how monogamous families, from a systems perspective, are shaped by a vast ecology of influences from neighbors, institutions, and friends. Relationships outside of a monogamous framework not only challenge cultural norms but also the very forces that shape the dynamics of American society (Anderson, 2010; Oppenheimer, 2011). This may be why nonmonogamies are

considered fringe behaviors (Barker, 2005; Strauss, 2012). For example, Conley, Ziegler, Moors, Matsick, and Valentine (2012b) suggested that only 4-5% of the American population is involved in consensual nonmonogamy.

Cherlin (2010) argued that this monogamous-rooted ideology has contributed to American's higher rates of divorce, remarriage, and short-term live-in partners. From a behavioral perspective monogamy seems to be discordant with human nature (Amato, 2010; McDermott, Fowler, & Christakis, 2013; Oppenheimer, 2011). Cherlin pointed out children of monogamous couples who divorce, remarry, or cohabitate have had to deal with frequent changes in the parental structure and learn how to navigate this ever-shifting relationship landscape. Because traditional monogamy is not as long-term as once considered, even the child-rearing dynamics of contemporary monogamous relationships may involve more than a binary male/female parental unit (Ryan & Jetha, 2010; Sheff, 2014).

Schilling (2012) claimed that polygamous and nonmonogamous relationships have become more popular over the past decade. Sheff (2014) argued that group or nonmonogamous relationships that involve more than two adults as part of the parenting team are therefore no more or less stressful to children than those monogamous families who have or are going through a transition from one partner to another. Bennion (2012) also argued that children are not under any additional strain due to relationship changes in a polyamorous relationship as they might be with a primary parent who is a serial monogamist.

Schilling (2012) as well as Heckert (2010) pointed out that contemporary polygamy in America, which is often considered less exploitive and more egalitarian than historic or nonWesternized polygamy, seems to be captivating the attention of several Americans who have come to recognize the challenges and limitations of compulsory monogamous relationships. Polygamous group relationships are gaining more attention in the media and social media (Antalffy, 2011). For example, there are a few new television shows, such as TLC's "Sister Wives," HBO's "Big Love," and Showtime's "Polyamory: Married and Dating," that focus on dynamics of group relationships, along with an emerging number of social advocacy groups like Pro-Polygamy (pro-polygamy.com), Bonus Families (bonus families.com), Love Without Limits (lovewithoutlimits.com), and Loving More (lovemore.org), that focus on alternatives to a traditional monogamous family.

Opponents to this recent emergence of alternative relationships focus on the type of polygamy that has been historically rooted in gender inequality, excessive or unbalanced hedonism, and exploitation (Buck, 2012; Clark, 2011). This predominantly includes the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints (FLDS) that has been accused of group marriages exploiting young females (Bennion, 2012; Whitehurst, 2011; Zuk, 2014) but also includes other organizations rooted around the world such as Orthodox Muslims who view polygamy as sexist and against social moral code (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001; Salhi, 2010), other fundamentalist Christian cultures (Koktvedgaard Zeitzen, 2008), some Arabian cultures (Profanter & Cate, 2009), and

some African cultures (Marques, 2010) that view polygamy as exploitive of women and certain lower social classes.

For example, McDermott, Fowler, and Christakis (2013) are opposed to polygamy due to its inherent unequal nature. These authors' research, along with Clark (2011) demonstrated that historically polygynous practices have led to women who get married very young, have greater burden in child-rearing, have higher rates of sexually transmitted infections, are at higher risk for domestic violence, and have access to poorer prenatal healthcare. In fact, the exploitive inequality of polygamy appears to be a salient theme throughout the literature (Burleson, 2005; Bertone & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2014; Chapais, 2013; Cherlin, 2010).

Dow and Eff (2013) conducted a meta-analysis of 186 pre-industrial societies in order to determine factors that contributed to what the authors described as a natural progression away from polygyny and towards monogamy. The authors found that genomic variation, reduction of pathogen exposure, and decreases in violence were all contributing factors for female mating choices. Al-Krenawi and Slonim-Nevo (2008) asserted that gender-rigid Arabian polygyny led to higher rates of social difficulty and mental health problems, as well as lower socioeconomic status. In their study, historic polygyny was a minefield of problems, largely because of gender inequality and the hedonistic exploitive nature of traditional polygyny.

Henrich, Boyd, and Richerson (2012) claimed that monogamy was a natural social evolution that increased accessibility of women to men, reduced crime rates, and increased economic productivity. The authors made bold causality claims that normative

monogamy reduced domestic violence, as well as child abuse. Their study, like many of the others, was focused on unequal polygyny that involved the possession of multiple wives and is associated with rigid gender stratification and sexual exploitation. While these authors' findings may indeed accurately portray the pitfalls of historic polygyny, many argue that it does not accurately reflect contemporary egalitarian polygamy, also known as polyfidelity, which is based in gender equality and communal harmony (Altman & Ginat, 1996; Chapman, 2010; Luscombe, 2012).

It is clear that in many cultures, unequal polygyny has contributed to a variety of socio-cultural problems. Keenan (2013) posited that these challenges existed regardless of the relationship construct and that legalizing polygamy would only bring people out of the closet and make it less likely for them to hide such injustices. Relationship normalcy, however is rooted in bipartisan politics in which conservatives who often take the normative position of monogamy (Anderson, 2010) dismiss the social challenges faced by marginalized groups, writing them off as "those liberals… subject to fickle whims" (Marsh, 2013, para. 6).

Ashe (2011) argued that the lack of separation between church and state in America continues to reinforce morality imposed by religious institutions. Yet the meaning of marriage has been left to the decision of the Supreme Court, which some argue has no experience or authority to determine such meaning (Kuykendall, 2012). On top of that the historical oppression associated with exploitative polygyny, which is often associated with stigmatized cultures such as fundamentalist Islam or Mormonism, has

created a backlash against group relationships, further justifying that monogamy is the only reasonable relationship orientation (Heise, 2013; Luscombe, 2012; Strauss, 2012).

Therefore it is arguable that binary-coupled monogamy is legally, culturally, and historically rooted as the only viable paradigm for acceptable romantic relationships (Bertone & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2014; Chapman, 2010; Luscombe, 2012; Straus, 2012). This paradigm extends into how society conceptualizes relationships in terms of an individual's developmental trajectory, as well (Barker, 2005). Current theories and frameworks used to describe human development often assume that a monogamous or at the very least, pair-bonded relationship, is the only valid form of sexual or romantic relationship (Conley et al., 2012b; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008). Kinship and the family structure is so tightly defined within this framework that there is little consideration of alternative approaches to building a family or romantic bond (Goldfeder & Sheff, 2013; Klesse, 2013; Labriola, 2010).

Literature Review

Polyfidelity as a Relationship Orientation

Recent research on nonmonogamous relationships suggests that relationships, like sexuality, could be tied to an individual's predisposed orientation (Manley, VanAnders, & Diamond, 2015). Recognizing relationships as an orientation would follow a similar political path of depathologizing homosexuality (Downie & Llewellyn, 2011). Only in this case, it would contribute to understanding why some individuals are predisposed to monogamy versus others who are not. Barker (2005) conducted a qualitative study reviewing transcripts of 30 polyamory-identified respondents in the U.K (age 20-60, *M* =

33). Using a social constructionist discourse analysis, the author deconstructed notions of social monogamy-bias and poly-prejudice and found supporting evidence that polyamory was a relationship orientation.

Barker's (2005) research demonstrated a clear power structure inhibiting the development and exploration of alternative relationships. Specifically there are legal challenges to prohibit accessibility to poly-families largely due to the fear of persecution. The author also found that researchers often lack a vocabulary or conceptual understanding of the dynamics of nonmonogamous relationships. Therefore these populations are often invisible, systemically erased, and excluded as valid forms of kinship. As a result, Barker posited the average individual might feel prohibited from exploring a group relationship, or lack the skills or role models necessary in forming such a bond, because like compulsory heterosexuality, compulsory monogamy is the expected norm.

Kolesar (2011) implemented a mixed-method study utilizing 484 online surveys and 33 phone interviews to determine relationship orientation development. The author found that bisexual/pansexual identities tended to be more likely tied to polyamory. Kolesar argued that the process of being oriented towards a relationship construct outside of monogamy is largely due to a more critically self-examined life. Individuals who have had to question their relationship orientation in context to monogamy are more critically aware of the fact that they are most likely oriented differently than those who successfully engage in monogamous relationships.

Many authors parallel the social progression of attaining equal polyamorous rights to that of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) individuals (Duff, 2010; Zoe, 2010; Melloy, 2010; Sheff, 2011; Weitzman, 2006). LGBT individuation required a cultural shift in attitude and perspective surrounding sexual orientation (Hegarty, 2013). This also required developing a language that could describe a more accurate understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity (Zoe, 2010). When it comes to understanding and describing poly relationships, researchers may need to reframe common concepts regarding kinship, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Developing a new language, such as relationship orientation, could lead to a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of human sexuality and romantic relationships (Ritchie & Barker, 2006; Tweedy, 2011).

Redefining how relationships are oriented was another common idea in both the literature and pop culture. Pansexuality or omnisexuality are alternative to the idea of bisexuality, focusing less on being in between same or opposite sex attracted and instead focusing on orienting towards an individual as a whole regardless of gender (Burleson, 2005; UC Davis, 2007; Owen, 2011). Crosswell (2014) attempted to define three types of nonmonogamy: hierarchical polyamory, nonhierarchical polyamory, and relationship anarchy. Hierarchical polyamory involves prioritizing partners from primary, secondary, tertiary, and so forth. Nonhierarchical polyamory could include polyfidelity or could focus on an individual who is in essence his or her own free agent in terms of commitment (MacDowall, 2009). Crosswell described relationship anarchy as a situation

when romantic and nonromantic relationship boundaries are not differentiated. For example, this could include asexual identities.

Ferrer (2007) suggested that genetic imprinting might be a contributing factor supporting the concept of relationship orientations. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2015) defines an orientation (in context of sexual orientation) as an, "enduring pattern of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions" (para. 1). This definition could easily describe the dynamics of an individual's inclination towards one relationship over another. Manley, Van Anders, and Diamond (2015) and others posited that ultimately it is quite likely that if mental health professionals were able to view polyamorous relationships (which include polyfidelity) as a set, yet potentially fluid orientation, much like sexual orientation, it could serve as a framework for better understanding and legitimizing relationships that exist outside of the classic monogamous paradigm (Barker & Langdridge, 2010a; Kolesar, 2011; Tweedy, 2011).

Challenges to the Concept of Relationship Orientation

There are several challenges with the concept of relationship orientation, however. Diamond (2008) conducted a 10-year longitudinal study following the sexuality of 79 women who identified as other than only heterosexual. The study found that nearly 2/3 of the women changed how they labeled their own sexual orientation over the duration of the study. While several studies have suggested that this in itself could be considered an orientation, the concept of fluidity certainly lends credibility to the idea that relationships have the potential for a formative or developmental oriented trajectory (Manley, Van Anders, & Diamond, 2015). Therefore sexual fluidity is the concept that

sexual orientation has the capability of changing over time (Diamond, 2008; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008), and evidence suggests a level of fluidity that may exist in not only sexual orientation but also relationship orientation (Manley et al., 2015).

Advocacy surrounding LGBT identities has often centered on the premise that an individual's's identity is not a choice, but instead an enduring pattern influenced by both nature and nurture (APA, 2015). However, these orientations are marginalized and systemically erased by society (ALGBTIC, 2012). Pallotta-Chiarolli (2014) pointed out that the erasure of the entire social ecology of an individual's intersecting identities contributes to greater mental and physical health challenges. In the same way, polyfidelity families are often omitted from textbooks and are not recognized socially, resulting in systemic erasure, perpetuating further invisibility and lack of understanding (Weitzman, Davidson, & Phillips, 2010).

The second challenge to defining relationships as an orientation was that it continues to propagate the idea of right and wrong relationships (Downing & Gillett, 2010). Queer culture, based on the postmodern idea of nonessentialism, might argue that it should not matter whether or not someone chooses an orientation. However, it could be argued that the most social power in today's culture continue to hold an essentialist belief that there are intrinsic categories that define experiences (Bertone & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2014). Defining relationships as an orientation is at the very least a pragmatic way to gain legal acceptance but yet runs the risk of philosophically perpetuating the idea of what is considered appropriate or inappropriate relationship parameters (Barker & Langdridge, 2010a; Sweet, 2013).

History of Polyfidelity

The term polyfidelity originated from communal or intentional living ideologies that became popular in the early 1970s (Hendricks & Hendricks, 1990). Sartorius (2004) described this type of relationship as polyfidelity or polyexclusivity, otherwise identified as a 3-person marriage, a de facto group marriage, conjoint marriage, or closed relationship between more than two individuals. Barker (2005) pointed out that closed polyamory is comprised of a vastly different set of dynamics than open polyamory. For example, some factors that might be unique to polyfidelity include: negotiating relationship parity, balancing dynamics of accessibility, navigating the impact of social stigma, and developing nonbinary relationship roles.

Polyfidelity gained momentum between the mid-seventies and early nineties. As open nonmonogamy based on independence and autonomy became more popular, concepts of polyfidelity became less popular, perhaps because both polyfidelity and monogamy share similar restrictions (Hendricks & Hendricks, 1990). Hence polyfidelity or group monogamy was perceived as being as restrictive and therefore less appealing than open nonmonogamy (Kolesar, 2011). The mid-nineties marked a sudden departure of significant literature pertaining to what might appear as a form of expanded monogamy. Because of this, the most comprehensive polyfidelity literature from which to draw from is now twenty years out of date (Sheff, 2014).

I identified four primary publications dedicated specifically to polyfidelity: *Loving More: The Polyfidelity Primer* (Nearing, 1992), *Polyfidelity: Sex in the Kerista Commune and Other Related Theories on How to Solve the World's Problems* (Kerista,

1984), *Lesbian Polyfidelity: A Pleasure Guide for he Woman Whose Heart is Open to Multiple, Concurrent Sexual Loves* (West, 1995), and *Group Marriage: A Study of Contemporary Multilateral Marriage* (Constantine, 1973). The most comprehensive historic descriptions and philosophical insights to polyfidelity are contained primarily within the Kerista Commune's archives (kerista.com). Additional archives based on polyaffective communities focused on polyamory, intentional communities, and group communication building include: Loving More (lovemore.com), The Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance (woodhullalliance.org), The Ganas Community (ganas.org), The Zegg Community (zegg-forum.org), and Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC) (ic.org).

Relational Strategies in NonMonogamies

There are conflicting reports on the levels of happiness between long-term closed relationships and ones that are not (Laumann et al., 2006; Pedersen, & Blekesaune, 2003; Wolfinger & Wilcox, 2008). Yet it could be argued that polyfidelity has the potential to bring out the best in both experiences (Waite & Joyner, 2001). Barker (2005) suggested it draws on some of the safety and accessibility benefits of long-term monogamy, while expanding the options and experiences attributed to polyamory. The approach to this study focused on identifying both the benefits and drawbacks of a closed group relationship and sought to better understand the relational strategies common in a nonmonogamous relationship.

Challenges in Understanding Poly Relationships

Perhaps the most significant challenges in researching and understanding poly relationships are parallel to the challenges of studying another stigmatized group,

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) individuals (Eliason, DeJoseph, Dibble, & Chinn, 2012). Both are often invisible due to social prejudice, therefore making it harder to identify, sample, and assess their phenomenology (Weitzman, Davidson, & Phillips, 2010). While tremendous strides have been made in improving LGBT invisibility and understanding over the past several decades, this population continues to suffer from the affects of discrimination and prejudice (ALGBTIC, 2012; APA, 2014). In the same way as same-sex relationships, alternative relationships such as polyfidelity, continue to suffer from marginalization, systemic erasure, and outright prejudice in society (Sheff, 2011).

Weitzman (2006) pointed out that while mental health counseling has made improvements in valuing diversity in gender, sexual orientation, and religion it has not educated students on alternative family structures. There are a number of poly advocates that report continual challenges with finding poly-competent providers (Pincus, 2011). In addition, not only do several providers lack cultural competency, but also many still remain judgmental when it comes to discussing poly relationships (Conley et al., 2012; Ley, 2009).

Common Mythologies Relating to Poly Relationships

Before understanding how to better nurture polyfidelity relationships it is important to understand some of the factors that contribute to further misunderstanding or social prejudice. Parsons, Starks, Gamarel, and Grove (2012) conducted a study on sexual relationship agreements and correlation with relationship quality. They collected data from a 2-day long survey of 1781 gay and bisexual men attending a GLB event in New

York or Los Angeles. From the data, 161 gay male dyads ($n = 322$ individuals) met the criteria for the study, from which the participants were divided nearly equally between monogamous and some form of nonmonogamous relationship.

Measuring relationship quality from four dimensions: sexual satisfaction, communication, jealousy, and frequency of sex, the authors found that relationship satisfaction and quality was not determined by the relationship construct (monogamous or nonmonogamous). This is important to distinguish since relationships outside of the monogamous norm are often thought to be less healthy or fulfilling (Parsons et al., 2012). In fact some studies suggest that rates of jealousy are lower among consensual nonmonogamous relationships due to the concept of compersion, or taking joy in other's joy (Aumer et al., 2014; Bonello & Cross, 2010; Conley et al., 2013).

Polyamorous individuals are less committed. Ferrer (2008) argued that a common fear surrounding the idea of polyamory is the perception that it increases the chances of an individual's's partner finding a more appealing mate, hence abandoning the primary partner. When viewed through the lens of monogamy, open polyamory is often seen as a weakness of will or conviction (Anderson, 2010). Polyamorists are viewed as unwilling or incapable of being able to commit to others, even when research would suggest that this is not the case (Chapman, 2010; Conley et al., 2012b).

Proponents might argue that this dynamic is different in terms of polyfidelity, since there is indeed an exclusive commitment between the members of a romantic group (Hendricks & Hendricks, 1990; Lano & Parry, 1995; Nearing, 1992; Pines & Aronson, 1981; West, 1996). The primary argument against polyfidelity is that each individual is

potentially less deeply connected to one another due to logistical challenges and that the bond between two members may be more exclusive or stronger than a bond with a group (Strauss, 2012).

Polyamorous individuals are hypersexual. Despite evidence to the contrary, being labeled hypersexual is a common mythology associated with those who identity as polyamorous (Chapman, 2010). Conley et al. (2013) found that those who engaged in a nonmonogamous relationship were more likely to be stigmatized by others as sexually deviant or insatiable. Ley (2009) found that individuals who seek mental healthcare services are oftentimes met with hostility or judgment due to the perception that polyamorous individuals are hypersexual, yet I was unable to find evidence-based literature to support this.

Polyamorous relationships lack closeness. Because group relationships are often framed within a monogamous lens, it is difficult for conventional society to imagine how a multiple-person relationship could be as intimate or close as a single-person relationship. There is a lack of research on delineating exact sources of social prejudice against polyamory (Nearing, 2000). However, Mitchell, Bartholomew, and Cobb (2014) suggested that a common mythology is the belief that polyamorous relationships are less need fulfilling due to the nature of the relationship itself despite evidence to the contrary (Emens, 2004). This relates back to the idea that polyamory is largely focused on sex and less on building lasting intimate bonds (Conley et al., 2013). Mitchells' et al. (2014) study ($n = 1,093$) found that polyamorous individuals are not necessarily seeking

additional connections due to a lack of connection with one or more of their current partners.

Polyamorous individuals are less adequate at parenting. A common criticism of polyamorous parents is that they are less committed or capable of raising children (Sheff, 2011). This is similar to claims made against LGBT individuals and their competency in raising children (Amato, 2012; Conley et al., 2013; Marks, 2012). However there was no evidence supporting this claim (Sheff, 2014). In fact there was significant evidence supporting the idea that poly families have more temporal, financial, and relational resources than dyadic couples when it comes to parenting (Pallotta-Chiarolli, Haydon, & Hunter, 2013; Sheff, 2010).

Stigma Associated with Polyfidelity

Social and familial stigmatization. Conley et al. (2013) conducted four studies geared at better understanding the stigma associated with nonmonogamous relationships. The authors' first study focused on perception of health and safety around monogamy versus nonmonogamy. They found that monogamous relationships are often associated with higher degrees of physical and emotional well being ($n = 189$, 66% female and 34% male, *mean age* = 25, *SD* = 10.5). The second Conley et al. study found that a stigma was associated with nonmonogamous relationships in general and that monogamy was associated with a halo-affect of higher degrees of virtue and well-being (F (14, 1085) = 207.39, *p* = .00005, *n2* = .74) *(n* = 1,101, 65% female, 35% male, 72% European/American White, *mean age* = 24, *SD* = 12.5).

The significance of these findings suggests that members of group relationships are often at risk for significant social and familial stigma and even rejection (Conley et al., 2013). This could result in diminished connections with family and friends, the perception that members of the group are mentally ill or sexually perverse, and a devaluing of the group (Barker & Langdridge, 2010b). This was another example of how nonmonogamies are often systemically erased and stigmatized resulting in a lack of understanding. Navigating such rejection and social stigma was a critical component to successfully counseling a polyamorous or polyfidelity relationship (Pincus, 2011).

Cultural and historical stigmatization. Historically the most prevalent and well-known form of polyamory has been unbalanced polygamy in the form of polygyny (Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001; Profanter & Cate, 2009). This was considered unbalanced because it oftentimes involved a hegemonic patriarchal ownership of multiple wives. There are many instances when women (oftentimes of lower socioeconomic status) were exploited for the sexual satisfaction of men who were in power (McDermott, 2011; Strauss, 2012). There are also many cultures that have practiced both polyandry and polygyny as part of a reproductive strategy during periods of high infant mortality and infertility (Clark, 2011; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001; Koktvedgaard Zeitzen, 2008).

For a significant period of time in world history there were more countries in the world that permitted polygamy than those who did not (Koktvedgaard Zeitzen, 2008). Over time polygamous group relationships were replaced by the concept of monogamy (Mendelson-Maoz, 2009). Remnants of culture-based polygyny still exist today in cultures such as Fundamentalist Mormons, Muslims, and Jews; some Native American

tribes; and several South African, Middle Eastern, and Asian cultures (Des Forges, 2012; Marques, 2010; Salhi, 2010; Stacey, 2011; Zuk, 2014). In fact it is estimated that nearly a third of the world's cultures legally condone polygamous relationships (Altman & Ginat, 1996; Bailey, Baines, Amani, & Kaufman, 2006).

The fact that polygamy has been so predominantly associated with gender inequality is perhaps the primary reason why it is so stigmatized by Western cultures today (Straus, 2012). As a result, the mere notion of a group relationship often evokes antiquated concepts of polygyny resulting in significant aversion (McDermott, 2011). This occurs even in context of contemporary egalitarian polygamy, also known as polyaffective or polyfidelity relationships (Sheff, 2014).

Dealing with social stigma and prejudice. There are a number of issues surrounding social stigma and prejudice when it comes to nonmonogamous relationships. This includes dealing with friend and family rejection, managing the welfare of children, and developing emergency plans during times of crisis (Sheff, 2014). For example, healthcare services may not view all of the group members as legitimate next of kin (Goldfeder & Sheff, 2013). There is also a lack of legal protections in place regarding power of attorney, estate planning, or parental rights (Whitehurst, 2011).

Group relationship parenting has similar stigma associated with parenting as same-sex marriage (Conley et al., 2013; Pallotta-Chiarolli, Haydon, & Hunter, 2013; Sheff, 2014). For example, the Family Structure Study focused on the reality of lived experiences of individuals who grew up in same-sex households versus those who grew up with their biological parents (Marks, 2012). Marks' study found that those in same-sex

households were exposed to higher rates of instability, minority stress, and nonconventional living arrangements. The study also focused on the real-life challenges, which are a result of living in a socially marginalized family and completely overlooked the social privileges experienced by hetero-normative households that do not experience minority stress (Marks, 2012).

Protecting society from these real-life harms, yet overlooking the underlying factors that contribute to dysfunctional realities, is how the legal system continues to justify antipolygamy laws (Buck, 2012). While the historic harm to children and women is certainly legitimate, the focus of the problem has fallen onto the relationship construct (polygyny) and not the behaviors and attitudes of the individuals who are often in the historical spotlight (sexism, hedonism, and exploitation) (Luscombe, 2012; Sheff, 2011). This is a similar response towards same-sex relationships, where gender was considered a significant factor as to the success or failure of a monogamous relationship (Ashbee, 2007; Marks, 2012).

As a result of social and legal stigma, families of group relationships are compelled to have to over-justify their legitimacy, defending their relationship in an attempt for gaining social acceptance (Pallotta-Chiarolli, Haydon, & Hunter, 2013; Ryan, 2012). This too is similar to same-sex parenting dynamics in which over the years same-sex couples have had to defend their competency at child-rearing (Amato, 2012; Marks, 2012).

Dealing with discrimination. In Fleckenstein, Bergstrand, and Cox (2012) study on polyamorous individuals ($n = 4000$), the authors found that polyamorous individuals

were five times more likely to report experiencing discrimination compared to the general U.S. Population (when compared to the General Social Survey). Nearing (2000), Sheff (2014), as well as Emens (2004) also suggested that poly relationships in general incur a greater deal of discrimination than those in monogamous relationships. While exact numbers may not be known due to significant sampling and procedural limitations, it is very likely that poly relationships in general deal with greater levels of social stigma than those who are not in such relationships.

Social disconnection and alienation. Most group relationships involve some aspect of same-sex intimacy, whether sexual or nonsexual. Group relationships that involve a combination of biological sexes often involve individuals with a sexual orientation that might accommodate this dynamic, whether it is bisexual, pansexual, or fluid (Berry & Barker, 2014; Impett, Muise, & Peragine, 2014; Kleese, 2011; Kolesar, 2011; McLean, 2011). This may contribute to the stigmatization of group relationships in a similar way as same-sex relationships (MacDowall, 2009).

Weitzman (2006) highlighted the fact that polyamorous relationships can help increase the visibility of bisexual individuals. Some bisexuals emphasize gender and may even participate in gender monogamy (Burleson, 2005). For example, a bisexual man who has a primary female partner might be allowed to have an open relationship with various men, but limiting female partners to only the primary relationship. Barker (2005), Sheff (2014), and others have argued that oftentimes these limitations are based on social prejudice that same-sex relationships are primarily sexual experiences, in which heterosexual relationships are based on long-term intimacy, family, and commitment.

A bisexual man might also be viewed as gay when in public with his same sex partner (Erickson-Schrotha, & Mitchell, 2009). Binegativity also results in a double stigma in which both bisexuality and polyamory are criticized as an inability to choose, lack of insight, or moral degradation (Burleson, 2005; Keppel, 2006; Sheff, 2014). Bisexuals often experience stigma from both the straight and gay community in criticism of being indecisive or playing both sides of the fence (MacDowall, 2009; Owen, 2011; Page, 2004; UC Davis, 2007). There might also be legal challenges due to gender that play a role in kinship, parenting rights, and relationship legitimacy (Pallotta-Chiarolli, Haydon, & Hunter, 2013). For example, male-male-female (MMF) triad in many states only have the option for male-female marriage, leaving the third, who is male, outside of any legal or social protections (Barker & Langdridge, 2010b; Sheff, 2014).

Robinson (2011) conducted a qualitative study interviewing 40 bisexual women regarding relationship history. 12.5% switched between monogamy and polyamory more than once. The author determined that polyamory could also be used as a strategic identity to explore an individual's's bisexuality when dealing with gender and sexual orientation. Shifting between identities helped justify romantic interests. Weitzman (2006), Sheff (2014), and others suggested that recognizing that some polyamorous couples and therefore potentially polyfidelitous couples may use relationship structures as a way to strategically advocate for their bisexual identity could inform mental health care providers on how to best address their client's needs.

If individuals within a poly-relationship lack social support or other means to share and connect with others in the community there is a greater potential for self-doubt,

feelings of isolation, disconnection, and loneliness (Shaw et al., 2012). As a result, inherent homonegativity exists due to at least one person in a heterosexual triad being of the same sex, even if they may not identify as LGBT (Szymanski, Ikizler, & Dunn, 2015). For example, Morandini (2015) studied 2,133 individuals between the ages of 18-77 ($M = 32.11$, $SD = 12.4$) and found that essentialist thought, often rooted in the same religious concepts supporting moral monogamy, lays the foundation for greater degrees of homonegativity ($p < .05$).

Sowe, Brown, and Taylor (2014) conducted an online survey ($N = 579$, $M = 31.76$, $SD = 11.73$, 76.2% White) to determine whether or not same-sex attracted individuals with higher degrees of religiosity experienced greater internalized homonegativity. Their study found that religious thinking, rooted in essentialist or moralized thinking (often associated with monogamy) contributed to higher degrees of internalized homonegativity ($X2(8) = 188.206$, $p < .0001$). In another study, Rosik, Dinges, and Saavedra (2013) studied 183 male (27.3%) and female (72.7%) undergraduate students (50.8% White) to assess for homonegativity. The authors found that higher degrees of intrinsic religious orientation (IR) were closely associated with higher degrees of homonegativity ($R2 = .37$, *adjusted R2 = .36*, $F(5,175) = 20.83$, $p < .001$).

It is therefore possible that polyfidelity relationships could experience the same minority stress as other sexual and gender minorities (Goldfeder & Sheff, 2013; MacDowall, 2009; Sheff, 2011). More research on polyfidelity is needed to better understand the dynamics that could be influencing these types of relationships. A

stronger understanding of polyamory in general will also affect legal policy and reduce the vulnerability of poly families to wrongful prosecution based on being reported by child protective services or prosecuted for adultery/bigamy (Sheff, 2014). For example, it would be interesting to investigate how minority stress experienced by those in nonmonogamous relationships has shaped the dynamics of relationship over time and whether or not it contributed to the family's resilience.

Ryan (2006) demonstrated how polyamory could be viewed as a belief system or worldview, which entitles such practice as protected within religious freedom. The author pointed out that much like same-sex marriage, polyamorous marriage or domestic partnership rights are systematically erased. Individuals building a family within a polyfidelity framework are not subject to the same privilege of social security and legal recognition (Sheff, 2011). This clearly demonstrates a significant legal hurdle for those developing a long-term polyfidelity relationship (Sheff, 2011; Sweet, 2013).

Legal Challenges that Impede Polyfidelity Research

Legal challenges due to prejudice. Polyfidelitous, polygamist, and polyamorous relationships have historically been subject to criminal investigations, child protective services inquiries, and social stigma (Brown vs. Utah County, 2013; Duff, 2010; Fry, 2010; Heise, 2013; Sheff, 2011; Zoe, 2010). There are a number of legal rulings that have benefited same-sex relationship recognition (Obergefell vs. Hodges, 2015; United States vs. Windsor, 2013). While those laws could open the door for broader legal recognition with alternative families, legal rulings over the past five years regarding polygamy continue to challenge the constitutionality of denying an individual the freedom to choose

his or her sexual mates and family structures. However more recently in December of 2015 a federal judge declared Utah's criminal components of their antipolygamy law were indeed unconstitutional (United States vs. Brown, 2015).

Tweedy (2011) conducted a meta-analysis on legal proceedings regarding nonmonogamy. The author argued that a majority of the prejudice surrounding polyamory is influenced greatly by institutional power structures that regulate monogamy, primarily in terms of adultery. Adultery, however, is an act of deception within the moral framework of monogamy, in which polyamory rejects this framework from the beginning and is rooted in the idea of transparency in having multiple sexual partners (Parsons, Starks, Gamarel, & Grove, 2012).

Legal strategies to help protect the rights of group relationships have centered on viewing polyamorous relationships as a relationship orientation (Ashbee, 2007; Chapman, 2010; Duff, 2010; Melloy, 2010; Pincus, 2011; Sheff, 2014; Tweedy, 2011; Zoe, 2010). For many years, polygamous families in several states have been the victims of harassment and criminal investigations. In the recent Utah case of Brown vs. Utah County (2013) a federal judge ruled that it is unconstitutional and therefore illegal to make polygamy illegal. While this did not legalize bigamy, or the marriage of more than one person, it prevented the government from prosecuting the Brown family, who was portrayed on The Learning Channel (TLC) show *Sister Wives*. The law that threatened polygamists in Utah was based from the institutional power structure of monogamy, which made it illegal to cohabitate with a sexual partner. This is an example of a double-sided law, as prosecutors only conducted investigations against polygamous families.

Although recent legal attempts to interfere with group relationships continues throughout the country, some laws in Utah have been challenged as being unconstitutional (Fletcher-Stack, 2013). For example, the legal system in Utah still continues to attempt to criminalize plural marriages and prosecute those who are part of these types of relationships (Whitehurst, 2011). The justification for prohibiting multiperson marriages is based on protecting primarily children and women from being exposed to harm (Buck, 2012).

There are intersecting battles between feminists, sex educators, religious leaders, and mental health professionals regarding the legitimacy of polygamy. Oftentimes those who are opposed to polygamy take a stance rooted in a solipsistic viewpoint and fail to delve deeper into underlying contributing problems (Duff, 2010). For example, Fry (2010) stated that courts should continue to outlaw polygamy for the sake of protecting children and women's rights. Yet it could be argued that opponents with this stance fail to consider that the core issue is indeed about child advocacy and women's rights rather than the idea of a group relationship (Buck, 2012; Sheff, 2014).

These challenges often create polarized viewpoints focused on the historical injustices and overlook the foundational challenges behind such problems (Sheff, 2011). For example, many historical polygamous (and most often polygynous) relationships are rooted in antiquated fundamental religious beliefs rooted in gender inequality and the objectification of children (Bennion, 2012; Fry, 2010; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001; Profanter & Kate, 2009; Whitehurst, 2011). Some contemporary polygamous relationships and groups of polygamous sects follow similar problematic thinking (i.e.

Warren Jeffs or Utah's Kingston Group) based on antiquated concepts of gender roles

(mormonfundamentalism.com). However, egalitarian polygamy is part of a more

contemporary reframing of group relationships based on committed connections between

all partners of the relationship (Strauss, 2012).

In 2013 the Supreme Court ruled that The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was

unconstitutional (United States v Windsor, 2013). Section 3 of DOMA focused on

marriage being a union of monogamy that was between a man and woman. While this

was a ruling that paved the way for legalizing same-sex marriage (Obergefell vs. Hodges,

2015), it was also a ruling that helped create the argument that imposing a monogamous

relationship as the only legitimate relationship is also an act of discrimination (Buck,

2012). This ruling helps preserve the rights of those in a polyfidelity or polygamous

group relationship. Bennett (2009) suggested that polyamory is replacing the paradigm of

monogamy, in which relationships between multiple partners have a stronger potential of

fulfilling each individual's needs. Several others suggested that the issues surrounding the

rights of polyamorists are similar to the issues surrounding the legitimizing of same-sex

relationships (Ashbee, 2007; Duff, 2010; Melloy, 2010; Zoe, 2010).

Lack of legal recognition and protection. Tweedy (2011) pointed out that the

cultural framework of imposing a monogamous/nonmonogamous framework onto

everyone in a free society is an act of inequality. Sheff (2011) found that because of this,

many nonmonogamous relationships are vulnerable to legal, social, psychological, and

physiological harm due to social stigma, prejudice, and lack of legal protection. For

example, without an appropriate legal framework, next of kin could be difficult to define

if one member of the poly family were to die, especially when children are involved (Goldfeder & Sheff, 2013).

Sheff (2014) pointed out that polyfidelity relationships oftentimes have to be creative when protecting their families. These types of protections are taken for granted in legal marriages. However, relationships not recognized by the law must plan for legal issues such as: estate planning, inheritance, tax burden, health benefits, power of attorney, parental rights, hospital visitation and next of kin (Sheff, 2011). Some strategies for alleviating these challenges include power of attorney, guardianship, adoption, family registration, legal contracts, estate trusts, and other means to secure an accountable connection. This included the potential of forming a legal family corporation or limited liability partnership with one another (Sheff, 2014). In many cases outside legal counsel is necessary resulting in a cost burden on poly families.

The Significance of Studying NonMonogamies

Need for explorative qualitative research. The American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (2014) Standard A.4.b. stated, "Counselors are aware of and avoid imposing their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors…." (p. 5). The American Psychological Association (APA) "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct" Principle E stated, "Psychologists are aware of and respect cultural, individual, and role differences…try to eliminate the effect on their work of biases based on those factors" (p. 4). The National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2008) "Code of Ethics" Section 1.05.c. stated, "Social workers should obtain education about and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression" (p. 4). This is

particularly important when dealing with marginalized populations that already face significant social stigma and rejection.

From a review of the literature it was clear that nonmonogamies are often systemically erased and not considered a viable relationship option (Barker & Langdridge, 2010a; Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2013). Paradigmatic constraints limit the scope of how researchers view relationships, which in turn makes it harder for researchers to understand the dynamics of group relationships (Eldridge, 2010; Halberstam, 2012; Zeeman, Aranda, & Grant, 2014). It was also clear that as a result, counselors and counselor educators are more likely to impose their own compulsory values around monogamy and may not even be aware of how their behaviors or beliefs are infringing on their ability to effectively serve alternative family structures such as those in a polyfidelity relationship (Moon, 2008; Pincus, 2011; Shaw et al., 2012; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011; Walker, 2010; Weitzman, 2006).

Limitations in Terminology and Interpretive Frameworks

The fact that I was unable to find any literature specifically pertaining to polyfidelity, or closed group relationships, suggests that there is a significant limitation in how researchers understand such relationships. As is often the case in paradigm-shifting research (Downing & Gillett, 2010), there is currently very little interpretive frameworks for understanding the dynamics of a group polyfidelitous relationships (Sheff, 2014). Not only that, but the language used to describe an individual's understanding of romantic relationships is also greatly limited to binary heterosexual norms (Moon, 2008).

Limitations in Current Research and Sampling Procedures

Bertone and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2014) stated that there is a significant lack of understanding regarding the needs of poly and other queer families due to limited research and education surrounding alternative relationships. The socio-politicocultural focus on monogamy and heteronormativity has made research on alternative families somewhat elusive and obscure (Barker, 2005; Sheff, 2014). This is because many of these alternative families exist in secrecy due to social stigma (Anderson, 2010; Chapman, 2010; Conley et al., 2013). Although some literature exists pertaining to group relationships, I was unable to find any literature specifically pertaining to relationships defined as polyfidelity (an egalitarian synchronous group relationship).

I was also unable to find much research on how to best counsel a polyamorous relationship. Pincus (2011), as well as Weitzman (2006) highlighted that a large number of mental healthcare practitioners lack an understanding of polyamory let alone the ability to appropriately work with this population. Polyamorous clients that encounter relationship microaggressions due to a therapist's bias are more likely to terminate therapy and avoid returning to the healthcare system altogether (Berry & Barker, 2014; Shelton & Delgado-Romero, 2011).

The Institute of Medicine's (IOM, 2011) "Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People," the Joint Commission's (2011) "Advancing effective communication, cultural competence, and patient-and family-centered care for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community," the APA's (2014) "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Health," and the ALGBTIC's (2012)

"Competencies for Counseling LGBQQIA Individuals" highlighted the foundational importance of provider cultural competency when working with any marginalized population.

For example, without cultural competency a counselor may be unable to differentiate between healthy polyfidelity relationship dynamics and practices that are problematic or subtly coercive (Berry & Barker, 2014). In addition, counselors without the proper training will lack the appropriate skills to assist individuals in working through some of the complex issues that might arise (Berry & Barker, 2014; Keppel, 2006; Pincus, 2011; Shaw et al., 2012; Sheff, 2014; Weitzman, Davidson, & Phillips, 2010). Not only that, but if the client perceives a disconnection with his or her therapist they are less likely to accurately articulate specific relationship goals or goals for therapy (Berry & Barker, 2014).

Following a multicultural model, affirming counselors could work within the client's value system and not the values of the provider (Arredondo, &Tovar-Blank, 2014; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Sue & Sue, 2008). However, acceptance alone does not guarantee a competent affirming counselor (Berry & Barker, 2014). The American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2014) pointed out counselors working with cultural minorities need to become culturally competent of the lived experiences of those populations. Because there is virtually no identifiable research on polyfidelity in particular and very little research on nonmonogamies in general, it is very likely that counselor educators are not well equipped to understand the development of a healthy polyfidelty relationship.

Summary and Conclusions

One major theme in the literature included framing poly relationships from a multicultural perspective (Melloy, 2010). From a counseling perspective poly relationships are subject to culture-bound limitations within the counseling theoretical paradigm (Kolesar, 2011). This included recognizing that relationship constructs, like sexual or gender identity, may involve elements similar to orientation (Barker, 2005; Ritchie & Barker, 2006; Sheff, 2014; Tweedy, 2011; Weitzman, 2006). If relationships are an oriented or predisposed framework in each individual, it may be easier for those who study relationships to understand why certain individuals gravitate towards one relationship orientation over the other (Duff, 2010).

A second major theme in the literature was based on the concept of intentional relating versus compulsory relating (Hendricks & Hendricks, 1990; Sartorius, 2004; Walker, 2010). As researchers begin to deconstruct the complexity of alternative relationships in terms of self-awareness, logistics, and regulation, it is understandable that such relationships, like polyfidelity, require a degree of intention (Barker, 2005; Sheff, 2011). Intentional relationships are focused on balancing intellect with emotion (Barker & Langdridge, 2010b). This included controlling elements of both so that the relationship is less subject to the whims of emotional reactivity (Anapol, 2010b; Chapman, 2010; Klesse, 2011; Nearing, 1992).

A third major theme in the literature was based on understanding the legal and social acceptance challenges of polyfidelity (Chapman, 2010; Sheff, 2011). This included understanding the historical and contemporary arguments for and against polygamy, as

well as understanding the legal battles and their arguments in context to historical

prejudice and cultural emancipation (Barker & Langdridge, 2010; Goldfeder & Sheff,

2013). It was clear that poly families have significant social stressors ranging from family

rejection to legal battles for equivalent civil rights (Fry, 2010). Social stigma also reduces

the visibility of polyfidelitous families making this population even more difficult to

study (Barker & Langdridge, 2010b; Chapman, 2010; Duff, 2010; Fry, 2010; Goldfeder

& Sheff, 2013; Melloy, 2010; Sheff, 2011; Tweedy, 2011).

Finally, while there are some techniques that have emerged to assist in counseling

polyamorous relationships, there are significant limitations in applying those concepts to

a polyfidelity relationship (Berry & Barker, 2014; Impett, Muise, & Peragine, 2014;

Weitzman, 2006; Shaw et al., 2012). Very little is known about how these dynamics play

out in lived-experiences, let alone the strategies and strengths that such individuals are

able to draw upon when negotiating such challenges (Pincus, 2011; Tabi, Doster &

Cheney, 2010).

Information from this study addresses the gap in literature and an individual's

understanding of how to best address the counseling needs of those in a polyfidelity

relationship. Because the gaps in literature are so broad and extensive in nature, I

employed a phenomenological qualitative approach in an attempt to ferret out specific

themes useful for further research. This included understanding how to differentiate

between systemic challenges, relationship challenges, and intrapersonal challenges. For

example, it may be difficult for an untrained counselor to differentiate between fair and

unfair relationship interactions. It may also be difficult for counselors to understand the

intricate balance group relationships require such as how to balance emotional and

physical needs in context to maintaining individuality. Overall, the more counselors

know about the dynamics of group relationships the more likely they are to address the

intricacies of some of the struggles that might arise.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In this study I explored the lived experiences of those who have participated in a polyfidelity relationship, which included (a) assessing what it means to identify as polyfidelitous; (b) exploring the dynamics of a polyfidelity lifestyle; (c) investigating influences that both challenge and support such relationships; and (d) determining how individuals in a polyfidelity relationship successfully capitalize on relationship's strengths and overcome its challenges.

This qualitative inquiry incorporated queer theory (Downing & Gillett, 2011) and relational-cultural theory (Eldridge, Surrey, Rosen, & Miller, 2010) to help reveal themes for counseling this population (Lenz, 2014). In this study I focused on increasing visibility of a polyfidelity relationship and better understanding the significance of the dynamics that are unique to it. The significant lack of literature demonstrated that these types of relationships have often been rendered invisible by society. It also supports the fact that individuals in such relationships have suffered historic prejudice due to social stigma (Pallotta-Chiarolli, Haydon, & Hunter, 2013; Sartorius, 2004; Schilling, 2012; Sweet, 2013; Whitehurst, 2011). Therefore, implementing a participatory action or community-based research approach while investigating this culture was an appropriate relational-cultural or multicultural framework for better understanding poly relationships. This approach is expected to help counselors understand how this population has struggled with historic prejudice. It also provides an opportunity to give back to the community the information gained from this study (Mereish & Poteat, 2015b; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008).

In this chapter I will explore the research methodology that might best illuminate the lived experiences of poly relationships. Using an interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology allowed me to remain more exploratory in nature, documenting the lived subjective experiences of the participants, while also helping to create a new language from which to understand nonmonogamies and group relationships (Finlay, 2012; Hall, 2009). I will describe the role of the researcher, along with a participatory action research (PAR) model that was used for accountability (Kidd & Kral, 2005; Lewin, 1948; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008).

I will also discuss participant selection logic, sample saturation criteria, the recruiting method, and instrumentation for data collection. A detailed account of interview procedures is discussed, along with the methodology used for analyzing data. Because hermeneutic phenomenology is less concrete and more interpretive in nature, I will also explain the procedures I used for maintaining credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability of the data (Hall, 2009).

I conclude the chapter with an extensive overview of the study's ethical procedures. This includes describing the anticipated risk to human subjects and the challenges regarding confidentiality. I provide a detailed account of how the data were safeguarded, how ethical discrepancies were dealt with, and what was included in the participant's informed consent.

Research Design and Rationale

Polyamory, as an overarching relationship category, involves the exploration of a variety of nonmonogamous relationship constructs. One type of relationship, described as

polyfidelity, focuses on a closed romantic group relationship between three or more adults. A central phenomenon inherent primarily in a polyfidelity relationship is the fact that both dyadic and synchronous group dynamics play a role in the development of the relationship (Lano & Parry, 1995). Relational cultural theory is a social justice based framework incorporating aspects of feminist and multicultural counseling that highlights the importance of relationship attachment.

Relational cultural theory posits that individuals ideally will seek growth-fostering relationships as part of an individual's basic human needs fulfillment. RCT supports the idea that as the complexity of a relationship expands, so does the potential for that relationship to be more rich and fulfilling on deeper levels (Frey, 2013). This growth-fostering concept is evident in many other forms of nonmonogamies that focus on individualistic dyadic relationships with multiple partners (Mitchell, Bartholomew, & Cobb, 2014). A polyfidelity relationship, however, focuses on a collectivist approach to intimacy, often referred to as intentional love (Nearing, 1992, Pines, 1987, West, 1996).

Intentional love and other forms of nonmonogamies require a greater degree of balance and communication in order to successfully develop over time (Barker & Langdridge, 2010a; Finn, Tunariu, & Lee, 2012). There was very little discoverable research on this topic which is why this study has focused on developing a broad framework for better understanding the dynamics of a polyfidelity closed group relationship. This includes addressing the following guiding research questions: What does it mean to be polyfidelitous? What are the lived experiences of polyfidelitous individuals? What are the dynamics that challenge and support a group relationship? How

do individuals in these relationships successfully negotiate these challenges and capitalize on relationship strengths? (see Appendix B).

A qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological approach framed within queer theory and relational-cultural theory was most helpful for revealing core aspects of a polyfidelity relationship largely because the power of this type of qualitative research focuses a deep descriptive understanding of an individual's lived experience (Ahmed, 2006b; Hays & Wood, 2011; Lenz, 2014). A qualitative approach acknowledges that phenomena are culturally embedded within an entire social ecology of worldviews and biases.

Maxwell (2013) pointed out that qualitative research questions are often guiding or exploratory, where research hypotheses are often confirmatory in nature. Although both quantitative and qualitative approaches could be useful for exploratory and confirmatory methodology, a quantitative study is unable to draw rich descriptions of the subjective experiences of polyfidelitous relationships because dominant culture often systemically erases the validity of such relationships (Hays & Wood, 2011; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Patton, 2002; Warner, 2004).

The interpretive framework of a qualitative phenomenological inquiry was appropriate for better understanding the subjectivities and philosophies of those who engage in poly relationships (Patton, 2002). An interpretive researcher strives to better understand the fundamental nature of the lived experiences of those who are systemically erased, misunderstood, or face significant social stigma (Ahmed, 2006a; Hall, 2009; Palmer, Larkin, De Visser, & Fadden, 2010). A polyfidelity relationship is often

misunderstood in context to existing relationship paradigms (Langdridge, 2008).

Therefore, the critical psychology perspective emergent from a queer theory qualitative

analysis may serve to help counselors better understand the lived experiences of those in

nonmonogamous relationships (Downing & Gillett, 2011).

Previous research based on queer theory often benefits from phenomenological

methods because of the post-structuralist nature of inquiry focused on legitimizing the

lived experiences of others as a valid form of knowledge (Ahmed, 2006a; Ajjawi &

Higgs, 2007; Landridge, 2004; Lopez & Willis, 2004). Queer theorists search to make

meaning of the lived experiences of those outside of dominant culture and therefore often

find a phenomenological approach useful for gaining insight (Salamon, 2009; Warner,

2004).

A hermeneutic phenomenological approach to studying fringe identities is

becoming more popular due to the interpretive nature of valuing subjective experience

(Ahmed, 2006a; Hall, 2009; Langdridge, 2004). This approach is ideal for studying

polyfidelity relationships because it enables me to truly reveal the nature of what it means

to be in a polyfidelity relationship, what those lived experiences are like, and how

individuals overcome struggles by capitalizing on strengths in the relationship.

The benefits of this approach for studying polyfidelity include: (a) the ability to

unmask the meaning behind engaging in a polyfidelity group relationship; (b) describe

the lived experiences of poly relationships; (c) increased objectivity for understanding the

complexity of alternative relationships in general; (d) emergence of resilience strategies

that are helpful for preserving poly relationships; and (e) an emergent approach that will

aid in helping researchers understand the fundamental philosophy of a polyfidelity group relationship.

Role of the Researcher

I implemented a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach derived from a participatory action research (PAR) model (Lewin, 1948). This approach was selected in order to better understand the cultural sensitivity behind researching this population, apply concepts from the research into practice, and give back the results of the study to key stakeholders in the community (Johnson & Martinez-Guzman, 2013; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008; Wallerstein & Duran, 2010). This model was also recommended by the Community-Academic Consortium for Research on Alternative Sexualities (CARAS), which has used CBPR for studying consensual nonmonogamies (Sprott & Bienvenu, 2007).

Community-based research begins by eliciting feedback from the community being affected in order to determine what key issues might be impacting them the most and therefore what might be most helpful to investigate further (Johnson & Martinez-Guzman, 2013). CBPR involves determining which issues the community considers most important and therefore which issues might also be helpful for affecting social change (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). In order to determine key challenges, I needed to network with key stakeholders in the community and develop a trusting relationship with those stakeholders throughout the research process.

It is important to note that I have a personal family history that involves witnessing a polyfidelity relationship. However, my role in this study was strictly as a

nonpartial observer. I needed to be aware of potentially biasing the research due to limitations in categorization (how the individual identifies) and limitations in language (how identities are conceptualized). I also needed to be aware of how my own language might bias this research, such as language that defines gender within a binary construct, or language that might infer a specific categorization over another. My personal understanding or perspective on the topic of polyfidelity may actually be helpful when analyzing data, as I am familiar with many poly experiences and therefore may have been able to more easily derive themes from the findings.

Johnson and Martinez-Guzman (2013) suggested that subjects be allowed to categorize and describe themselves free from being labeled within a particular normative identity. I was also aware of the potential legal and social risks that subjects were taking when agreeing to participate in this study (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). As a result, significant procedural safeguards were taken in order to avoid exposing subjects to further stigma. This included meeting with subjects in confidential locations, securing data, and concealing identities to avoid loss of confidentiality. It also included making sure the community has access to the data upon completion of the study.

Methodology

I was unable to locate any data estimating the number of polyfidelity relationships in America. Loving More (lovemore.com) is the nation's oldest and largest nonprofit polyamory advocacy group focused on promoting the acceptance of relationship choice rather than compulsory monogamy. The organization is governed by a national board of directors and hosts annual conferences on the education, research, and exploration of a

variety of polyamorous relationships. Loving More estimated that there are

approximately 500,000 open polyamorous families in America. In 2012 researchers

(Fleckenstein, Bergstrand, & Cox, 2012) from Loving More and the National Coalition

for Sexual Freedom (NCSF) conducted the largest online polyamory survey to date ($n =$

4062). Their study found that the most common polyamory construct involves one

woman and two men.

Participant Eligibility Criteria

Enduring egalitarian-based Polyfidelity relationships constitute a small portion of

the overall polyamory population (Fleckenstein, Bergstrand, & Cox, 2012; Sartorius,

2004; Sheff, 2014). Participants were pre-screened in order to determine if they met the

criterion for inclusion. There is a lack of common language describing what it means to

be polyfidelitous (Bergstrand & Blevins Sinski, 2010; Pallotta-Chiarolli, Hayden, &

Hunter, 2013; Ritchie & Barker, 2006). Therefore potential subjects were assessed using

the following guidelines: (a) has the participant been involved, or is currently involved, in

a synchronous romantic or sexual relationship with three or more adults over the age of

18 (including the subject); (b) was or is the nature of the relationship a closed,

committed, long-term intended relationship between some or all partners; (c) was or is

the relationship free from exploitation, coercion, or other nonegalitarian influences.

Sample Size and Saturation Criteria

Due to the emergent nature of this study I recruited as many participants as was

needed to achieve saturation. Because there were no studies to reference, I incorporated a

Participatory Action Research (PAR) model (Kidd & Kral, 2005) to determine an

appropriate sample size. A PAR approach takes feedback from key stakeholders and community members in order to gauge what could be considered an effective sample size. While information from this study may not account for the full variety of variability found in polyfidelity-defined relationships, a qualitative sample size must be large enough for primary themes to emerge (Janesick, 2011; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Therefore I collected feedback from my dissertation committee, eight mental health professionals, five researchers, and seven community organizers that are familiar with the dynamics of polyfidelity. These individuals suggested an average sample size ranging between 10-20 participants. My committee and I have determined that saturation required a minimum of 10 participants.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Polyfidelity relationships are socially stigmatized and therefore often invisible to the general population. There are limitations surrounding accessing diverse socioeconomic, race/ethnicity, and age/generational acceptance. Therefore a transferable sample is hard to determine at this stage in research. Convenience, purposive, and criterion-based sampling was used, with purposive selection focused on finding the best subjects available. While convenience and snowball sampling procedures are considered some of the weaker sampling methodologies in a qualitative study, it is not uncommon for these approaches to be used when studying stigmatized, vulnerable, or hidden groups such as poly relationships (Amato, 2012; Barker & Langdridge, 2010b; Eliason, DeJoseph, Dibble, & Chinn, 2012; Finn, Tunariu, & Lee, 2012; Fleckenstein, Bergstrand,

& Cox, 2012; Goldfeder & Sheff, 2013; Mitchell, Bartholomew, & Cobb, 2014; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2014).

In order to recruit participants, it was important to build strong connections with communities who publicly or semipublicly acknowledge their polyfidelity relationship status. This included attending polyamory support groups such as Loving More (lovemore.com), participating in on-line polyamory discussion boards (such as various state polyamory groups: Denver Metro Polyamory Group, AZPolyPurpose, North Bay Poly, PolyBUILD, SoCalPoly, Squawk, Orlando Poly, KanPoly, Poly-Boston, MNPoly, Utah Polyamory Society), observing and corresponding with individuals who are on polyfidelity on-line dating sites (FetLife.com, meet-up.com, alt.com), and interviewing those who have friends or family members that are in a polyfidelity relationship (snowball sampling).

The procedures for recruiting participants involved: (a) identifying candidates through the methods described above; (b) contacting these participants via email, discussion board, in-person, mail, or telephone (see appendix A); (c) recruiting these participants via peer, key-stakeholder, community organizers, university educators, and mental health professional outreach (see appendix A). Outreach involved a brief description of the purpose and nature of the study, relationship development via in-person, email, on-line introductions and meetings, and electronic mass email or discussion board solicitations (see appendix A). Due to limited funding a majority of the interviews took place via distance-based methods such as video-conferencing, telephone,

email, and other electronic forms of communication (Amato, 2012; Barker & Langdridge, 2010b; Finn, Tunariu, & Lee, 2012; Sheff, 2014).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is focused on understanding the lived experiences of the subject being studied. Therefore I used open-ended interview protocols that allowed the individual to fully express his or her experiences, which is considered an effective data collection methodology (Ahmed, 2006a; Hall, 2009; Langdridge, 2004; Salamon, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2003; Warner, 2004). The data collection methodology for this study included gathering multiple sources of data, primarily in-the-field data collection conducted through extensive interviewing.

Individual mental health professionals, community organizers, and university educators were approached to assist in recruiting potential research participants. University educators and mental health professionals were helpful for addressing clinical needs faced by counselors. Community organizers such as leadership within LGBT Community Centers, National Coalition for Sexual Freedom, and Consortium for Academic Research on Alternative Sexualities have the best access and understanding of those engaged in alternative nonmonogamies. In order to be included in this study, the participant must have met the criteria of having participated in a polyfidelity (egalitarian group) relationship at some point in his or her life.

Information gathered from all participants included: time, place, and date of field information gathered. Voluntary demographic information collected included: the number of group relationships participant has been a part of, including the number of members; age; race; gender identity; sexual orientation; and highest level of education

completed (see appendix E). This information could help counselor's better identify

cultural factors that may or may not play a role in the dynamics of a group relationship.

This information was collected separately and not associated with the identity of the

participant in order to avoid researcher bias. This information was only disclosed in the

results of the study to help understand the demographics of the participants.

Data collection came primarily from transcriptions of interviews and observations

within the interview, which were helpful in deriving the rich information needed to best

support the guiding research questions (Hays & Wood, 2011; Janesick, 2011). Multiple

sources of data were collected, primarily in-the-field data collection conducted through

extensive in-person interviewing, observation during interviews, participant

questionnaire, follow-up phone interviews, video-conferencing, and audio recording. I

encouraged participants to share the contextual significance of artifacts such as love

letters, emails, home videos, commitment vows, philosophical statements, relationship

agreements, diaries, and photographs when responding to interview questions. Only their

description or interpretation of such artifacts was used as part of my data collection.

The interview protocol was researcher produced following the formatting used in

similar hermeneutic phenomenological studies. This included using questions that allow

the subjective experiences of the participants to emerge without interference from the

researcher (Langdridge, 2004; Salamon, 2009; Warner, 2004). Content validity was

established by determining whether or not the interview question was able to engage

participants in authentically describing their lived experiences. Smith and Osborn (2003)

suggested open-ended questions that avoid framing or interpreting an experience are

more helpful in hermeneutic studies than rigid pre-determined questioning that might limit the richness of a participant's response. Since the methodology in this study was explorative in nature this approach adequately addressed the goals set forth in the guiding research questions.

Interview Procedures. I conducted all of the interviews using the interview protocols (see appendix B) via face-to-face and/or distance-based electronic methods such as video-conferencing, email, or telephone. Each interview was conducted individually in order to understand the individual's unique experiences. This approach has been useful in other small sample studies because it helps derive the richest possible data (Barker & Landridge, 2010a; Goldfeder & Sheff, 2013; Mitchell, Bartholomew, & Cobb, 2014). Because subsequent interviews may be influenced by the interpretation of the original interview, it was my goal to focus on a comprehensive initial interview leaving open the potential for follow-up interviews as needed (Palmer et al., 2010). Upon deriving core themes, I shared those themes with each participant, allowing them the opportunity to share any follow-up information based on some of the themes revealed in preceding interviews.

Two telephone interviews or electronic interviews (via teleconference or videoconference) were conducted at a location selected by the participant and negotiated by the researcher in order to ensure a safe and comfortable environment for each participant. A third interview was included in the informed consent and if necessary, would have been limited to one-hour. Electronic interviews, by nature, provide the safety of a physical barrier, which may have the effect of inhibiting or opening up greater

exploration depending on the personality of the subject (Fleckenstein, Bergstrand, & Cox, 2012). Both primary interviews were limited to two hours or less in order to reduce fatigue and over-burdening the participant (Diamond & Huebner, 2012). The third interview would have been limited to one-hour. All interviews were audio recorded via a secured laptop computer unless the subject was unwilling to give consent, at which time I attempted to capture as many verbatim statements as possible in my written notes (Sheff, 2014).

Armour, Riveaux, and Bell (2009) found that research conducted on stigmatized populations might require additional rapport building prior to initiating an interview protocol. This is largely due to the fear of being stigmatized by the researcher when revealing sensitive information. As a result, the participant may lean towards giving more socially acceptable responses to the interview questions. Best practices in collecting data from stigmatized populations suggested being cognizant of not over-identifying or proscribing identities onto participants (Kleinplatz & Diamond, 2014; Tolman & Diamond, 2014). Therefore I was mindful of incorporating humanistic skills such as unconditional positive regard, person-centered authenticity, and other affirming behaviors with all research participants. This included giving the participant significant information about the purpose of the study and allowing them to ask meaningful questions prior to the start (see Appendix C) (Trau, Hartel, & Hartel, 2013).

Phenomenological interview questions require a careful balance between open-ended possibilities and enough contextual structure to spur thought-provoking and rich responses (Smith & Osborn, 2003). These questions need to invite an authentic dialogue

without over-framing the context of the participant's responses. After the initial opening

question, subsequent questioning was less structured and focused more on the exploration

or emergence of core or salient themes (Sheff, 2014; Warren, Harvey, & Agnew, 2012).

This required the implementation of counselor attending skills, such as probing,

clarification, and reflection, with as little interruption or disruption as possible (Armour,

Riveaux, & Bell, 2009; Langdridge, 2004; Palmer et al., 2010).

Follow-up questions were conceptualized in vivo with the goal of spurring deeper

and richer descriptions of the participants' lived experiences. For example, if I identified

a salient theme from one interview and not the other, I asked follow-up questions aimed

at deriving information specific to a theme that was not addressed in the first two

interviews but that has emerged from other participants (Wallerstein & Duran, 2010).

Follow-up questions or probes were geared towards avoiding a preconceived

interpretation and instead I remained neutral enough to elicit deeper more subjective

responses. Examples of neutral follow-up questions included: (a) "How was that

significant?"; (b) "What was that like?"; (c) "Tell me more about that experience?"; (d)

"How did you negotiate that challenge?"; (e) "What did you find helpful in that

situation?"; and (f) "What influenced that decision?" This approach is similar to a

narrative structure, allowing the participant to engage in a natural dialogue framed from

his or her own words (Frost, 2013).

My goal was to help the participant describe his or her lived experiences without

over interpreting or intellectualizing the meaning behind those experiences (Smith &

Osborn, 2003). This included having to redirect participants if they began to over-analyze

their experience by focusing on answering a specific question in a rigid manner or one that is geared at best addressing the question and not fully describing the experience (Kleinplatz & Diamond, 2014).

Interview Termination and Follow-Up. Each interview was concluded with an opportunity for the participant to share any other comments or observations that were not covered during the interview. The participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about the study. During each interview, I informed them of the process for the interview and used reflective skills, reflecting back what they stated, allowing them to provide feedback in order to determine accuracy of their statements. I notified them that a third follow-up interview might have been needed in order to attempt to draw additional information from salient themes that may have emerged from the first two interviews or other interviewees.

I also gave the participant a time frame for when they could expect to hear from me regarding whether or not researchers needed to conduct a third follow-up interview. Upon completion of the participant's involvement, an exit protocol was administered to debrief the participant and alleviate any concerns or anxiety regarding the use of the material and confidentiality (see appendix F). The participant was given my contact information and invited to ask questions if any should arise. I also gave the participant information about the time frame in which I might be able to share the results of the study.

Data Analysis Plan

The goal of hermeneutic phenomenology is not based on rigid methodology (Landridge, 2004; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). Instead it is focused on effective processes that attempt to most accurately gather an account of participants' lived experiences as possible (Finlay, 2012; Lopez & Willis, 2004). There are a significant number of hermeneutic studies that focus on capturing the spirit of open-interpretation based on the subjective raw experiences of the participant versus a predetermined set of expectations (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). For example, Larkin, Watts, and Clifton (2006) posited that a Heideggerian approach to phenomenology is a more open-interpretive process for qualitative research.

In order to collect open-ended data free from researcher influence or bias all field interviews were recorded and then transcribed. I cross-reviewed the transcription with notes taken during the interview. Transcriptions were hand-coded in order to map themes and identify subthemes within the data. Connecting themes helped create a three-dimensional understanding of the experiences of individuals in polyfidelity relationships. For example, because of the difference in language I may not have been aware of a salient theme in one relationship that was also significant in another but that was not highlighted or expounded upon. This approach allowed me to check-in for further clarification from participants based on what I learned in subsequent interviews, giving them the opportunity to share any additional information.

Three primary methods of coding and interpretation, described by Miles et al. (2014) were used: (a) descriptive coding, which is oftentimes a summarization of the

theme; (b) in vivo coding, which is using the participants' actual words to create catch phrases; and (c) process coding, which captures the movement or action of an event. First cycle deductive coding was initiated via a start-list of codes and then modified in-vivo in order for inductive coding to emerge. Second cycle coding occurred after each in-depth interview. This helped reveal deeper understanding in the material, which in turn directed the next field experience.

A descriptive coding analysis compared and contrasted themes that emerged as shared experiences or meanings between the participants. This approach contextualized the relationship between each theme and the lived experiences. In vivo coding helped highlight the most salient and rich themes as they emerge directly from the narration. It focused on clarifying the meaning of each theme and identifying the patterns that result from those themes. I also audited this process via the guidance of key stakeholders and my dissertation committee in order to determine the accuracy and effectiveness of the approach (Hays & Wood, 2011; Wallerstein & Duran, 2010). I triangulated the data collected with a variety of sources, as well as experts in the field (Miles et al., 2014).

Finally, process-coding analysis was used to reveal movement of language into common themes that could then emerge as paradigm patterns. Each aspect of this interpretation focused on connecting direct text to interpretations and then providing supporting evidence of the interpretation (Miles et al., 2014). All three processes required an emersion in the data, becoming an expert in the process and building a deeper familiarity of the data (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Wood, 2011; Maxwell, 2013). Because analysis is an ongoing process in hermeneutic phenomenology, it was also important to

continually familiarize myself with relevant research and salient themes from previous studies (Janesick, 2011).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Threats of internal credibility include researcher bias, dwindling of participant motivation (throughout the stages), descriptive validity, and participant reactivity (limitations of what is shared due to researcher involvement), which is why I used the participants' specific wording to derive themes. External credibility or transferability could result from inappropriately defining variables or making false assumptions from the data. Because the researcher was the primary data collection instrument it was important to reveal my internal bias, values, and personal worldview.

Procedures for data recording, transcribing, and coding were consistent, making sure transcripts are accurate, and crosschecking codes between various interviews to assure coding accuracy. Triangulating interview data with other sources determined theme convergence and made sure that coded data was described in thick, rich detail (Janesick, 2011; Miles et al., 2014). Contradictions or discrepancies were cross-checked with the raw transcript, triangulated data, and ultimately the participant when necessary (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Wood, 2011).

Dependability

An initial interpretation of the data was made after coding each transcript. This narrative process involved highlighting specific wording within the transcript document and then creating a coding table of interpreted themes. Hermeneutic research often

involves an auditing process by external members (Laverty, 2003). Triangulating data by hand-coding from a variety of sources, including interviews, follow-up conversations, and correspondence, helped pull out additional themes and verify previously found themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Themes were then categorized and overlapped within the guiding research questions.

Each transcript was then cross-analyzed with the other transcripts in order to derive common themes among the participants. The goal was to find shared experiences or common themes starting with narrow themes and eventually breaking those down into larger and broader themes (Hays & Wood, 2011; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Each theme included rich descriptions of content and included supported excerpts from the transcripts. I followed-up with participants by sharing the themes that I revealed and allowed them to share additional information from those topics or ask additional questions from information I found in other interviews until the participant stated they had no more to share.

There was no further observations conducted other than the interviews. My analysis of the interview data included critical self-reflection and disclosure about any potential bias that could influence my objectivity. It also included information that did not support the researcher's primary goals, such as disclosing complications with the data collection process or revealing aspects of the study that may diminish authenticity (Laverty, 2003; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002).

Confirmability

Five key components were considered when verifying data. The first is objectivity and confirmability. This involved making sure the logic and procedures associated with the questions are understandable. This also involved consulting with experts in the field in order to conduct an audit of my findings. I compared my questions to examples of similar types of questioning in other studies. Internal credibility involved assessing the information for clues as to whether or not the data was being interpreted correctly. This was also accomplished via expert audit and participant audit. I also triangulated the data through the collection of various types of information from field interviews, questionnaires, and correspondence (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

Careful protocols were implemented so that the data was gathered in a uniform and precise manner. This included developing an interview procedural checklist. I also used a comparison strategy to compare the types of responses between the participants in addition to in vivo validation to assess for immediate challenges in language and framing (Trau, Hartel, & Hartel, 2013). For example, one participant might have framed experiences independent of gender or sexual orientation while the other might have framed that experience within existing paradigmatic parameters. This could be confusing when it comes to data collection and therefore as terminology from one participant emerges that terminology was explored with other participants. A validity checklist included: searching for discrepant evidence, triangulation, and respondent validation (Janesick, 2011; Maxwell, 2013).

Ethical Procedures

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board, IRB approval # 06-15-16-0245438 (Exp: June 14, 2017). Confidentiality was extremely important since there are significant social and legal stigmas associated with nonbinary relationships (Sheff, 2014). This included the risk of legal prosecution due to antibigamy laws; the risk of expensive child welfare litigation as the result of unfounded claims, and the risk of employment, familial, or friendship rejection due to historic prejudice and mythologies (Pallotta-Chiarolli, Haydon, & Hunter, 2013; Sartorius, 2004; Schilling, 2012; Sweet, 2013; Whitehurst, 2011). Therefore each participant was given a pseudonym prior to engaging in the study. Participant transcripts was scrubbed of any potentially identifying information such as names of schools, family members, employers, geographical locations, public institutions or establishments.

The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) standard G.1.e. stated, "Counselors who conduct research are responsible for their participant's welfare throughout the research process and should take reasonable precautions to avoid causing emotional, physical, or social harm to participants" (p. 16). The Code continues to list specific components that must be included when giving informed consent. These include: explaining the purpose and procedures of the study, describing risks and experimental activities, describing benefits and alternatives for participants, describing the risks and limitations of confidentiality, and informing participants that they are free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Risk to Human Subjects. This study was conducted under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board at Walden University. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of participation (including the ability to withdraw at anytime), the process of the interview, how privacy was maintained, the criteria for being included in the study, the participants accessibility to the data, the use of the information obtained including an assessment of potential benefits to the participant, potential conflicts of interest, contact and supervisor contact information, and the risks of participating in the study, via both a verbal and written informed consent, either printed or electronic.

A challenge with using electronic data collection includes power differentials, privacy, and limitations regarding confidentiality (Kraut et al., 2002). Therefore participants who are engaging in electronic forms of data collection were also informed of these challenges and limitations, as well as ways in which to safeguard their privacy. I explained potential scenarios, using easy to understand language, where data could be compromised and how the participant could avoid or manage such problems. Finally, time was given at the end of the informed consent process to address participant questions.

Reducing Risk and Treatment of Data. The procedures for protecting against potential risks were as follows: (a) the document containing the true identities of participants and their respective unique pseudonyms, and (b) all transcripts, recordings, email-communications, research notes, and other documents, was stored in an electronic password encrypted document on a password protected computer, which was always stored in a locked room or storage cabinet. This triple-protection methods: protected

document, protected computer, and protected room were very effective against the potential risk of theft.

This approach ensured each participant's data was kept confidential throughout the collection, interpretation, and analysis process. This did not guarantee confidentiality, however, due to the fact that the data may contain identifiable information, which was why the data was scrubbed at the time of transcription. Careful safeguards were in place to protect the security of all data. Data was stored in password-protected formats, on a password-protected computer in a locked room, and a backup copy was stored in a cloud-based secure socket server until the study is completed, after which all data will be permanently removed from the cloud.

Ethical Discrepancies Due to Recruitment Processes. Recruitment occurred in a noncoercive manner through direct solicitation in on-line forums, in-person at poly events, via word-of-mouth, via mental health professionals and educators, via colleagues and peers. The materials used to solicit participation included: (a) telephone calls and (c) electronic appeal (blast email). Both described the study's process, qualifications, procedures, purpose, and application of results. Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to engagement both verbally and in written form. I did not assess any under age minors for this study.

The nature of the information provided in the informed consent included a review of the purpose of the study, a review of the expectations of the participant, a review of the risks of the study, a review of the benefits of the study and a brief description of how the information gathered was used. It also included a description of the unique identifier

procedures and an attestation statement acknowledging an understanding of the material in the informed consent.

The consent was obtained via the following methods: (a) if face-to-face, informed consent was read from a script and then discussed with the subject. The participant was required to verify understanding by signing the informed consent document; (b) if via electronic means, the participant was read the same script as stated before. The participant then received an email with the informed consent items and was asked to reply to the email by stating "I consent," which was documented as proof of consent.

Ethical Discrepancies Due to Data Collection. Participants were given access to the completed project in order to benefit from the findings. In the event of a subject becoming emotionally distraught by the survey or assessment, I have included a mental health crisis hotline that the participant can access 24-hours a day. This hotline is able to provide referrals for additional mental health services if needed. I anticipate that the likelihood of the participants encountering such stress after the study would be very slim.

As part of the interview protocol I differentiated between the role of researcher and role of therapist. Because participants were disclosing information that could bring up memories of painful experiences I always checked-in and debriefed participants at the end of each interview session. If necessary, I was ready to also refer participants to appropriate mental health services. Participants who refused to participate or withdrew from the study were noted in the final analysis. If unanticipated problems would have arose, such as the revelation of criminal activity (i.e. child abuse), supervision would have been sought from dissertation committee members, chair, and my clinical licensure

supervisors. The risk to subjects was negligible compared to the potential benefits of better understanding polyfidelitous relationships.

An ongoing self-auditing process reduced the risk of ethical discrepancies or conflicts of interest. Research was not completed at my place of employment, nor were any of my active clients asked to participate. This was in order to avoid dual-relationships. Incentives were not offered as part of this study, nor were reimbursements for participant expenses. The nature of collecting data suggested that participants would have most likely incurred negligible expense in participating.

Summary

The methodology selected for this study was key to understanding the lived experiences of those who are often marginalized or systemically erased. An interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology framed within relational-cultural theory and queer theory focused more on quantifying research procedure than it did on traditional methodological concerns such as instrumentation, sample size, and transferability (Downing & Gillett, 2011; Frey, 2013; Smith & Osborn, 2003). For example, the interviewing process focused more on exploration and less on framing structured thoughts (Ahmed, 2006a; Langdridge, 2004; Palmer et al., 2010; Salamon, 2009). The researcher initially focused on building rapport through humanistic techniques in order to offset safety concerns that were common among stigmatized populations (Armour, Riveaux, & Bell, 2009).

The barriers of entry to this population were significant due to social stigma (Pallotta-Chiarolli, Haydon, & Hunter, 2013; Sartorius, 2004; Schilling, 2012; Sheff, 2014; Sweet, 2013; Whitehurst, 2011). Therefore, the researcher developed relationships

with key stakeholders and gatekeepers. This involved spending time immersed in the community and participating in on-line discussion boards. The emergent nature of this study made sampling procedures less defined (Palmer et al., 2010). My committee and I approximated a sample size ranging between 10-20 participants in order to reach saturation. Principles from Community-Based Research approaches were used in an attempt to honor past prejudice experienced by this community, this included developing accountability with key stakeholders, and giving back to the community the information gained from this study (Astramovich & Coker, 2007; Kidd & Kral, 2005; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008; Wallerstein & Duran, 2010; Wallerstein & Duran, 2006).

Finally, the methodology chosen for this study was intended to foster the development of a better language for describing and communicating the lived experiences of poly relationships. It will help counselors and counselor educators better understand the challenges faced by such individuals in these relationships. It will contribute to an enhanced understanding of the legitimacy of a poly relationship. Ultimately, it will help counselors and counselor educators better meet the needs of individuals in a polyfidelity or polyamory relationship who present for clinical mental health counseling.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to seek a deeper understanding of the lived

experiences of those who are engaged or have engaged in a group romantic relationship.

This included identifying internal and external factors that both challenge and contribute

to the success of the relationship. The ultimate goal was to help counselor educators and

counselors better serve the needs of individuals in alternative relationships. The study

was based on two guiding questions : (a) What does it mean to be polyfidelitous?   (b)

What are the lived experiences of polyfidelitous individuals? There were four

subquestions: What are the dynamics that challenge a group relationship? What are the

dynamics that support a group relationship? How do individuals in these relationships

successfully negotiate these challenges? How do individuals in these relationships

capitalize on relationship strengths? In this chapter I will:

- Review the information specific to my data collection process, including the number of participants and challenges that arose during data collection;

- discuss participant demographics and characteristics that facilitate a better understanding of the dynamics of each of their relationships;

- describe my data analysis process that included how i distilled salient themes and core categories;

- share specific quotes from my interviews that supported the significance of those themes;

- review issues surrounding the trustworthiness of the data, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability;

- summarize the study's results in relation to the research questions.

Data Collection

I made a direct appeal to individuals in the poly community for participants who were currently or had previously participated in a polyfidelitous ("polyfi") relationship. I used the following criteria to identify a polyfi relationship: the relationship was synchronous and consisted of three or more consenting adults; the relationship was not exploitative in nature, and all members were somehow intimately involved with one another, whether it be romantic or polyaffective (not sexual in nature, but beyond friendship). The networking abilities of these individuals garnered a surprising response to my appeal, as I very quickly had over 20 inquiries from candidates throughout North America, 14 of which met criteria.

During the sample selection process, I revealed a personal bias that I had coming into this study. While I included polyaffective relationships as qualifying criteria, I originally believed it was important that all participants in the relationship were sexually involved with one another. However, the majority of my sample included at least one polyaffective component within the relationship. Through the interviews, I soon learned that polyaffective relationships are as invested and intimate as romantic relationships. I also learned that polyaffective relationships, while often rooted in friendship, also extend beyond friendship and included themes common with kinship and family.

I interviewed 14 participants before reaching saturation—when responses to interview questions became redundant or no new information was revealed. Of the 14 participants, one asked to have his interview completely removed from the study after his

relationship suddenly ended. Almost all of the information gathered from the removed interview was revealed throughout the other cases.

I conducted two interviews on two separate occasions, totaling approximately two hours of data collection per participant. All interviews were conducted via telephone, audio recorded, and then transcribed. While I did not diverge from my originally described data collection process in Chapter 3, I did have to re-ask a few of my questions using clarifying probes, as some respondents asked for clarification on how to interpret the interview question. Since my interview questions were open ended there were several specific questions that came up during each of the initial interview sessions. I used an in-vivo cascading process in which I added each of those additional questions to the remaining interviews and then added those questions to pertinent second interviews so that previous participants also had the opportunity to answer subsequent questions.

All fourteen participants were in separate relationships from other participants except in two cases, in which I interviewed two participants from the same current relationship. Those cases are identified below in the participant profiles. However, the information gathered during data collection spans across more than twelve independent polyfi relationships. This was because some participants drew experiences from more than one previous polyfi relationship.

Below are the profiles of each of the 13 participants in the order in which they were interviewed. I included information about the size of the group, relationship structure, and geographical location. Participants had the option to voluntarily provide additional information about themselves such as age, race, gender, education, and sexual

orientation. I have also included that information where applicable. Because of the sensitive nature of what is considered a socially stigmatized relationship, the real names of each of the participants are replaced with pseudonyms. Names of romantic partners, family members, geographical locations, affiliated groups, job titles, and some situational information has also been concealed or omitted in order to maintain participant confidentiality.

Demographics

Mary. Mary is a Caucasian 63-year-old biological female who identifies as female and considers her sexual orientation to be bisexual. She has a bachelor's degree, as well as graduate level trade education. She is currently in a 39-year relationship with two other individuals, a Caucasian female and an African American male. They have three adult children that were born after entering the group relationship. Mary has one biological child and two children from her female partner. They currently live in the South Atlantic Southern region of the United States.

The group met through work and she became a part of an existing dyadic relationship between her two other partners who were legally married when they met. The male partner identifies as heterosexual and the female partners both identify as bisexual or sexually fluid. The original dyad began as monogamous, the male partner desired polyamory and had an affair, then became polygamist, and then became a polyfidelitous triad relationship that later became primarily polyaffective between the two female partners. Social discrimination due to multiple-race relationship was more

significant than the relationship structure. This participant has a trauma history. I also interviewed her female partner who is listed below under the pseudonym Kim.

Karen. Karen is a 34-year-old biological female who identifies as female and considers her sexual orientation to be pansexual. She identifies ethnically as a combination of Pacific Islander, Asian, and Caucasian. She has a master's degree and lives in the West South Central Southern region of the United States. She recently returned to her original dyad with her legally married husband and has one adolescent child that was born while in the original dyad. Prior to returning to the dyad relationship with her husband, she and her husband were in a 4-year relationship with a gender queer and gender fluid female, who identifies as pansexual.

The original dyad began as long-distance polyamory, became monogamous, then became open to threesomes, then became a polyamorous V, then became mutually polyamorous, and then transitioned into a polyfidelitous relationship, and are now again a dyad seeking a third. When in a polyfi relationship the group met at a party and her female partner became a part of Karen's existing dyad. That partner identified as female when they met, but then transitioned to male and then gender neutral during the relationship.

Eleanor. Eleanor is a Caucasian 31-year-old biological female who identifies as female and considers her sexual orientation to be bisexual or pansexual, and has a master's degree. She lives in the West North Central Midwest region of the United States. She is currently in a dyad with her original male partner but used to be in an approximately 1-year relationship with two other individuals, a Caucasian male and

female. She first identified as solo-poly or open polyamorous, then engaged in a monogamous dyad that evolved into an open relationship, and then transitioned into a polyfidelitous relationship.

Eleanor met her female partner through online social media, who then became a part of her existing dyad. The group relationship was considered fidelitous, but not polyexclusive, as the female partner was in an open relationship with another male. Eleanor also considered herself to be more of an open nonhierarchal polyamorous. The group also had the option of becoming nonexclusive if the desire was communicated and agreed upon at a later date.

Michele. Michele is a Caucasian 35-year-old biological female who identifies as female and considers her sexual orientation to be pansexual, and has a master's degree. She lives in the Mountain West region of the United States. She is currently in a dyad with her original male partner, but identifies as polyfidelitous because that has always been the dyad's primary goal.

Together she and her male partner have four young children. She has been in several polyfidelitous triads in the past and is currently in a dyad that is seeking a relationship consisting between 3-5 partners. Her focus is specifically on *family-focused polyfidelit*y and stated that she is not as interested in monogamy or polyamory. She has met previous partners primarily through specific social groups, but also through a variety of ways, including both in-person and online.

Susan. Susan is a biological female who identifies as female and considers her sexual orientation to be bisexual. She lives in the Mountain West region of the United

States, but did not disclose any other demographics. She is new to polyamory and has what she names as a history of being "a serial cheater" in her previous dyads. She then became legally married to her male partner, with whom she is currently in an open polyamorous relationship.

She then accidentally discovered that a polyfidelitous relationship felt the most comfortable as her other-than-primary relationship. She is currently in a new triad for approximately six months with an existing male and female dyad. She met her partners at a party. Susan is fidelitous but not exclusive and her partners are both polyfidelitous and polyexclusive.

Tim. Tim is a Caucasian 41-year-old biological male who identifies as male and considers his sexual orientation to be heterosexual, bisexual, or other, and has a doctoral degree. He lives in the East South Central Southern region of the United States. He is currently in an 8-year relationship with two other individuals, a Caucasian female and male. He was originally in a dyad with his female partner, with whom he is also legally married, and together they had one child prior to the group relationship. He first identified as exclusively heterosexual, but described currently being solely in a bisexual relationship with his male partner and a polyaffective relationship with his female wife.

The male and female partners identify as heterosexual and the group now has additional young children who are fathered by the other male partner. Tim's original dyad began as monogamous and both expressed that open polyamory was not really a desire. However, the female partner was previously exposed to and desired polyfidelity, which

began as a second monogamous relationship with the other male partner and then grew into its current scenario.

Blake. Blake is a Caucasian 37-year-old biological male who identifies as male and considers his sexual orientation to be heterosexual, and has a general equivalency diploma. He lives in the West North Central Midwest region of the United States. He is currently in a dyad, but identifies as polyfidelitous. He originally behaved as a relationship anarchist, then entered a dyadic relationship with a female and became legally married.

The two of them were monogamous for several years until his wife, who identifies as bisexual, asked specifically for a polyfidelitous relationship in order to fully express her bisexuality and remain connected to Blake. Since then they have had two polyfidelitous relationships, each lasting approximately one year. The group met online, in-person, and at events primarily through the dating efforts of Blake, where he vetted potential female partners who were sexually fluid or bisexual.

Laurie. Laurie is a Caucasian middle-aged biological female who identifies as female and considers her sexual orientation to be pansexual. She lives in the Pacific Northwest region of North America. She did not provide additional information. She is currently in a dyadic open polyamorous relationship with a male primary partner, but described that she is seeking either a polyamorous V or to become a part of a polyfidelitous triad. Laurie was previously in what she described as a "dysfunctional triad" with an existing female and male dyad, which was her first and only polyfi experience.

The relationship lasted less than one year and was hierarchal, as well as unequal in nature. It was challenging due to conflict within the original dyad about what type of polyamory they wanted. She met the dyad at a special interest social event where the male partner was seeking an egalitarian relationship and the female partner wanted a hierarchal relationship, or what some describe as a *pet* or *flavor of the month*. While they described their relationship as polyfidelitous in nature, the female partners were primarily polyaffective. Laurie also described herself as someone who has "special needs" in a relationship due to attachment problems resulting from an extensive trauma history.

Felicia. Felicia is a Caucasian 45-year-old biological female who identifies as female and considers her sexual orientation to be heterosexual, and has a doctoral degree. She lives in the New England Northeast region of the United States. She is currently in what she describes as a 6-year long poyfidelitous alternative family. She is romantically involved with two Caucasian males who are not romantically involved with one another (often called a V), but described that the nature of their relationship extends beyond what she would consider a polyamorous V, in that the relationship between the men is more like a family bond.

She was previously in a dyadic relationship with a male partner whom she legally married. Their relationship was monogamous and eventually polyamorous, although she reported her polyamorous experience was unfulfilling and a mistake. The dyad met their third partner at a special interest social group, but they struggle with maintaining a strong support system due to social prejudice and lack of exposure to other alternative polyfi families.

Kim. Kim is a Caucasian 65-year-old biological female who identifies as female and considers her sexual orientation to be primarily heterosexual, but at times sexually fluid. She has a doctoral degree and lives in the South Atlantic Southern region of the United States. She is currently in a 39-year relationship with two other individuals, a Caucasian female who identifies as bisexual and an African American Male who identifies as heterosexual. They have three adult children that were born after entering the group relationship. She has two biological children and one child from her female partner. Until last year she was considered the primary financial provider for the relationship.

She was originally in a dyad with her male partner whom she legally married. They both worked at the same location as their third partner, whom her male partner had an affair. For a short period of time they were polygamist and then became a polyfidelitous triad relationship that most recently has become primarily polyaffective between the two female partners. She, as well as her female partner, highlighted the fact that more social discrimination came from racism and antimiscegenation than the fact they were in a three-person marriage. Kim is a person with disability as the result of injuries from an auto-accident. I also interviewed her female partner who is listed under the pseudonym Mary.

Melissa. Melissa is a Caucasian 29-year-old biological female who identifies as female and considers her sexual orientation to be pansexual. She has a bachelor's degree, and lives in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. She is currently in a multiyear five-person relationship with two female partners and two male partners. The

two male partners identify as heterosexual and the two female partners identify as

bisexual. She noted that her connection to her female partners is primarily polyaffective

at this point.

She was originally a part of an open polyamorous dyad with one of her male

partners, which then became a polyfidelitous triad with the male partner and one of her

female partners. More recently the triad extended their group to include an additional

existing dyad, which are long-term friends who were also seeking a polyfi relationship.

Melissa described that all of her partners originally started out as friends with one another

and the relationship slowly transitioned towards a family of choice. The Polyquint has

purchased a home together and are planning on having children at some point in their

relationship. Three of five partners in her relationship have a trauma history. I also

interviewed her female partner who is listed under the pseudonym Patricia.

Aaron. Aaron is a Caucasian 32-year-old biological female who identifies as

gender queer (or gender fuck), orienting more closely with being male, and considers

their sexual orientation to be pansexual. Aaron identified as Female-to-Male transgender

and the pronoun "they" is used to denote Aaron as gender unspecified. They have

completed some college, as well as trade school education. They live in the South

Mountain West region of the United States and are currently in a relationship with a

Female-to-Male African American transman who identifies as heterosexual and an Asian

American female who identifies as bisexual.

Aaron described the challenges that they have had in dealing with discrimination

due to being in a mixed-race relationship as well as identifying outside of the gender

binary norm. Like racism, gender normativity was also more provocative than their polyfi relationship structure. They define their relationship as an open polyfidelitous relationship, although their relationship behavior to date has been polyexclusive. Aaron was originally in a dyadic relationship with their female partner and later met their third partner through work, which started as a friendship. All three partners in this relationship have significant trauma history and Aaron is currently temporarily on medical leave due to a recent work-related injury.

Patricia. Patricia is a Caucasian 30-year-old biological female who identifies as female and considers her sexual orientation to be bisexual. She has a master's degree, and lives in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. She is currently in a multiyear five-person relationship with two female partners and two male partners. The two male partners identify as heterosexual, one female partner identifies as bisexual, and the other as pansexual.

She first started dating one of her male partners who was in an existing open polyamorous dyad. She described that she eventually "went out on a limb" and decided to try a three-person polyfidelitous relationship with both her male partner and his female dyadic partner. While the connection between the female partners was primarily polyaffective, she described their connection beyond that of an open polyamorous V. More recently the triad expanded to include an existing dyad comprised of a male and female, who were also part of Patricia's social network. Three of five people in her relationship have significant trauma history, including Patricia. I also interviewed her female partner who is listed under the pseudonym Melissa.

Data Collection

There were no variations in data collection from the plan presented in Chapter 3. A first round of interviews was conducted with 14 participants during the months of June and July 2016. Each interview was conducted via telephone and an audio recording was created. The first round of interviews averaged between 1 ½ to 2 hours. Data was recorded via audio recording, as well as researcher notes taken during the interview. The second round of interviews was conducted 13 participants during the months of July and August 2016. One participant from the first round asked to be removed from the study and to have all information, including the first interview, removed from the study. The second round of interviews averaged between 45 minutes to 1 hour. Data was again recorded via audio recording, as well as researcher notes.

Data Analysis

Three-cycle coding process. During the data collection process I conducted all of the interviews and transcribed all of the audio recorded sessions. This helped me become more familiar with the data and themes that emerged. The first cycle of coding occurred after transcribing each interview and involved descriptive coding of specific themes. During this time, I also took notes alongside the transcription in attempt to identify bias or interpret meaning.

A second method of coding included capturing in vivo phrases. This process involved collecting specific phrases from participant's actual words to support the description. I also highlighted sections of text that may be helpful for later review when conducting process coding. The in vivo phrases are included below in an attempt to

support my interpretation of specific themes. Triangulating the data with previous research, including my literature review, also helped validate the significance or accuracy of each theme.

A third method of coding included process coding. This occurred after the interviews were completed and focused on revealing movement in the language. Such movement also assisted in better understanding the depth and significance of a specific descriptive theme. Hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis is an ongoing and immersive process throughout the entire data collection process. During this time, I was able to reveal specific themes that contributed to deeper probes and follow-up questions during the second interview process.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Credibility was maintained by deriving core themes and subthemes from participant's actual wording. I approached each interview with an awareness of my own cultural bias, including values and worldview. I recorded and transcribed each interview personally to ensure consistency and to make sure each transcript was accurate. I also followed triangulation procedures as described by Janesick (2011) and Miles et al. (2014) by cross-checking the transcript with the recording and when necessary following up with each participant (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Wood, 2011).

Dependability

Dependability of data was maintained throughout the interview process. I made an initial interpretation of the data after coding each transcript. This included identifying

themes in context to the guiding research questions and triangulating data via follow-up conversation, interview notes, and recordings (Miles et al., 2014). Each transcript was then cross-analyzed with the other transcripts in order to identify common themes. Narrow themes were broken down into larger and broader themes as suggested by Hays and Wood (2011) and Larkin et al. (2006). A rich description of content and in-vivo excerpts from the transcripts were used to support findings.

Confirmability

There were no problems with data or procedural confirmability. The logic and procedures of the questions were consistent and understandable. This included assessing whether interview questions were being interpreted correctly. Data was collected and organized in a uniform manner, following an interview procedural checklist. I also cross-analyzed transcripts by comparing in-vivo excerpts to determine challenges around framing (Trau et al., 2013). Terminology and follow-up probes that emerged from previous interviews were incorporated into subsequent interviews. Subsequent interview terminology and probes were then incorporated into the second round of follow-up interviews.

<div align="center">

Study Results

</div>

After the third cycle of coding I was able to distill my participant's narratives down to two core themes that I divided between "Understanding Polyfi" and "Helping polyfi." Within each of these core themes were additional categories and subthemes as illustrated in Table 2. This differentiation was created to delineate between information that may help enrich a counselor's understanding of how and why individuals engage in a

polyfi relationship and the information that may help a counselor better serve the counseling needs of individuals within a polyfi relationship.

Six core categories emerged from the data in both sections. The first six categories focused on subthemes that may help a counselor better understand polyfidelity. I labeled these six categories under the core theme "Understanding Polyfi," which could help identify what individuals find appealing about polyfi, specific values that are important or vital, the philosophy behind such relationships, the concept of kinship in terms of family or community, the influence of attachment, how relationships are logistically balanced, the benefits derived from such relationships, and how these relationships begin and evolve over time. These subtheme categories are:

1) More of Everything

2) Intentional Families

3) Evolution from Dyad

4) Transparent Communication

5) Balancing Everyone's Needs

6) Greater Self-Actualization

There were also six core categories of subthemes that emerged from the data that could be described in terms of helping better serve the needs of individuals in a polyfi relationship. I labeled these six categories under the core theme "Helping Polyfi," which may help counselors better understand the needs that could be considered in terms of the dynamics of these relationships. This included helping partners mitigate minority stress as a result of social stigma and rejection, reap the benefits of acceptance through the

therapeutic alliance, and recognize the significance of communication in terms of which styles are beneficial versus detrimental. The final three categories deal with intrapersonal challenges, interpersonal or relational challenges, and the roles of helping professionals. These subtheme categories are:

1) Poly Discrimination

2) Increased Rejection

3) Communication Intelligence

4) Attachment Awareness

5) Exponential Dynamics

6) Experiences With Helping Professional

Table 2

Core Themes and Subthemes For Understanding And Helping Polyfi

Understanding Polyfi	Helping Polyfi
More of everything	Poly discrimination
More love	Relationship discrimination
More security and support	Protective measures
More enrichment and fulfillment	Racial discrimination
Deeper friendships, connections, and emotional experiences	Institutional and legal discrimination
More challenges with attention, energy, and liability	Increased rejection
Intentional families	Family rejection
Egalitarian but not equal	Friend rejection
Chosen commitment	Workplace rejection
Chosen family	Communication intelligence
Common worldview via flexibility, Creativity, and adaptability	Communication skills
Individuality via reciprocity, cooperation, and inclusion	Conflict negotiation
Evolution from dyad	Emotional intelligence
Dyadic foundation	Attachment awareness
Meeting partners	Attachment challenges
Normalizing and belonging	Anxiety and vulnerability
Polyfi evolution	Anger and resentment
Transparent communication	Jealousy and compersion
Communication style	Exponential dynamics
Utilizing technology	Relationship structures
Individual boundaries	Amplified reactivity
Balancing everyone's needs	Personal accountability
Individual roles	Village parenting
Needs distribution	Experiences with helping professionals
Logistical balancing	Resource deficits and isolation
Greater self-actualization	Negative experiences
Career fulfillment	Positive experiences
Same-sex expression	Ideal experiences
Multiple sides of self	

Understanding Polyfi

More of Everything

Across the board, nearly all participants stated that when successful, their polyfi relationship had significantly more resources than their previous dyadic relationships. Participants described an abundance of love, safety, and support, which was part of the perception of having more resources. This included more kinds of love and more amounts of love. Following that came more security and support, this included emotional, physical, and financial security. Participants also shared the perception of having more enrichment and fulfillment in terms of meeting individual goals, needs, and vocational aspirations. Finally, abundance was described in terms of depth and enrichment, in which participants described deeper connections and emotional experiences.

Abundance was also double-edged in terms of an increase in both positive and negative outcomes. For example, participants also found that they needed greater amounts of communication, energy, and attention to sustain such a relationship. In addition, there was the potential for more loss due to more potential liability because of more people in the relationship. This could include more dysfunction, more personal baggage, more risk for illness or injury, more risk for legal or financial problems, and so forth. The five subthemes derived from the narratives in this section include: (a) more love; (b) more security and support; (c) more enrichment and fulfillment; (d) deeper friendships, connections, and emotional experiences; and (e) more challenges via attention, energy, and liability.

More love. Many participants described having more love, which included: physical love, emotional love, and mutual love.

Patricia stated that her draw towards polyamory in general had to do with the draw towards finding more love and happiness.

> I went out to the world and said I want to be loving and happy and in love with people. That's what drew me to poly. It is one of the ways that I found my best ability to be that. I found a lot more love and happiness out of it than I could have thought.

Aaron found that when a triad works it has the potential for greater connection and greater experience than their previous dyad.

> It's not all peaches and cream. But when things are balanced and everything is communicated, the power and what can get done with that energy and that love is nothing like I have ever been involved in before. It has taught me a lot all year.

Mary described a deeper love in her long-term relationship, as well, stating that her love has evolved over time.

> We have been together for 30 plus years our relationship is now very different from what it was in the beginning, only because we now have three simply handicapped older people that rely on each other with the deep love that we have to get through what we are going through. So the love has changed from an in love to a love no matter what love. It is more than a lust, it's a deeper love, a forever love.

Karen stated there is more love to go around because of more people and those individuals intention of inclusion.

There is more love to go around and there is more time and energy to be given. I think the idea is that it is less likely that someone is going to feel unloved, or neglected, or not taken care of, because there is that much more energy to be shared.

There is also an abundance of love for the family. Blake also pointed out that children have more potential for receiving love and attention, as well.

Childcare is easier, because there is more love and attention available. For children who need a lot of love and attention there's another set of hands around the house. It can be a very practical way of living.

More security and support. Participants also described more safety, support, and security. This included more: emotional trust, emotional security, community safety, emotional support, physical support, supportive friendship, supportive family, supportive environment, mutual support, family accountability, personal accountability, financial security, physical and financial assets, dependability, and physical, emotional, intellectual, and financial child support.

Aaron believed that individuals who come from challenging home environments might have the opportunity to build a sense of home beyond that of their family of origin, "I think a lot of kids could find homes out of this that are positive." Eleanor described greater emotional security when a relationship is closed versus open primarily due to meeting reciprocal needs.

Its more safety, security, you don't have to worry about them meeting someone new and that person deciding they don't like you and then your partner having to choose between the two of you. It feels so much more safe, its like its just going to be the three of us and I will get all my sexual needs met because I will have a woman and a man.

Mary, Michele, and Aaron described more financial security due to economy of scale and potential additional income earners. Aaron pointed out that their triad has been the primary way to make ends meet.

Right now we are almost forced to be in a poly relationship to survive this economy. If I broke my hand right now and I wasn't with them I would be on the streets. She would be up to her eyes in bills and daycare bills. She would never have been able to open that business and he could never have gone to school.

In terms of support, additional partners were also described as having the potential of contributing to chores or supportive roles such as child rearing and partners with special needs. Karen described these additional resources as a safer and stronger support network.

I really appreciated having an extra person's help with the day-to-day responsibilities. Splitting up the chores, being able to count on this person to pick up that thing we needed, everybody being able to coordinate. One more person to remind 'oh don't forget this thing.' It builds a stronger network, provides more of a safety net, because there is one more person thinking and being insightful in any situation.

Eleanor described how she was able to help an existing dyad with one partner's mental health challenges resulting in reducing the burden of one person's care-taking responsibilities.

He knew it was better for me to be with her and secretly I think he knew it was better for him because she has such severe mental health problems. I really helped make her feel better and took a lot of the burden of care taking off of him.

Kim captured the overall spirit of abundance in terms of removing pressure and fostering more enjoyable moments with one another.

It also gave me the opportunity to have the best parts of a relationship with my male partner. It makes it so that you are not up under each other's feet all of the time because he is having to divide some attention elsewhere. So when we spent time together it was more enjoyable. It wasn't having to rehash things that had been said or done. You could kind of shrug some of that off and just have a better time with each other.

More enrichment and fulfillment. More enrichment and fulfillment was also described by having more: common interests, activities, connection, diversity, energy, possibilities, options, freedom, optimism, motivation, significance, attention, involvement, meaning, opportunity, mental wellness, and met needs. Blake described, "With polyfidelity you have more diverse ideas. You have a wider variety perspectives to share your ideas of who you are and what you want." Aaron described this as, "The energy and sharing of three people's energy, whether it be on a project or in the bed, is a beautiful thing… It is very interesting."

Michele described how having two partners that are committed is more fulfilling than a dyadic relationship.

It is how I identify. I really don't feel like relationships should be restricted to two partners. I don't think that always feels complete. Me myself, I am pansexual, so having a male partner and female partner feels much more fulfilling to me.

Aaron pointed out how their triad can accomplish more with a group dynamic than any individual or previous dyad.

We all have different assets to bring forth and see it come together as a team, or even in bed it is pretty mind blowing. Just having three really beautiful brilliant different energies intertwined to work together, the amount of things we can get accomplished is phenomenal. None of us have ever done this well financially, done this well professionally and in our lives. I can stay home now. Now they are both finally able to accomplish both of their goals.

Deeper friendships, connections, and emotional experiences. Participants also reported more abundant emotional and connective experiences through deeper relationships. This included reclaiming lost family experiences rooted in deeper levels of love, as well as experiencing sides of partners that would have otherwise been omitted in a dyadic relationship. Karen described her polyfi relationship has brought deeper friendships into her everyday life.

In practice it is kind of like having a live in best friend, its like having one more person you can go to with all of your deepest issues or fears, in the same way you

would connect with a really close friend, you can connect that way with all of your partners.

Patricia pointed out that because three of the five individuals in her relationship are abuse survivors, she is able to recreate a loving family environment and potentially reclaim what was lost in the past.

Nobody said we want a giant poly family and make this group of people with the same values who love each other. But along the way we have found people close to us and have been open to the idea that love can come in different shapes and forms and are exploring what that can mean to us. What drew me into it is that three of the five of us are abuse survivors. I was drawn to poly because of the idea of recreating a better family situation was very inviting to me…I wouldn't say the abuse is the only reason but it's a large draw.

Participants also described deeper emotional experiences with their partners when compared to their previous dyadic relationships. Michele made some poignant observations about how only in a group relationship could a partner witness sides of their other partners that they would have otherwise never seen.

Getting to be in love with your partners is such a great feeling, but being able to watch your partners be in love is such a unique experience as well… I think there is nothing quite like that, which is one of the great things about poly in my opinion, you get to really see your partners in love with each other. It's a very magical experience. When you are in part of the dyad that is dating it's really special to get to date someone else, because you get to see something within that

dyad that you would otherwise not get to see before. When you start dating individuals you don't get to see your partner go home and be giddy after the first date, or something like that. So you get to see this whole other side of them that you wouldn't get to see in any other way.

Karen described the development of a greater sense of emotional awareness in terms of her newly added female partner.

I had kind of forged this friendship with her and the three of us got to talking about whether or not we would be interested in having something sexual. There was a lot of positive feedback so we gave that a shot and then it became this regular thing. And because we saw each other so often I really felt like there was a deepening emotional connection. I would go out of my way everyday to see her and talk with her. We would go to lunch every Friday. So we weren't just having sex, we were forming an emotional connection.

More challenges with attention, energy, and liability. Abundance was not only a positive factor but also a negative factor. This included the need to pay more attention, engage in more complicated planning that consumed more energy, and the risk of more potential liability. While liability was not a concern brought up by any of the participants, some of the narratives described situations that led to increased risk of liability. Michele shared how group relationships are more complex and require more coordination than a dyad.

We have to accommodate three peoples needs rather than two people's needs. Its just everything is more complicated, the decisions have to take into account three

people. It is harder, its more work, so I could see it being, I don't think it has to be less stable, but that it could be a stressor just the work of coordinating three lives together, it is just harder, although that's probably harder for any family with more than 2 people.

Felicia found that it was challenging to shift her attention from one person to two, especially in terms of when she was being singularly present with her polycule.

I feel like there's a split attention, switching from living with one person to two, where it used to be I would spend a whole weekend with one person, and I tend to focus on one person, and then there's more interruptions to that. Its not exactly emotional, but its having the length of time I spend with one person is not as long as it used to be. Sometimes that is harder for me.

Some participants' expectations of abundance fell short. Laurie found herself in a relationship with an existing dyad that was controlling and disinterested in fully including her as an equally valid member of their relationship. She came into the relationship with expectations of having more love and support from her partners. She stated that her partners were not capable or interested in having a mutually reciprocal relationship.

Being in a poly relationship, I have this expectation that it is about support. I function as a human much better when I have a lot of support. I need people in my life that are not only willing, but are able to do it. Can they even tolerate it? I have found these things do not always go together. I thought being in a poly relationship I would have more support. I am bisexual, so I would not want to be in a relationship with two girls, but I wanted the best guy friend partner and best

girl friend as partner. It seems like the best of two worlds. It seemed like a good idea at the time….They said they wanted like a family and love forever. But I was treated like a dirty secret. It felt awful.

Abundance was the most pervasive theme throughout the study. For example, the theme of village parenting or having multiple caretakers was common throughout the narratives. Themes of abundance were also central to providing for both the needs of the individual and the needs of the family. This included: (a) more financial support, (b) more physical support, and (c) more emotional support. Abundance was also evident, however, in terms of factors that placed stress on the individual or family. For example, several participants reported needing to put more energy and attention into their group relationship than their original dyad.

Intentional Families

This section focuses on the philosophy or intention behind polyfidelity. In order to understand the lived experiences of individuals in polyfi relationships it is first important to understand the perspective behind engaging in such a relationship. The five subthemes derived from the narratives in this section include: (a) egalitarian but not equal; (b) chosen commitment; (c) chosen family; (d) common worldview via flexibility, creativity, and adaptability; and (e) individuality via reciprocity, cooperation, and inclusion.

Egalitarian but not equal. Many participants described their relationship as having some sort of equity or parity. Some participants described this as balance, others described this as egalitarianism, and some even used the word equal but clarified their

definition as not being or having the same thing or same amount, but instead having the same value. According to Mary it is unrealistic to expect an equal relationship with each partner. She shared different aspects of herself with one partner than the other, which is what makes the relationship rewarding to her.

> I have a deep relationship with both of my partners. Because you share different things with each individual person those relationships are completely different from each other, but I love them both. I have always loved them both. But it's just a different love…

Michele used the word equal, but after further exploration highlighted the fact that while not equal in the sense of having or being the same, each partner should have equal value and consideration.

> It is something where all partners should be equal, have equal say, and whether or not any partner is added, even my kids have a say as far as if we are looking for additional partners… Everyone's opinion is taken into equal consideration. Everyone shares responsibilities.

She went on to elaborate that sometimes the perception of having a balanced relationship is based on the unrealistic expectation that everyone will the same level or types of connection.

> There's definitely an amount of balance because it's obviously very important that everyone is in agreement that this is a good choice, a good person, good dynamic. However, we don't expect perfect balance. I think you're not going to love everyone the same, and we really don't. There's definitely been times when I

have been closer to one partner than the other, or I lean on one partner more than the other. There are times when one relationship felt strained or whatever. The perfect balance is not something that I seek or believe is necessary.

Karen defined fairness in terms of meeting individual needs and not based on having or desiring the same.

I think that when we first decided to be poly, we had this concept of fairness. We had to figure out for ourselves that fair didn't mean the exact same thing. It meant satisfying the needs of each person whatever they were. If everybody needed different things, then it would be fair for each person to have their needs met. It's not fair in terms of each person having the same thing if they didn't want the same thing.

Eleanor shared how the concept of equality is unrealistic in terms of time, attention, and affection. She pointed out that in a monogamous relationship partners run the risk of comparing their relationship with other outside monogamous relationships. However, in a group relationship partners also run the risk of comparing their relationship with the relationships of others in the group.

From about week six, I could tell that me and her were more in love then he and I were. Even though we loved each other, it was just not as passionate as it was with me and her. It was more obvious because he was watching it happen right in front of him. We had sex all three of us together, so he could just see it, even if I tried not to….So that made it more difficult, because in a monogamous one-on-one relationship you don't have someone else interacting in a romantic way with

your partner right there in front of you to compare your romantic interactions with. So yeah there was lots of comparison there.

Some participants described being vigilant in maintaining perceived equality between partners. Eleanor described a challenge in her relationship due to individual stress on each participant from the constant threat of jealousy.

Because there was too much jealousy and insecurity I felt awkward. I would walk into their house and they would both be there in the same room and I literally had to choose who to kiss first, or stand there and let one of them come to me. But I had to think about it every time it happened because there was the potential for it to hurt someone's feelings. Then I would have to constantly think about whether I am looking at them equally or giving affection to them equally. Sometimes one of them would want to sit in the middle, and that made me anxious because I knew that I would be giving more attention to one of them, and then I would have to give the other one more. So that was stressful.

Aaron also pointed out the impracticality of equality and how that sometimes can be anxiety provoking for some individuals in the relationship.

It can never be perfectly balanced. There is definitely a challenge there, because you are always getting closer and sometimes it is closer to one. For me, I probably have the most trouble accepting that. For him, it is just natural and calm for him. A lot of people say it is easier with four.

Chosen commitment. For many participants the choice to become committed was a natural evolution. Some participants differentiated fidelity from exclusivity stating

that a group of people can be fidelitous without having to be exclusive. Melissa described

her process with her original dyadic partner when they decided to transition from a

monogamous relationship to a polyfi relationship.

> When my husband and I talked about opening up our relationship, we had been
>
> together several years and married about one year. We both knew that neither of
>
> us liked the idea of one-night stands. Sex is great, but we really like the emotional
>
> aspect of it. So we started building this community… We definitely have done
>
> polyamory in general. I think right now where we are we are sort of settling
>
> down. We are getting ready to have kids and so having this structure of each other
>
> to rely on and be with each other, to have our family and be with each other, feels
>
> very safe and connected. Even if for some reason the romantic portion of our
>
> relationship should change or flux we are all still in this for the long haul to stay
>
> together essentially.

She differentiated, however, between polyfidelity and polyexclusivity, stating that

her polycule is fidelitous but not necessarily exclusive.

> I think that's where our commitment is to each other…. We are not exclusive,
>
> none of us have ruled out the idea that there might be other people, but we are a
>
> core group, so someone coming into that would take time and would need to be
>
> discussed.

Blake described the desire for choosing a committed versus noncommitted

relationship in terms of providing a greater sense of security, as well as unity.

People who gravitate towards polyfi, who are oftentimes bisexual, want to be able to express all of those parts of themselves without giving up the security of a monogamous relationship… The key to the polyfidelity part is that the fidelity exists. Fidelity isn't just a sexual commitment, or a romantic commitment, its people operating on the same level and understanding each other, that's what fidelity means.

Susan stated that a closed or committed relationship resonated more and therefore helped build stronger intimacy.

I didn't really honestly aim for the relationship style that I am in right now. It's kind of more that I tried it and I went 'oh, this is perfect, this is exactly what works for me.' All three of us have had the same experiences where we tried dating someone who was also dating many more people than us, and it just kind of felt like it detracted from the true full intimacy you can get in a relationship.

Felicia stressed that part of the chosen commitment to longevity is what makes a polyfi relationship so meaningful.

For me, the longer more committed relationships I have had are more meaningful. Just having that history feels more significant to me. That is why I have chosen polyfidelity. In polyamory literature there is the idea that it's not the length of the relationship but the quality of it that matters. For me, the quality is knowing that these are my life partners, not just a partner for now. It changes what the relationship feels like, even while I am going through it, as well as the commitment to one another. There is a depth to having a long history with

someone. I have been with my life partner now for 6 years. There is something about knowing someone at different ages, in really significant ways, really knowing someone and also knowing everyone else in their lives as well.

Michele described the draw to exclusive commitment as one that is focused on family. She felt that solopoly takes time away from the family unit.

For me it's just one of those things that I really prefer the fidelitous portion, because I believe in being a very full and committed involved partner. So when you have partners who are more open than that, I think it can be distracting from the familial relationship. For me its all about family, I have four children, having those partners be completely involved in the family, living under the same roof, just feels much more complete than having the more open style of relationship where people are kind of coming and going, doing their own thing. I feel like that just takes away from the family.

Karen found that her commitment gave her a deeper sense of comfort and stability in terms of a core family base.

I think there was always be some kind of fidelity because ultimately you have to this sort of core group, this core family unit or base, where this is my safe space. This is where I go to calm down. This is where I go to receive comfort, whatever it is that you need.

Patricia framed this choice in terms of bringing more love into the world by adding more people to the equation.

As it progressed towards a larger group dynamic it was certainly not without stress, but that love is something we can choose and create and not by accident, but choose to bring more love into the world.

Chosen family. Some participants described the process of choosing a group of people to become their family. This has allowed some participants to have the type of family they wished they could have grown up in. Melissa described what it means to have a chosen family in contrast to her family of origin.

I'm a very loyal person. I'm a very social person and these people are my chosen family. These are people that are going to be parents to my children. I want to see them everyday… This is the family that I always wanted. I was an only child growing up and my parents were divorced, so now I can have the family I always wanted. That is the significance of it to me. These people support me and I support them and we do things together. We support each other in our endeavors, our crises, and all that, knowing that I can rely on all of them.

Kim is proud of the fact that unlike many of her children's peers she can say that her children's parents are all still married to one another.

My kids have come to me and said 'you know mom, you are the only one of my friends that I can say my parents are still married. Everybody else comes from a divorced family.' For me that is more concerning. My family is different; we are all still married to each other. I think my female partner would have married us if the laws were different and we could have. When I say that we are all still married that is the way we look at ourselves, as being married.

Michele described this as, "Family are the people who live under one roof, that you choose to do everything with to a certain degree." She differentiated polyfi from solo poly in terms of the primary focus shifting towards family rather than self.

> To me, my primary focus is the kids, the family unit, as opposed to my opinion or what I perceive as the other types of poly is more focused on personal pleasure, personal empowerment. I am very self-sacrificing, where family comes first, I don't come first as an individual, I think that is kind of the difference how people are coming from the center of family rather than the center of themselves.

Family is so important that Michele even takes into account how additional partners might influence the overall family dynamic.

> I am also extremely picky about who I date. I have had so many first dates and some second dates but often it doesn't make it past that because it's pretty clear at that point if this is not someone I could add to my family in a cohesive way. It's hard enough to find a partner for one person, but to find one who fits into a family of six is challenging. They have to fit in with all those dynamics.

Common worldview via flexibility, creativity, and adaptability. Many participants described a natural draw towards polyfidelity or at least nonmonogamy. In several cases this discovery process included a willingness to try new things. Throughout the narratives there were examples of flexibility, adaptability, and creativity among the partners involved in a polyfi relationship. Several participants described how different they were from their partners yet how alike they were in terms of worldview and values.

Michele found that she was drawn to a worldview based on loving more than one person and being able to build a family with more than two adults.

> I have had relationships or dated separately, but that was always the point where I was just interested in dating and having fun, not a point where I was interested in building my life. Whenever I want to build more of my ongoing lifestyle is when I have always been drawn to polyfidelity. That's something that I was actually drawn to before I even knew there was a word for it. I didn't know anyone else did it this way, I didn't have terminology, I just always believed that you can love multiple partners and that the focus should be around the family…. It was just this realization not only do I want to grow my family with children, but that I want to grow my family with other adults and other loving relationships as well.

There were components of flexibility, creativity, and adaptability that were evident throughout the narratives of each participant. For example, Tim was originally sexually active with his female partner at the beginning of his polyfi relationship but then transitioned to being only Polyaffective. He also transitioned from a traditional male gender role to a more submissive role with his male partner. When asked for tips on helping foster a polyfi relationship, Tim highlighted the importance of flexibility.

> Have a flexible approach to the whole thing, where you can always be comfortable with who you are and what you do, and balance that with the realistic views of others, whatever the situation. That flexibility is important.

Several participants had one or more partners who were described as "easy to get along with," "very chill," and "goes with the flow." Michele described a level of

flexibility in terms of whether or not the relationships with her additional partners would be sexual in nature.

> To me it doesn't matter if sexuality is included in all parts of the relationship. Sexuality is such a minor component to the relationship in my opinion. So if we found a heterosexual female for example who wanted to date us and would be in a romantic and loving relationship with me but it wouldn't be sexual, but would be romantic and loving and sexual with my partner, to me that is also a polyfidelitous relationship.

Individuality via reciprocity, cooperation, and inclusion. Three common interpersonal dynamics included reciprocity, cooperation, and inclusion. Some participants found that reciprocating both an emotional or physical connection begins by acting as an individual and avoiding acting or speaking as a group. This type of individual reciprocity encouraged a sense of mutual inclusion and cooperation. For example, Felicia described that part of the spirit of individual reciprocity is wanting the best for one another.

> The strength is wanting the best for everyone. That is something I feel in general in my life. From that base you can solve whatever problems you have because fundamentally there is a desire for good things for other people, as long as they feel the same way towards you, then from that based you can handle a lot of problems. If things need to change then everyone is on board with needing to make that change.

Mary described the spirit of reciprocity applies in terms of a physical connection, as well.

So when there are more than one other person in bed it is not just about you its about making sure others involved are meeting their needs and that is a learning process…helping each other know themselves better. It is a process you just have to go through it.

Eleanor described reciprocity as a way to add more enjoyment and satisfaction to the relationship.

It seems like the things I do in life are more enjoyable when I am doing it with someone who I am feeling romantic love for and they are feeling it back. That is hard to maintain with just one partner for a long time. I think adding more people in, like inviting a fourth person, once this new relationship energy ends, once I am no longer staring at you and smiling at you all of the time like a weirdo, then there is someone to rekindle that love.

Felicia pointed out that individuality is rooted in reciprocity, in terms of mutual or cooperative love.

Our strength is that we want the best for everyone. From that base you can solve whatever problems you have because fundamentally there is a desire for good things for other people, as long as they feel the same way towards you, then from that base you can handle a lot of problems. If things need to change and its for the best of everyone, then everyone is on board with needing to make that change.

Kim's advised that like a dyad, individuals in a polyfi relationship need to make a conscious choice towards working on addressing the needs of everyone in the relationship.

Every day you have to work on it. Every day you end up having to ask those questions. Are you taking sides? Are you trying to present the adult view? The commonality view? Sometimes I get caught up in that too. If it's me, sometimes I need to work at meeting his or her needs, reminding the other parties that they need to work on each other's needs.

Laurie described what could go wrong when reciprocity was not present. Her relationship involved her coming into an existing dyad in which there was no intention of egalitarian participation.

We weren't actually a three, we were a two plus one… So I wasn't included in the kids events, or practice. I was kind of not included in the family unit at all. So when visiting, no one would know, friends would just think I'm a friend and that was hard feeling like I had no value in the relationship. My value in the relationship was not equal. They were the relationship. They were the cake and I was just the frosting. I knew that I would be the one alone. I felt alone in the relationship. It was so unbalanced in many ways.

Laurie's experience in a triad was the opposite of reciprocal. She believed that her partners were incapable of understanding the spirit of polyfidelity, which according to her is based on inclusion and reciprocity.

I don't get to be a part of the family. I don't get to be around the kids. I didn't get

to go to Christmas, or their plays, or soccer practice. I didn't get to go to any

family dinners on Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Easter. I didn't even get to show

up on Christmas day. I don't believe what they are is poly. Not really aware, not

conscientious thinking, altruistic people. How could people hurt other people?

Hurting other people is not who I am and not what I want of myself. If I am not

able to participate effectively in a relationship I will get out of it.

Reciprocity and inclusion were also central themes throughout the narratives.

Polyfidelity has been classically described as intentional love (Nearing, 1992) and this

intention was embedded throughout the narratives. While there were more resources

with more people there were also more obligations and more relationships to maintain.

Evolution from Dyad

There were a variety of ways in which respondents labeled their relationships.

Mary and Kim defined their relationship as a pod, Karen as a pack, Melissa as a polycule,

Patricia as a primary family, Aaron as a team, Eleanor as a polyfi triad. Tim used the

word polyamorous. Melissa defined her relationship Polyfidelitous but not polyexclusive.

Felicia used the word alternative family, and Michele used the word family without the

need to designate what kind. The four subthemes derived from the narratives in this

section include: (a) dyadic foundation; (b) meeting oartners; (c) normalizing and

belonging; and (d) polyfi evolution.

Dyadic foundation. Participants in every case met their partners in context of an

existing dyadic relationship. In other words, there were no participants who all came

together as individuals to form a triad, quad, or more. The dyad often served as a foundation from which something more might emerge. The most common addition began by adding a third to an existing dyad. From there quads and quins could emerge. Michele knew that polyfidelity resonated after being involved as a third who came into an existing dyad. That experience opened up the idea of new possibilities in terms of defining kinship and what a family could look like.

> It was something that I hadn't really considered before as being an option in marriage, so I brought it in and he was very open with the idea right from the beginning, hey we want to grow our family. It was a really easy conversation because we were trying to have children at the time and to me it was just this realization not only do I want to grow my family with children, but that I want to grow my family with other adults and other loving relationships as well. Just wanting to add to the family, so that's continued to be where I am now. I really like the idea of adding to my family and I don't care if the people added are children or are another adult partner, or adult partner with children. Whatever it is I just want to continue to grow my family.

Karen pointed out how a dyad helps secure a founding attachment that has the potential to later evolve into something more.

> We kind of took a period of time where it was just the two of us and after we felt that yeah this was definitely secure, we know where we are at with each other, we know how to interact, then we were able to open it up.

Meeting partners. Participants met partners via friends, special social groups, and online. In many cases the special social groups were either Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) affiliated or a part of other extraneous alternative sexualities, such as the kink and fetish community. More increasingly, however, was the ability to meet potential partners through social media and other online resources. Eleanor described how on-line communities and social media was helpful in meeting her potential partners, especially when seeking a specific type of partner, such as someone who identified as gender neutral or who was vegan.

> At first I started with an in-person group that I was a part of, kind of like an LGBT group, and tried to meet someone through there without luck. Then it was suggested maybe looking at having a profile online, because pretty much everyone in the LGBT group was also online. So I started a profile there and met our partner.

Kim found herself in a relationship with a partner who wanted to be polyamorous and soon introduced the idea of a third into their existing dyad. She stated that there were no role models or polyfi triads that she even knew of back then.

> It was something that kind of happened. I had no blue print. I had no realization that anybody else would take the same route that we had taken… but I have never really thought about it because it just happened and I didn't have anybody to look at and see how it worked. I didn't realize there were any other relationships like this…I don't know how other people get to that same relationship. When we started out 35 years ago, I never would have imagined that.

She did not originally intend for the relationship to become a polyfi triad, but an unplanned pregnancy directed their future path together.

> That was when we found out she was pregnant and he said I want her to move in with us because that is my child. I was angry, but I agreed with that and understood that. There was a time that her and I established a deeper relationship and better working relationship that he did with either one of us. I am sure he felt the odd man out, but I was angry with him at first so I didn't care. But then I came to understand that what I had was a great relationship with her and an increasingly deeper relationship with her, that we kind of had the same interests and that he had actually done a good thing… It got us into a position that was stronger with the three of us than any of us two would have been in. Therefore it turned out to be a positive. I will confess that the idea of what was happening was not something that I would have thought would have happened.

Normalizing and belonging. Several participants described the desire to belong and overcome the stigma associated with polyfidelity. This could involve normalizing polyfi relationships and the dynamics of nonmonogamy in general. Blake stated that normalizing polyfidelity is important on both a cultural and personal level.

> People have been conditioned by a monogamous lifestyle their entire lives and then get into problems when they try to do poly. That's where the normalization needs to happen, not just on a cultural level but also on a personal level, because everybody has ideas on how everything is supposed to go. They become paralyzed by that fear of what they have always been told.

Mary has never been in any other relationship other than as the third in her current relationship. She stated that polyfi is what is normal for her because she really has little experience in dyadic relationships. When asked about logistics and relationship dynamics she was uncertain as to the benefits or drawbacks of a polyfi relationship stating, "I have not been in another kind of relationship so I don't know. This is what is normal to me."

Felicia reported that after the first year there was a period of settling in which things felt normal and she felt that both partners belonged as part of the family.

There was some strain in the first year. I had no idea if I was going to end up with him. Once we decided to be together after a year there was a settling. I feel really supported in each relationship by the other person.

Kim found that her relationship eventually transpired into a situation in which she felt she belonged and was a part of something that worked for her and her partners.

It's just a relationship that worked for me, that worked for all of the parties involved. I think it was a surprise, he is the one who approached that idea and therefore it just seemed to happen. The way that I would define our relationship now is one that continues to work for us, that continues to have an obligation to make sure that it continues to work for each one of us. It is something that I see going forward, but in a different way than how it started out.

Blake described that a major draw in his relationship was based on feeling at home with his partners. This level of comfortability and strong existential fit has been a driving force in shaping his polyfi relationships.

The main thing that is universal about what we want in the world is a feeling of

connection and feeling of involvement. There are only certain things that people

can feel involved in. When people fall in love and get excited about love its

because they found a place where they belong. It's a sense of home. It's an

attraction, romantic or otherwise. When people start to get a crush, that's usually

the hope for the feeling that this person could be a bit of my home. That

intoxicating feeling through the course of most romantic relationships it goes

through that kind of cycle where that person could be home.

Polyfi evolution. In several instances polyfidelitous relationships began as a

friendship and evolved into something more. Participants described this process as

surprising, uncontrived, and organic. While many participants stated they had a draw

towards a nonmonogamous relationship, it was oftentimes the case that participants were

not entirely sure what that relationship would ultimately look like. Tim described how his

group relationship grew slowly over time and was founded first in a deeper friendship.

An open relationship was never an appealing idea for us, where people can just go

in and out of relationships over time. It did not feel right to us at all. But this was

a very different thing, a person who we started to have a real connection with and

over time became workable. Before he actually moved in, we had known him for

quite a while and were very comfortable with him. We had sort of been in this

dating-like relationship kind of a submarital relationship for a few years. It wasn't

immediately comfortable or a quick thing. It wasn't something we sort of laid out,

like at the start of our marriage that this would be ok, it was sort of an organic

beginning and development over time.

Kim's relationship evolved over the years, starting out tentative, becoming more

collaborative, and now being rooted in what she described as a deeper commitment.

So we have evolved a lot over the years, but I see that as not being a polyfidelity

thing, just that people need to do that for each other. I guess that is because it's us

three in the house who drive all of that. But as individuals I always felt you need

to be there for the people you love and that's it. That's just what you do, you are

there for them, you are supportive of them, and if they live in your household,

great. If the kids move out, you still need to be there for them, that's just what you

do.

Aaron pointed out that the relationship is a continual work in progress, as well as

learning process. This not only has to do with a lack of role models, but also an

extraneous factor of recently becoming a person with a disability.

It is always a work in progress, which is why it is completely circumstantial.

Right now we have come a long way; it has been a learning process. A lot has

changed recently because I am injured, so everything I do is manual. I am useless

at this point so she is in charge.

The evolution of normalizing was also a common theme. Most if not all

participants grew up exposed to dyadic relationships. Overcoming the stigma of a group

relationship often involved a period of normalizing over time as the bonds strengthened

between the individuals in the relationship.

Transparent Communication

Strong communication that was open, honest, direct, collaborative, and frequent was a common theme among most of the participants. Blake expressed the spirit of open communication as, "If you show people that you respect them enough to allow them to express themselves, they was respectful towards you." Regular communication was a central component in many of the narratives and was also a component of participant's worldview or value system. The three subthemes derived from the narratives in this section include: (a) communication style; (b) utilizing technology; and (c) individual boundaries.

Communication style. In following the abundance category as previously discussed, more communication was a central theme throughout, however there was also a specific connection between more participants and the need, as well as benefit, for more communication. This included greater openness, as well as honesty and directness. I explored themes of communication under two subdomains in both sections: Understanding Polyi: Communication Style, and Helping Polyfi: Communication Skills.

Honesty as both a communication style and personal value was central to many participants in polyfi relationships. Participants described their communication style as: honest, immediate, transparent, forthcoming, open, direct, collaborative, frequent, up-front, resolute, and in-the-moment. In some cases a group dynamic fostered continuous communication that perhaps would have otherwise fallen short in a dyad. For example, Susan found that it was easier to be honest in a group relationship because

communication helped the relationship exist. She also felt more secure that she would not be judged.

> This experience of polyamory has actually opened up communication, because you have to talk for it to all work, so I can see myself and I can divulge things that I wouldn't want to tell other people… I know emotionally it's like way more deeper than if it was a normal monogamous situation, because I know we would have gotten to the point where as a couple we eventually would have stopped talking to each other. So this kind of encourages on all sides more communication.

Michele stated that in their relationship there are not a lot of rules primarily because their communication style is immediate, transparent, forthcoming, and open.

> There were not a lot of guidelines or rules because there was just simply the expectation that if you have a need you are going to talk about it. There was just that really good communication where there was a lot of opening for that. We didn't have family meetings, whenever we felt the need to talk we felt like let's figure out when we can get the kids occupied so that we can go have a conversation.

Mary described their communication style as direct and resolute. In their relationship they are able to be direct, up-front, and then take action or let things go.

> One of the things we have going for us is that we can sit down and talk knowing that the conversations will go absolutely no further. That you can talk about what

came in, what you did, what you should have done, what you wanted to do but couldn't, you know, all of the things that you think about or worry about.

Patricia stated that their polycule tries to focus on communicating each individual's needs in the moment.

We are all in therapy right now which means we can understand our own needs and wants better. That is something that keeps us going, because we do continue to work on ourselves and on each other, and continue to say things like I need this right now and is there somebody who can help me get that.

Utilizing technology. Many participants described using technology to aid in communication with partners. This included social media such as Facebook, or other online social groups for meeting partners. In addition, technology such as Google Calendar made it possible to synchronize planned events and logistics such as dates and sleeping arrangements. For example, Michele described a variety of ways she has met potential partners from church to meeting on the bus. However she found her current partners on-line using Craigslist.

Karen wanted to connect with relatable families but explained her struggle finding other people who are in a polyfi relationship. She found that social media has provided a gateway in making connections with more diverse families.

We don't know a whole lot of triads in person, but we do interact with some on Facebook. We interact with a lot of people from a lot of different backgrounds, genders, relationship styles, who are open to a variety of ideas.

Eleanor pointed out that there are more poly and polyfi groups emerging recently via social media such as Facebook, as well as on mainstream television.

I definitely noticed that more and more people are coming out on Facebook. They are not staying in the closet. People are more accepting. People know what it is; there have been a few more TV shows recently. It's kind of becoming equivalent with the movement of the LGBT community. I think it is going to be legal for three people to get married soon, because there are several high profile triads. We really need some celebrity triads. That would help a lot because Trans celebrities really had a huge impact on the Trans community.

Patricia's relationship is with five people so they employ the use of Google Calendar. Utilizing synchronous technology has reduced the need for the amount of formal meetings.

For sleeping arrangements we have Google Calendar. We rotate through the days to make that work. Its adjustable if needed. As of right now we have a date night, so if someone wants to swap out that's OK. We try to schedule date nights for nights that aren't already scheduled. I think at the end of the day sleeping arrangements are going to wind up being a Google Calendar thing. We've got some fairly solid sleeping arrangement schedules that work pretty well.

In terms of romantic logistics, members of Melissa's relationship utilize technology to help in organizing and communicating dates, sleeping arrangement, family events, and meetings.

We are faithful followers of my lady of Google calendar, as many poly

relationships can attest. Basically all five of us have shared our calendars with

each other so we can see who is busy. When one dyad or triad has a date night

then it goes on the calendar and can be seen. Then the fairly explicit rule is if

someone is on a date you don't bug them unless it's an emergency and you

respect the date… Part of what the calendar is for is seeing what is going on.

When you don't have explicit expectations, that's when there's potential for

miscommunication and potential problems.

Individual boundaries. Many participants described effective communication as

also focusing on when and how to set boundaries with partners. This included knowing

when to ask a partner to turn to a different partner for support. It also included being

aware of and knowing how to prevent triangulation in terms of speaking as a group rather

than an individual. Patricia described her ability to assert a boundary around providing

support for a partner without feeling as if she was abandoning her partner.

I got into a fight with one of my partners a few days ago and one of my responses

was that 'I can't continue this discussion with you. You have to continue this

discussion with someone else.' I directed him to one of the other partners to ask

them if they could continue this. Having those other people to rely on, knowing he

can get the same kind of support out of them that he could get out of me was

great. It means that I can make my needs a priority when I need to. I can say

things like 'I am not in a place where I can do this, I have to say no.' You know

plenty of other places to get support and I don't have to feel guilty about that. I

know that there is more support out there and I don't feel I have to be the person

who is bearing the burden all of the time.

Blake highlighted the need to address each person in a polyfi relationship on an

individual level versus a group or dyad. This prevents triangulation and also focuses on

self-accountability, as well as building self-awareness of specific needs.

If someone comes to me with a polytriad problem, usually the biggest problem is

that they keep trying to address the two-others in the triad as a group instead of

taking the time to deal with each of those persons as an individual. They treat it

like it's a package deal, which doesn't work with people. You have to treat people

like individuals. If you treat an individual like a group, one or both of those

parties are going to feel like neither of them are being addressed at all, because

both of them are having needs they are trying to communicate, neglected.

The narratives would suggest that communication in a variety of forms was an

important component to successfully navigating a group romantic relationship. This not

only included the amount of intentional communication, but a communication style that

was direct, up-front, and transparent. Technologies such as shared calendars, group text,

and conference calling assisted in participant's communication efforts.

Balancing Everyone's Needs

Several participants stated that a relationship is not balanced, in terms of being

equal or the exact same with each partner. Participants described the desire to attain

balance within individual roles, individual needs, and logistics. The three subthemes

derived from the narratives in this section include: (a) individual roles; (b) needs distribution; and (c) logistical balancing.

Individual roles. There were a variety of relationship roles among participants with many of those roles focused on nurturing. Some participants described these roles based on partner interests and desires that had the potential of shifting or evolving over time. This included the roles of care-taking, providing, child-rearing, and in Michele's case, peace-keeping.

> I think that I am the peace keeper in many ways. I try to keep people on the same page, or get my partners together to work things out. I have those skills where people can talk to me.

Melissa found that each person's role in the family builds upon individual strength and allows more collaboration than a dyadic relationship.

> We all bring different things to the table, different ways of thinking and helping each other. I am a fairly practical person. My friends refer to me as the mom of the group. I don't feel like I have been forced into that position, it is just one that I come by in my personality. I bring that strength of keeping people on task with things. I try hard to keep everyone together and communicating. We just have these individual strengths that we bring to each other. We get to help each other out with.

Karen's concept of gender roles shifted when her dyadic relationship transitioned to a polycule.

When my partner and I first entered a relationship we had traditional ideas of gender roles, but adding a third person makes you question how much of this is based on who I am as an individual versus what I think society wants me to be. I thought I couldn't do nontraditional gender role activities, but at some point I realized that was silly. It may have coincided with questioning gender roles. I definitely feel more free in general knowing that being non traditional is probably OK.

Tim also shifted his view on traditional male dominant gender roles and soon found himself feeling comfortable transitioning into a more submissive role.

He was very clear about what he wanted from the start. He does have a dominant way about him and this was kind of his desire for us to keep going along with that… We both have our roles, makes my expectations clear and easy to understand and it allows for not having too many bosses to run everything. Because the roles are there we don't have to fight over power or who makes decisions, we can contribute ideas when we talk about something and it doesn't make some sort of problem come up to compete for power in terms of who wins the issue or something like that.

Kim found that her gender role, in terms of being a mother, wife, and in a committed relationship did not really change once she entered a triad.

I never thought I would be in anything except a monogamous relationship and that was my expectation originally but certainly not any more. In many ways my

role is not all that different than what I thought it would be, in that I can have a

loving, in depth relationship with both of them, individually, as well as together.

Her role, as well as others in the relationship did change, however, after

experiencing a catastrophic accident last year placing her on long-term disability.

My role has changed considerably since I had the accident last year. I had never

been dependent on either of them as I had to be with both of them since last year.

I never thought that would happen. It's different than it would have been a year

ago…How does it affect us? Not a whole lot as it turns out, but me feeling so

dependent for a year changed me because I am no longer the bread winner, but it

didn't change the relationship in any way. Individually with different people it did

change that.

Aaron found that gender roles were also fluid in their triad, which made for a

unique and more robust dynamic.

What I love about this relationship triad, is that we have a lot of variety in our

dynamics. We have a lot of everything when it comes to gender.

Needs distribution. Many participants described the need to make sure

everyone's needs were being met. For some, this was described as being one of the more

difficult logistical components of a polyfi relationship. For example, Michele found that

balancing her own needs with the needs of her partners could be challenging at times

when taking into consideration the group's dynamic.

You have to balance all of the needs. My relationship with one partner is one way,

the other partner the other, and then their relationship together impacts me as

well. So when having to balance my needs but not impinge on their relationship I

found that there are a lot of balls to juggle at the same time.

Susan described challenges around balancing the needs of everyone in a polyfi

relationship compared to just one other in a dyad.

There's also consciously having to deal with multiple people and you have to

consciously figure out ways to balance everyone being happy. In the dyad

relationship I noticed it kind of gets into they will just do something to shut the

other one up versus in a triad we are consciously doing things to try and help each

other out and make each other better…There's a lot more conscious thought,

because there's more people involved and therefore it's more active. It's not such

a lazy relationship that I feel a lot of dyad relationships get to be over time.

Patricia expressed the importance of reciprocity, describing that it was important

to respect everyone's needs in the relationship.

It's about respecting each person's needs and balancing what you know about

their needs and what you know about your own personal needs. How they need it

is almost as important as what they need. Is there a way I can help that person get

that need, or is it better off if someone else meets that need.

Laurie had a significant trauma history and therefore recognized that she had

some special needs in relationship-attachment that were above and beyond common

circumstances. As a result, she hoped that two partners might be a better fit for

distributing the load, which ended up in this circumstance to not be the case.

One of the reasons I thought poly was a good idea for me was because I feel in a

relationship I have special needs. I have social anxiety. Mine could be a little

much for a single person, so I thought maybe if I have another person it would be

spread out between two and I might be easier to handle. It has worked out that

way, but not always. I went into this thinking I would get twice the love, twice the

affection, twice the good feelings and I didn't even get as much as a regular

relationship, it was weird. It was awkward.

Aaron also described that all three individuals in their triad have a trauma history.

They were grateful for the added support and sense of community acceptance provided

by a triad.

I have lots of trauma to figure out and I am kind of unique. I communicate

differently. For anyone to be with me long term is not easy. I am not normal. So

that is what we are working through right now. They have been incredibly

supportive. With the dynamics changing after my injury it has brought us closer.

Logistical balancing. For many participants there was a need to plan basic

logistics such as sleeping arrangements or dyadic time together. Participants described

that such logistics needed to be managed in an equitable way. Kim described, "It is

difficult enough to make sure that both parties in a traditional two person relationship get

equal time, equal recognition, equal work. When you have three it is almost logarithmic

in aspect." Karen pointed out that this constant change could at times be unsettling.

I tried to be really fair in terms of sleeping arrangements when we were first

trying to figure everything out. What that ended up happening was every other

night one partner and I would swap who was sleeping upstairs with our other partner….the constant change was really hard for me and I think if we had an additional bedroom it would have been easier to say that each of the three of us have our own rooms and any of the three of us can sleep where we want, but that wasn't an option at the time.

Patricia handled the day-to-day financial logistics. Their quin or five-person relationship, requires regular communication. She also pointed out that when it comes to romance, it is often determined between the triads and dyads.

The day to day making sure the accounts have money, etc. is my role. We all have debit cards from a group account. We have rules for what types of expenses go on that account. Relationship logistics, we have a lot of family meetings to make sure we are all on the same page. Our plan is to have them once a week to make sure we are all on the same page as far as what is happening or what we need to share together as a unit. There are a lot of meetings. In terms of romantic relationships, a lot of that is handled on an individual basis between the dyads or triads.

Felicia found that because of a lack of precedent or role models, logistical decision-making was a process that had to evolve through trial and error.

I have to admit it has been a challenge. We have had to figure out over time how to make decisions, because my husband and I were together for so long. We had to learn how to make decisions when we moved to a three-person structure…There are smaller decisions I might make with my husband. But any major decision about what we are going to do or how we are going to live we

make together…If we are going to spend time alone, sometimes it is kind of fluid, if we plan to spend time alone sometimes we just end up wanting the other person there if they are free. It kind of feels like there is never enough time because the other person has so much to do anyway.

Melissa described each partner's logistical role in the relationship is potentially fluid but is also based on, "basically playing to people's strengths and to those who have time." She described their process for determining logistical roles in the household.

As things come up we decide who will do what based on what they are good at and enjoy. We did start a spreadsheet for household chores. Like who likes this chore? Who detests this chore? Who is not a fan but is willing to do it? So that way we can divide up chores so that it is fair but also take into consideration people's strengths and desires.

Blake described the benefits of having more people accessible during times of need and when distributing workloads.

When someone wanted more, then the other two parties would address it. There was kind of a load balancing, which is the best thing about a polyfi relationship. Something needed to get done, but didn't have to belong to a certain person. It was kind of neat that there was another person there. That was probably the primary practical thing about being in a polyfi relationship. Not just physical and financial stuff, but that was emotional stuff like if one person is at work and cannot cut out for a person in need, there is another person available a lot of the time, which was nice, especially when you have a three year old running around.

Balancing everyone's needs in the relationship was not necessarily based on equality, but on equal consideration. For example some participants did not seek the same amount of attention or same amount of involvement. But most participants shared that each participant in the relationship needed to have an equal amount of value.

Greater Self-Actualization

Several narratives followed themes around being able to fulfill more dreams or desires. Participants described a stronger ability to reach personal goals and express themselves on a deeper level than afforded by a dyadic relationship. Each of these categories focused on ways in which participants or their partners were able to accomplish a personal goal, desire, or awareness as the result of the perceived benefits of a group relationship. The three subthemes derived from the narratives in this section include: (a) career fulfillment; (b) same-sex expression; and (c) multiple sides of self.

Career fulfillment. In many cases participants had the opportunity to either pursue deeper career or home interests. Kim highlighted the fact that because a polyfi relationship has more resources and people it allows participants to have a better work/life balance.

> He's been allowed to do the things he wanted to with his career because I wouldn't have been left at home alone with the kids. He was there and he knew there was a stable relationship between me and her that he could come back to.

Karen believed that a polyfi relationship allows individuals to reach personal goals because of the additional support of a group relationship.

People should choose things that make them happier. Choose things that help them reach their potential, to help them be better at who they want to be. Reaching towards that whole self-actualization thing, where you choose the people you want in your life who are supportive of you and who you can be supportive of, so that you are all moving towards that higher ground.

Kim defined her triad as something that works for them. She found that it allowed her to pursue her career in medicine without having to give up or sacrifice aspects of her family life.

I would say that I define our relationship as something that works for us, that has allowed me as a woman to fulfill what I wanted to fulfill. I wanted to go into medicine and therefore it just seemed to work really well for us… I was concerned about what I was going to be able to do in my profession or in higher education and felt like I wasn't going to be able to have any children. How could I balance all of these things and children and a husband? That's a whole lot and none of them are very forgiving. When my female partner came into the picture it gave me the ability to want to have children and a career.

Same-sex expression. Many participants described same-sex sexual expression as a factor for engaging in their polyfi relationship. This was accompanied with similar stigma associated with same-sex relationships. For example, Aaron stated that anxiety around shame has been a barrier in same-sex expression and self-actualization.

For me it's just a life of being shamed for everything I feel. A life of shame for

loving both sexes from both the queer and hetero community. I have been shamed

for not being able to pick a gender from both communities. It has been hell just

not being monogamous. I had several partners who wanted to sleep with other

girls, but they didn't want me to sleep with someone else. So I wasn't allowed to

be myself. I just knew that I needed to get away from everybody who was trying

to mold me to their way.

This shame created an internal sense of homonegativity that makes it hard for

Aaron to engage with their male same-sex partner. It also interferes with their ability to

be fully present in the relationship.

It is hard to let my guard down and let him touch me. He and I do everything

together, so it's hard for me to switch into the mode that this is my boyfriend too.

So I am working on finding how I can be myself fully when both of them are

present…They are helping me see that it is internalized.

Melissa found herself denying a deeper part of her existence, which was her

bisexual identity. After living in a monogamous heterosexual relationship for a period of

time she was finally secure enough to come out of the closet and explore her same-sex

attractions.

My husband and I were very much monogamous throughout college. I like to tell

people that I was so far in the closet I could have been in Narnia. I was a senior in

college until I could admit to myself I wasn't straight. My husband was the first

person I told. After we got married I thought it might be nice to be with someone

else other than the one person I have been with. Neither of us are one-night-stand

people so if this is something we want to pursue, how do we do it?

Karen's self-perception of her own sexual identity transitioned over time as she

became exposed to alternative relationship styles. She stressed the importance of

allowing an individual to express themselves in a way that works for them.

> I guess for me it started because I identified as bisexual before I was aware of the
>
> fluidity of gender and then I changed my term to pansexual.... Its not that being
>
> one way is better than the other because you love everyone. It might be better for
>
> that individual because that's who they need to be, or what helps them be their
>
> best. But I just think that polyamory should be one more option on the table for
>
> anyone to be able to look at and review and compare and contrast and then make
>
> an informed decision.

> Her female partner struggled with internal homonegativity primarily because of

her family of origin environment. This affected her self-concept, which in turn impacted

the relationship.

> She comes from a very closed, nonaccepting background, to the point where I
>
> said something like, well because you are bisexual, and she said I am not
>
> bisexual, what are you talking about. So she would have sex with women, but not
>
> be comfortable calling herself bisexual, so she had some things that she hadn't
>
> figured out with herself. If she wasn't comfortable calling herself bisexual, then

she was never going to call me her girlfriend, because straight girls don't have

girlfriends.

Multiple sides of self. Participants described that they were able to express

multiple sides of themselves when they were with more than one partner. This was

described in terms of how each relationship has its own dynamic to bring out a certain

aspect of an individual's identity. For example, Aaron pointed out that polyfidelity has

been helpful in finding and expressing different sides of their sexual and gender identity.

For me I have always been a lesbian, always been a boy, but for my entire life I

have been fighting to just be me. So I have been poly, queer, a boy; I have been

all these things this whole time. I wasn't allowed to do these things until I came

out here and found these people, and let it happen naturally like it did…For me

and my FTM male partner it is really hard, because I have a dominant relationship

with our female partner sexually. It's more of my masculine side with her that

comes out. With him it pulls my gay boy side, my femininity. So I have struggled

to allow myself to get in touch with that part of myself.

Blake stated that he sensed his wife wanted to explore other sides of herself that

included same-sex interests and female friendship.

We'd been married about six years and my wife expressed to me that she wanted

a girlfriend to share, specifically polyfidelity. I explained to her how hard that

would be. I was kind of semifamiliar with it from situations when I was younger.

She came to me in tears. She was expressing to me that she needed to express this

other half of herself. It wasn't just about sexuality. It was literally she had gone

her entire life, getting crushes, and sort of falling for this girl and that girl, always

having to let go, because she came from a very conservative Roman Catholic

family.

Karen also pointed out that knowing many sides of an individual's self, including

where one derives confidence and what one wants out of life could be a helpful

foundation when starting a polyfi relationship.

One of the things that people want out of any relationship is to feel like their best

selves, to feel capable of being their best, and to feel supported, encouraged, and

surrounded by the love needed to be the best person…I feel like in order to be

successful in any relationship you have to first figure out yourself. You have to

know who you are, where your confidence comes from, you have to know what

you want, where you want to be going. Obviously nobody's perfect and no one's

going to have it all figured out, but I think the more that you can have yourself

figured out before coming into a relationship, the more you are going to bring to

the table and the more sort of like the solid rock foundation that you're going to

be able to help provide.

The ability to express multiple sides on an individual's personality was an

important value common throughout the narratives. This included being able to express

same-sex attraction, express a variety of roles within the relationship, and express parts of

an individual that might not otherwise come out with only one other partner. Expression

was also extended to include actualizing dreams or more effectively balancing both a

successful career and family life, which could contribute to an individual's sense of fulfillment in a relationship (Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011).

Helping Polyfi

In this section there were six categories of subthemes that emerged from the narratives that could be tied to how a counselor might better serve the counseling needs of individuals within a polyfi relationship. These subthemes included the different types of discrimination and rejection experienced by polyfi families; styles of communication and conflict negotiation; a variety of challenges potentially associated with attachment; the dynamics of polyfi relationships, and specific experiences, as well as suggestions, regarding counseling such relationships. These subthemes include:

1) Poly Discrimination

2) Increased Rejection

3) Communication Intelligence

4) Attachment Awareness

5) Exponential Dynamics

6) Experiences With Helping Professionals

Poly Discrimination

Mitigating exposure to risk was a common theme in polyfi narratives. In many cases the threat of discrimination, both perceived and real, was pervasive. Participants experienced discrimination, whether real or perceived, in terms of family, friend, and workplace rejection. The lack of legal protection, society's institutional and legal policies, as well as social disregard for anything outside of a mononormative framework,

prevented many polyfi individuals from feeling fully invested in their community, safe from physical and emotional harm, and free from potential future conflict. The four subthemes derived from the narratives in this section include: (a) relationship discrimination; (b) protective measures, (c) racial discrimination; and (d) institutional and legal discrimination.

Relationship discrimination. Discrimination towards a polyfidelitous relationship in general was a common theme in the narratives. Many participants struggled with both internalized and external polynegativity. For example, Eleanor described how internal polynegativity resulted in relationship stress, as well as feeling insignificant in the relationship.

> They were both in the closet about being poly and about her being bisexual, so I could not meet any of their family members. That was a huge deal, me being a secret in their life. We couldn't put it on Facebook. Their best friends knew, but none of their acquaintances knew if they ran into them. Generally it was just not a thing that they brought up to people they were not close to. I felt like they were allowing other people's prejudice to impact our relationship… If you are going to be with me, be with me, don't hide me. I have always been open and am open to the consequences. If my family members are going to disown me because of who I am with then they don't deserve to be in my life. They didn't have the same opinion… It felt like they were taking the preference of the family members over me.

Aaron believes that public attitude is biased towards a dyadic viewpoint and therefore deals with a lot of polynegativity.

I have heard mixed reviews about triads all throughout my life and I hear a lot of negativity. A lot of people look down on it because three is a crowd; one is left out.

She believes that polyamory and polyfidelity are probably more common than public perception and that many relationships are simply invisible to society.

It's probably more common than people think. Because society isn't accepting of these strange ideas a lot of people don't talk about it. You have a lot of people quietly living their lives in an alternative way. But if there was more visibility and acceptance and this idea that who you choose to love doesn't change how good of a person you are allowed to be. Then the more accepting the environment, the more likely others will come forward.

Protective measures. Most participants recognized that the consequence of rejection could be significant and cause on-going challenges. There were varying levels of outness between the participants as a result. Some groups used their invisibility as a protective factor, while others simply kept the nature of their relationship ambiguous. For example, Michele stated she is still weary of becoming too involved in her neighborhood out of fear of being outed and the discrimination that could take place towards her children.

We are a little more cautious at home, like our neighbors knowing certain things,

because if that goes poorly that could really make living at home challenging. So

that is a place we are very cautious about.

While poly-relationships are often systemically erased or go undiscussed, this has

also been helpful in terms of using that invisibility as a protective factor against poly

discrimination.

People just don't usually pick up on it…So we are careful about how we approach

it and create a strategy for it. There is more explanation for those who already

know. It's not as tough as an inter-racial couple, for example, which is a lot

harder, because it is immediately obvious and if someone has a problem with it

they might react.

Karen used ambiguity as a protective measure. Outsiders who were invested

might inquire about the relationship while others often minded their own business.

Socially we left it open for interpretation. If the three of us went somewhere and

we were holding hands to just let people think about it what they were going to

think about it. Usually people mind their own business and don't care. I think

some people thought that the female partner and I were Lesbians and that the male

partner was my divorced husband. We would let people think what they wanted to

think and not very many people asked many questions.

Tim stated that it is rare that they share their poly identity with people outside of a

close-knit group. This was to avoid drawing attention to them.

It is something that we have been a little hesitant about being completely out about. There are some people who know, but not many. If it is an event, or where my wife would have to go to a work event or something like that it is generally that I would go with her. There's all sorts of reasons for that, not the least that it is simpler, doesn't require any explanation, doesn't have the potential to make anybody be freaked out or whatever.

Mary didn't provide information to outsiders about her relationship structure unless she was asked and felt safe in disclosing. She primarily found herself mimicking dyadic relationships, shifting between her same-sex partner and her heterosexual partner.

Sometimes the three of us go places, but often each different twos go different places. So I think what we managed to do in all these years is confuse people. And I don't care. It's none of their business anyway.

Felicia had mixed feelings about coming out as being poly to others. While she desperately sought social support and community connection she also experienced significant rejection throughout her relationship resulting in becoming more cautious about being out.

There's always a risk, people at work can find out any time, but publicly proclaiming it, I think the risk is too high.

Tim also pointed out that coming out was a continual process and that the most stress came from new situations or meeting new people in the outside world.

It is usually things that have to do with the outside world. Negotiating social stigma and things that come up related to that. Unusual situations that have to be

felt out: starting a new school, meeting new people. There are just so many little

examples. So many little iterations of how it all plays out and who they are in

terms to how they relate with us. That can range from work places to schools,

doctors, friends, all sorts of stuff like that. That is the biggest challenge.

Felicia described her frustration around having to always deal with coming out,

which results in drawing attention to herself, which has been difficult for her.

We went to a relative's funeral and we introduced my other partner and she

responded why would you do that. He said I am here to support him and she said

yeah right. With the memory of that happening, every time coming out I just don't

know what to expect. That is not the typical reaction but especially that being at a

funeral, felt really terrible. I want to be focused on the funeral, not the people's

reactions to us. I feel like the meaning of these events has changed. It's hard to

focus on the event because everything is focused on my coming out. It was one

big coming out party.

Kim used her invisibility as a way to avoid rejection, focusing on maintaining a

professional boundary with work friends.

I don't talk about it at work. It is nobody's business. I make it a policy. I usually

talk about kids because that's such a bonding experience with nurses, so I

probably talk about the kids a lot if I am going to talk about things personal. I

don't talk about my husband. I don't talk about a three person relationship at all.

It's nobody's business and it is not something that I think… I'm not a curiosity

item is the way I think about it.

Racial discrimination. Racial discrimination was also identified as a stressor on some of the participant's polyfi relationships. Some participants stated that being in a multiple race relationship was more provocative than the fact that they were in a polyfi relationship. For example, Mary shared that racial discrimination has always been a greater relationship stressor than the fact that they are in a three-person relationship.

> The challenge has been the fact that we are a Black man with two White women. It has been more racially problematic than anything else, honestly. I think with two women, one can be a nanny, one can be another mother, I don't know what people think…But it is the fact that we are with a Black man that makes the difference.

Kim also found that the inter-racial nature of her relationship is what outsiders have found more provoking than their polyfi relationship.

> We have an added curiosity that we not only have a poly relationship, but that it's inter-racial. That seems to fascinate people more. But our personal lives are not up for curiosity or discussion.

Aaron described racial discrimination in terms of microaggressions in which outsiders assume an African American third is not a part of the triad, even when it may be fairly obvious.

> What happens all of the time, all three of us standing there clearly together. What happens to him is that people don't think he is with us and say can I help you. They think he is bothering us. They assume it is odd that he is standing with us.

So it's more of a racial issue than a poly issue, which is messed up. We want our

child to grow up appreciating difference.

Institutional and legal discrimination. Several participants experienced both

institutional discrimination and legal discrimination. Some instances were more blatant

than others, yet participants described feeling a constant threat. For example, Felicia

brought up several references from the workplace to her neighborhood where she felt

potentially exposed or vulnerable due to some of the negative rejection she has

experienced from friends and family.

I think the most important thing we could do in polyamory is to try to get

antidiscrimination laws passed, because that's what we really need. It is scary to

think that there is absolutely no protection at all, in housing, employment, or

anything else. We have zero recourse legally. A company could fire them over

this and there is no recourse that we would have.

Mary was less concerned about legality in terms of the relationship until children

came into the picture. She experienced compounded discrimination for being both poly

and part of a mixed-race relationship.

We have been together for nearly forty years. At first we didn't have children and

it was no big deal. But then when we started having children we went to an

attorney to make it so that the three of us could be the parents to the three of the

children. We didn't get very far because by the end of the session we were told it

was against the law, you cannot do this, if anybody knew about this people could

take your children from you, and especially with our male partner being black, this would not be good.

Mary went on to share her challenging experience working with a lawyer when trying to seek legal protection.

Because we have been together for nearly forty years, at first we didn't have children and so legality was no big deal, but then when we started having children we went to an attorney to make it so that the three of us could be the parents to the three of the children. We went to a lawyer because we wanted things to be very legal, but going to a lawyer was expensive. Ultimately we were told that if we did this he would go to jail, the children would all be taken away from us, how could I be raising someone else's children, and how could she be raising someone else's children, it's immoral, especially with a Black man, it's this and that… and we said OK thank-you. We will just do it the way we do it. We are as honest as we can be and sometimes it gets you nowhere.

Tim also sought out the help of an attorney for legal protection regarding the children. He too found that their relationship did not have much legal protection, nor did nonbiologically tied individuals in the relationship. Legally he is not considered kin but is viewed as a domestic partner with a Letter of Agreement.

We actually had an attorney in the area draw up some documents kind of clarifying that in writing and she told us its not something that is well settled in law and could be completely legally binding so to try not to have that expectation.

Eleanor described how a commitment ceremony felt second-class and that she would prefer to become an activist, which put stress on the relationship due to the anxiety of confrontation.

You cannot discriminate against LGBT people, so you should not discriminate against polyamorous people. We have the right just like everyone else does. If marriage as a social institution beyond a social contract then they should have the right to have that. People get married for a lot of reasons, not just to have a few papers signed… When we talked about having a commitment ceremony, I said I don't want a commitment ceremony until we can get married. That kind of put some tension between us, I was like no I am not having a commitment ceremony, I am going to marry you. We are going to get married, if the government wants to oppress us we will fight them and of course she is not in a place to do that right now and I am not either.

Eleanor also pointed out that she, as well as her loved ones are fearful of a lack of legal protection because of some of the stories involving poly discrimination.

That's why my mom was scared. She called me crying multiple times worried about the idea that my now ex-partner was going to have my child taken away and that I might lose my job if I put that I am poly on Facebook and stuff like that.

Tim pointed out that if society accepted and acknowledged polyfi relationships it would create a better framework for partner roles and provide a place for their family to exist.

If society recognized our relationship it would allow us to immediately have an obvious role in various situations. Such as a work function where a spouse is invited, there wouldn't be, is society just immediately understood it as any other relationship, like a monogamous relationship.

While Melissa had a good experience with her legal dealings, she still had to devise her own legal protection for co-owning property, next of kin, and succession planning.

We worked with a lawyer who made poly relationships part of his specialty. The first thing we did was sit down with him to decide finances and who pays for what, or if we decide to bring someone into the house, or if someone dies. The way we are buying this house is that we are forming a trust and LLC, so that's how we will take possession of the house. Yes, there was a massive paper signing before moving into the house. It's basically a five person prenup agreement.

Karen believed that much of the stigma around polyfidelity comes from antiquated ideas regarding the exploitive nature of polygamy.

The concept of polygamy has a lot of ties to old school Mormonism. The idea of polyfidelity is much more modern, feminist, and it's about equality of the sexes and genders. It's really just about being open to the possibility of love wherever you find it, regardless of gender. Because the word polygamy is loaded with these historical concepts, people might have a lot of antiquated ideas about that word, which is completely different from modern polyamory.

Michele was optimistic that as a society we were evolving towards becoming more inclusive and accepting of alternative relationships, as she had a fairly positive experience when dealing with an end-of-relationship custody battle.

Through the separation with my previous partner we had to go through a custody battle and were involved with some legal issues, which again is very risky in polyamory. Luckily we were nothing but supported by the legal system. The legal system actually supported that all three of the parents should not be removed from the children's lives which I think was amazing.

Michele also pointed out how the hurdle in gaining legal recognition of polyfi relationships may be more difficult than the process behind legalization of same-sex relationships.

I think there is going to be additional concern because the legalization of marriage between three or more partners is a lot more complicated than a dyadic same-sex marriage.

Racial discrimination contributed to more stress than any other form of discrimination. The lack of legal protection for polyfi families placed those who were in multiple-race relationships at greater risk. Some strategies to mitigate this risk included remaining invisible or isolating from their immediate community.

Increased Rejection

Like discrimination, rejection and stigmatization were very real problems in several of the participant's narratives. This included rejection by family members, both immediate and surrounding. Friend rejection included childhood friends, current friends,

and future friendships that were derailed. Family rejection was perhaps the most devastating, followed by friend rejection, and then finally the threat of workplace rejection. While specific examples of workplace rejection were not revealed in the narratives, it was clear that some participants experience stress from both the perceived and real threat of job loss and discrimination. The three subthemes derived from the narratives in this section include: (a) family rejection; (b) friend rejection; and (c) workplace rejection.

Family rejection. Family rejection was a common problem in at least one of the partner's families of origin. Some of the most common reasons were based on fear for preserving the original dyad, thoughts that the poly-lifestyle was immoral, and the perception that a drive towards adding a partner was primarily sexual in nature. Melissa shared how even if there are accepting family members in the relationship, those partners who have rejecting family members places stress on the entire relationship as a whole.

> We have some really supportive family members, parents, and what not. We also have had some parents that have needed more time to come to terms with choices their children have made. That has been a stress factor on our family. There is one parent in particular that has basically stopped speaking to one of our partners. That is a huge stress on him, because he still loves his dad, which in turn is a huge stress on us. It is OK that he is frustrated, but we have to be careful about how much frustration we display, because its like I can be mad at my mom but don't you be mad at my mom.

Michele reframed her family's rejection by stating she would prefer to be around those who are supportive rather than judgmental.

> We had an unfortunate situation with our families. We are not in touch with any of our families because we are poly, all of our families reacted poorly…That's definitely been hard, but I don't know if I would even call that a negative because in my mind that's allowed us to get away from toxic people in our lives. If you can't support who we are then I don't want you in my life anyway. It has been kind of a blessing in disguise.

Felicia was caught off guard by the fact that both her family and friends were dismissive and did not even try to attempt to understand a polyfi relationship.

> I knew they would be scared, but I thought they would see how right we are for each other. But they didn't even try. Our relationship didn't even exist as a possibility; it was just considered something that was bad. They only looked at the structure of it. They only saw the relationship as being unfair as sharing or competition; that my partners were competing for me.

When Felicia brought her third partner home for a holiday her family rejected her resulting in her no longer wanting to celebrate the holidays.

> Before I was with my life partner my husband and I would spend time with my mom. Then my life partner came into the picture and my life partner wasn't welcome there. So we stopped spending holidays there. We kind of stopped celebrating holidays at that point.

Patricia found that her mother rejected her at first but over time has become more affirming of her polyfi relationship.

My mom considered it a personal failing that I decided to be poly. She thought that only if she had left dad sooner I wouldn't be this broken, which is outrageous. She has gotten better each year, but she has struggled with that a lot. At first she didn't talk about it for the first year. The next year she tried to convince me to date some other guy who was not poly. This year she is finally asking questions about it. There is some literature and so she has been looking through the literature.

Patricia's extended family was a little more challenging, which again made it difficult to participate in family events such as birthdays or holidays. It was also difficult to witness the pain of some of her partner's families when they are rejecting.

My uncle stopped talking to me in November because I told him that I was poly and he told me he didn't approve. I told him I didn't need him to approve, but that it was something he needed to know because we might show up for Christmas. One of my partners is dealing with his dad who is a pastor and is not accepting, which is hurting him greatly. The family constraints are difficult.

When rejection was not a factor participants found the support incredibly helpful. Aaron was surprised to find that their mother treated the relationship like any other relationship, which was impactful and rewarding.

I was surprised with my mother who is innocent, sweet, and Christian. I couldn't have asked her to do it any better. When I talk to her about my problems she treats

it like she would any other relationship and her advice comes from a loving place and its legit advice. So mom surprised me.

Friend rejection. Like family rejection, many participants reported challenges when attempting to share their lives with friends. This included social rejection, loss of support system, and blaming individuals for failed marriages. Blake stated that the fear of social rejection could have been a significant stressor and contributed to part of his relationship's demise.

That may have played into why she split away from the relationship because she realized she was always going to have to explain herself to other people. Eventually we would have to deal with her parents. She would have to come out and she is terrified about that.

Felicia pointed out that the very nature of her relationship is provoking to outsiders and that even open-minded individuals had difficulty overcoming their own relationship prejudice.

If it was like being gay I wouldn't worry at all. But the thing about polyfidelity is that even people who are very liberal say I could never do that, because you know, we are breaking the norm of there being one person. So I am an activist whether I want to be or not and just our existence challenges monogamy. Just our existence brings up very potent issues for people.

Felicia poignantly described how the absence of a significant support system eventually leads to a strong sense of disenfranchisement.

It has been a very long road for us trying to be accepted by other people. We told everyone 5 years ago and even to the present people are still coming around. Not having that support feels terrible, so that support can really help in a relationship and we don't have that, we are always having to help other people with their emotional reaction to us.

Felicia also noted that a lack of support was also at times a source of rejection, in which friends villainized her as betraying her commitment to monogamy.

Right from the start people were just scared to death for one thing. People did not recognize us as a family. We had to define ourselves as family. Everyone was scared that we were going to get a divorce, or that I was a bad person, that I was hurting my husband. So the support for my marriage went way down, that was extremely painful, after 15 years of marriage it was like my marital relationship now doesn't get the support it used to. That really hurt being downgraded and being seen as something that was unstable and not respected in the same way.

Felicia described the emotional drain that rejection has had both individually and on the relationship as a whole.

The pain is still there for me. The pain doesn't completely end once a friend eventually has accepted us. Because during the time when I wanted them to celebrate with us, we thought a few years ago maybe we would have a commitment ceremony, and just dealing with other people's negative emotions and trying to help them through all of their difficulties around what we were doing, it was so draining. I was like oh god, so this commitment ceremony is just

going to be another way for us to be judged. So I kind of lost my enthusiasm for that. I feel worn out. I feel tired.

Workplace rejection. While there were no reported incidents of blatant poly discrimination in the workforce, the threat of being outed or chastised was a common concern of a few participants. Felicia noted that currently their workplace seems to be a liberal and open place, but that there is always the looming threat of potentially being outed to someone who might react poorly, or that the political climate could at some point down the road change, exposing them to the possible threat of discrimination.

In terms of the work place, most of the people who have rejected us would consider themselves liberal. They support gay rights. They support transgender rights. They support economic redistribution. So these are not conservative people who have slighted us and have not really been in support of this.

Tim discussed his trepidation about the relationship dynamics in general, as well as his fear of how being outed might affect his work or family.

We all had some reservations as things started to get more serious. We had times we would talk about how this would really play out on a daily basis. Such as who would we tell, what would people think, or how would it affect our work. I honestly had an overall trepidation about how this was going to work and where this was going to go. I did have some fears in terms of I didn't want this to hurt our family. I didn't want this to end or damage our relationship, things like that.

Themes of rejection, stigmatization, and discrimination were common in the narratives. Family and friend rejection was perhaps the most impactful. The threat of

neighborhood or workplace rejection was also on the minds of several participants at one point in their relationship.

Communication Intelligence

As noted earlier, communication was a central theme of the narratives, with several examples of the type of communication necessary for maintaining a healthy group relationship. This often involved transparent, open, and direct communication. This category emerged as specific ways that communication might be helpful in a polyfi relationship. The three subthemes derived from the narratives in this section include: (a) communication skills; (b) conflict negotiation; and (c) emotional intelligence.

Communication skills. In this section I share further themes of communication specific to communication skills that fostered the health of a polyfi relationship. Aaron pointed out that communication is most likely the most difficult component of a group relationship. They stated, "I think the most challenging part is communication and all of us come from a different background with different scars and baggage." Tim highlighted the fact that the nature of a successful group relationship draws out more open and inclusive communication from each individual in the relationship.

> There is sort of a need to share more things, keep things out in the open more, so everyone understands things and isn't left out. There is more of an appreciation of those things.

Michele stressed the importance of communicating from an individual's own experience rather than speaking for somebody else. She also pointed out the benefits of

having an additional partner point out problems within one of the unique relationships within the overall relationship.

> You really speak for yourself. Speak from your own experience. If two partners are sharing a concern, you don't gang up on somebody, but you speak from your own personal experience only. If one partner is being affected because the other two are having an issue, that partner could speak up and say 'hey you two are avoiding each other, you need to sit down and address this issue whatever it is because its affecting us and the family.' I think that is a real benefit, getting an outside perspective can be really helpful.

Blake believed that a challenge to communication often results from the fear of being judged, which was the case in his relationship.

> The risk of trying to be totally honest in communication puts you at risk for judgment. Most people desire romantic relationships because it's a break from judgment. If you don't put yourself out there you can't be really judged, which is a hard part of relationships. So there are people out there who don't really want to communicate.

Laurie believed that teaching open and transparent communication rooted in respect and levity can help facilitate a healthy polyfi relationship.

> Teach transparent communication. I don't think that will happen with selective communication. It has to be everything is on the table in order to work. There should be a poly handbook that people get on respect. Plus, people who can laugh

with each other can get through tough times together. When you have a tense

moment and someone cracks a joke you shake up the tension, start over, and

realize you are friends coming from the same place.

Melissa's five-person relationship continues to figure out how to best

communicate with one another. She found that the romantic element seems to add a level

of pressure that was otherwise not there when her partners were first her friends.

Right now we are in a place where we are still kind of figuring out how to talk to

each other. We went from being a triad and couple who were all friends with each

other to being this polycule and there is a difference there that we are still trying

to navigate and communicate with each other. It's almost like it was a little easier

to communicate with them when there weren't the romantic entanglements. It

feels like it raises the stakes of conversation.

She also recognized that triangulation can be insidious and sometimes not as

obvious as she had previously imagined.

You really need to be careful of that triangular communication, because it sneaks

up on you. Because I was aware of it and I was like oh I am not going to do that.

It took me a month to realize that I had been doing it consistently when things

were upsetting me because I was trying to protect these new people in my family

dynamic from what I perceived as either being an inconvenience or upsetting

them. But in the end it just caused strife.

Patricia, who is a part of Melissa's relationship, pointed out that communication is

so important they enlisted the help of a communication coach.

If you can't communicate what's going on in life then everything breaks down really fast. We just had a person come in and give us some training on communication. It was intentional about being good at nonviolent communication.

Conflict negotiation. Negotiating difference was similar in a group relationship as in a dyadic relationship. One notable difference was the ability to turn to a third (or more) to assist in resolving conflict between a particular dyad. Susan stated that negotiating conflict or difference is similar to a dyadic relationship but with more people involved. She pointed out that being conscientious and aware of emotional dynamics plays a role in resolution.

I have a much more intense relationship with my boyfriend, so most of the conflict in the relationship are the two of us butting heads. We are just emotional people. The very few situations when it has been something that literally involves the three of us, we just try to work it out however we can. Usually there is a lot of snapping. When there's a huge blow out we have to back into our corners for a few days and then go 'hey I'm sorry, I miss you.' But I honestly don't believe it's a lot different than with two people. There's just more people involved so you have to be conscientious of more people and have to work things out with more people.

Karen found that additional partners could be helpful for making sure that conflict negotiation between two of the partners was accurate or fair.

When you have a two-person relationship, you tell your partner what you want them to know, and that's that. When you have three people, you can say this is how it happens, but the other person can say no, I was there, it is not what you said, its not how it happened. Maybe there is more accountability for really being honest and straightforward.

For example, Kim stated that having an extra person outside of the dyad has the potential to assist with negotiating conflict or simply provide support for each individual.

Sometimes my partners felt one person was saying something mean to the other. So where does that put me? I could divorce myself entirely, but than it might seem I am taking a side. I could take someone's side. Or I could act like an arbitrator for both sides. I could even bring up something related but that is different. So it adds a different dynamic to a relationship.

Eleanor found that personal issues that go unaccounted for have the potential for creating irreconcilable differences resulting in the discontinuation of the relationship.

He was pretty mad, it was a combination of him being jealous from a time imbalance and then him having anger problems, he could not express that without yelling at me. The day that I broke up with them he threw a dish down in the sink or something and I was like alright that's it. I went into my other partner and said I can't take it, he yelled at me a lot, I came into this relationship and I told you that being yelled at is one of the things that is a hard limit for me because I just got out of this relationship with a guy who yelled at me.

Part of conflict negotiation may involve helping a group relationship disband. The most commonly described disbandment involved one partner leaving the previously formed dyad, while the dyad continued. Eleanor described the huge blow she felt from feeling as if the relationship was a failure after recognizing the need to break-up.

> Well it definitely failed because the outcome was not what we wanted. I guess it didn't fail completely; I got to be in a polyfidelitous triad, that was an accomplishment. I managed to do that for 8 months. But it failed in the respect that when we started spending a lot of time together we had all these great plans and stuff and things we really wanted to do in the future. Then to go from that to breaking up was a huge blow.

Emotional intelligence. Many described that a group relationship required greater awareness of self and others. This was often described as the need for having deeper or stronger emotional intelligence than perhaps those in dyadic relationships. Mary described her role as an empathic listener who would support her partners at the end of their long workday.

> So when they come home they need to dump that so that they can move on with their day and get rid of the stress because you can't hold on to all of those things. So if you give it to somebody else and we talk through it, it helps. Because then we can laugh about it or I can help either one of them.

Eleanor defined emotional intelligence according to counseling theorist Irvin Yalom, which according to her is based on intention versus impact.

It's the ability to interact with other people in a way that allows them to feel good about the interactions you are having and also you feel good about the interactions you are having, so you can manage conflict, decrease conflict, resolve issues that come up. Yalom talks about interpersonal learning…does your intent match your impact.

Blake pointed out the importance of paying attention to the emotional process of others in the relationship instead of reacting in a negative manner.

When one person has negative emotions and express them in the wrong way, other people react. The reaction is never a responsible reaction. To respond you have to pay attention to what's going on with the other person. So if someone in the group has a negative behavior, other people in that group instead of reacting, respond to it and know how to get that person to a place where they know that person to be safe, so they can communicate what they need.

Felicia stated that paying attention to more than one person could be taxing over a period of time. Therefore she not only has to be emotionally intelligent towards both partners, but also emotionally intelligent in contrast to those partners' relationship as well.

Emotionally I would say the thing that is harder for me is that kind of sometimes I feel like there's a split attention, switching from living with one person to two, where it used to be I would spend a whole weekend with one person, and I tend to focus on one person, and then there's more interruptions to that. Its not exactly

emotional, but its having the length of time I spend with one person is not as long
as it used to be.

As pointed out previously, the ability to communicate in an open and transparent
manner was a common theme in the narratives. This included a level of intention that
perhaps takes more effort than the communication between a dyad. However,
communication not only included the amount, style, and conveyance, but also included
and emphasis on self-awareness and emotional intelligence.

Attachment Awareness

This section may help provide insight to the intrapersonal attachment challenges
of a polyfi relationship. Participants described challenges surrounding the amount of time
spent with each partner, dealing with anxiety or anger, and learning how to avoid
jealousy. The four subthemes derived from the narratives in this section include: (a)
attachment challenges; (b) anxiety and vulnerability; (c) anger and resentment; and (d)
jealousy and compersion.

   Attachment challenges. Eleanor described stress and anxiety resulting from
insecure attachment between her other two partners. This became cyclical and resulted in
avoidance of one of the four relationships in their triad.

   The time we spent all three of us together felt kind of stressful for me, because I
   was constantly having to negotiate my affection towards them in my head and it
   had the potential for one of them to get upset. So after they got upset several times
   and I got stressed out all of the time and it never really stopped, like 1 in every 4

times we hung out. I was like OK we just need to spend lots of time alone or one

on one, because we do better that way.

Aaron has childhood attachment challenges as the survivor of abuse and family

adverse childhood events. resecuring attachment within a family has been powerful and

opened up the door for them to start working on the anxiety behind childhood trauma.

When they said they love me and aren't leaving it was a big game changer for me.

That I need to work on this stuff and work on my own fears. If I mess this up

because of my own fears that would be bad. It made me think twice that they

really love me. I have never had a partner say that.

Melissa grew up feeling unattached to peers and expressed how her attachment to

her family of origin was also lacking. She found a polyfi relationship to be cathartic and

attachment-satisfying.

I just love it when we are all together. I was an only child and I grew up around a

lot of adults. I didn't have a lot of peer friends, so now I have this group of peers

that aren't just my friends, they are my family. I know I can rely on them and that

they are there for me. Its just nice when we are all together, or celebrating

together, or even when we are not all together. I was deeply grateful that they are

a deeper part of my life. That's why I would say I have built a family.

Anxiety and vulnerability. Participants described anxiety associated with feeling

more vulnerable. For example, Kim experienced a tremendous amount of uncertainty at

the beginning of her polyfi triad. This was mainly due to what she knew as monogamous

social convention and fear of abandonment.

I think that it was intimidating to me because I thought that I was not going to continue to stay married to this man I love. But I was willing to go out on a limb a little bit and see how far that limb would take me, never being really sure if that limb was going to break or not. I think that the fear going into this for me was great. I am going to have this woman move in with us and then he is either going to leave me, push me aside, or I am going to be out of this relationship because he is going to want her more.

Felicia stated that she tends to worry often, placing the burden on herself to make sure no one feels left out.

Sometimes I don't feel that free to go with one of them and do something with them. They both say you should, that's fine. But I feel awkward about it. Sometimes I end up worrying about how one of them would feel. They always try to convince me that they wouldn't actually be upset. I put a great burden on myself worrying about what the other one would feel. There aren't any rules, but I feel like I am always worried. I put emotional burden on myself, but they tell me they wish I could lift those off of myself. I feel that more, living together, because everyone is right here and I don't want anyone to feel left out.

Laurie's struggle in her triad was largely rooted in the anxiety from being in a more vulnerable position in the relationship. Her current remedy is to only engage in relationships in which she can be in full control.

I will never again go to a pair and be their third. But I could possibly add someone to my pair, because I feel like I am in control now and now it was fair. Fairness is

really important to me, social justice is important to me. But I feel like I will

ensure the fairness in my world and I don't have that guarantee in someone else.

With that couple I was kind of going along for the ride. I felt like my life was

happening to me. I was on the outside looking in. Poly is not about exclusion. I

thought the whole concept of poly was about.

Blake stated that the dynamics of a group relationship contributes to higher

degrees of vulnerability. Oftentimes this vulnerability is in terms of fear around judgment

or entering an already existing dyad with established norms.

When you talk about vulnerability in a group context, you are talking about more

potential for judgment. Because there is a group dynamic within the romance, and

that's not something a lot of people are prepared for, because when you are

vulnerable with one person, you only have to deal with that person's judgment,

now you add a second romantic partner to that dynamic, you are giving two

people the opportunity to agree or disagree with those judgments, you have

created a committee. That's the hard thing for the person who is coming in on the

couple, because the couple is going to have privilege, that committee is already

used to making judgment calls with each other, if they are a good couple.

Michele found that those who make greater sacrifices might experience greater

feelings of vulnerability. For example, the individual who is coming into an already

existing family could be in a very vulnerable position.

Having been a unicorn, I have a unique understanding of what that looks like. It is

a very precarious situation potentially. A single person that is joining a family of

five; so naturally one person versus five. I'm the one who moved in with them. I

gave up my home. I was the one who made a lot of time and energy sacrifices.

Aaron identifies as gender-queer. They struggled with being shamed for same-sex

interests when growing up. It still fosters a low-level of anxiety regarding identity and

self-concept.

It brings up a ton of fears. It brings up everything you hate about yourself. I have

a lot of issues because I was gay. It's been quite a strange life. With that I have

probably had the hardest time.

Eleanor described one of the positive factors contributing to reducing anxiety is

the concept of compersion and self-security.

Feeling compersion, not feeling jealous, but feeling secure in myself is helpful. Its

kind of hard at first dating two people, because there's not only the potential of

rejection from one, but two. There's actually twice the potential for rejection. It's

hard enough to find one person who likes you, let alone two.

Anger and resentment. Themes of anger and resentment emerged when

participants described the absence of reciprocity or felt excluded. Anger was also a factor

when situations were perceived as being unfair. For example, Kim struggled with her

own anger and hurt at the beginning of her relationship primarily because she thought her

partner sought a third as a replacement or better fulfilling partner.

At the beginning of the relationship I was more hurt than anything else. As if I

didn't offer him everything he wanted or needed and she did. But as I have come

to understand it wasn't really about that. It wasn't about that she offered everything, she offered some.

Eleanor stated that unicorn hunting, the concept of adding a third person to an existing dyad in which the third person is not equal, is unfair and can lead to anger or resentment.

I am getting this unicorn hunting thing that is associated with poly that feels really gross. An example is a heterosexualish couple, the girl is usually bisexual, who wants to find one girl to join them, and they want it to be closed. Basically they want to have a primary relationship with each other and then they want a girl to join them, but not to have a primary relationship with anyone else. It feels much more like people who are bored or are trying to be flexible for the bisexual girlfriend but really are actually monogamous.

Laurie expressed some of that resentment when recollecting her experience with noninclusive couple.

Every woman needs a soft place to fall and I didn't have that. It triggered hostility within me… I felt like their dirty little fuck toy and I didn't like it. I didn't realize that it still plays a bigger part; it affects my life today. I did it to myself because I didn't have firmly established ideas of what my own needs were. I take ownership, so I have to learn better and respect the process.

Jealousy and compersion. There were a few themes regarding jealousy that emerged from the narratives oftentimes when a participant felt less valued. Compersion was also a common theme in place of jealousy. Tim described the concept of compersion

by using a simply analogy in terms of family. He stated that when one adds a new child to an individual's family that love is spread between children and not taken away from the others.

> It's like having two children versus one child. Once the second child is born you don't start loving the first child less, it just adds, an overall richer life in terms of the amount of people and love there is.

> Mary did not believe jealousy was a strain in her relationship. She noted that jealousy primarily occurred when someone was less cooperative and more self-serving in spirit.

> People expect there to be a lot of jealousy, instead of wanting to share because you love someone, you want to squeeze their love, you almost want to love them to death. You can't do that to people, when you love them you love them to make them happy and be free. So jealousy is about I am most important, it is not about a single person, no matter what relationship you can't be the most important person there, its not about you.

Felicia expanded on the idea of compersion, highlighting the fact that it is not just individual joy for other partners, but a sense of joy for the group in and of itself.

> Everyone is clear that we all have each other's back and I don't think people are afraid, so there really isn't a reason for jealousy. It is not just compersion, there is certainly I am happy that you are happy, but it's not just that. Its not just that I am happy for you, it's also that he is happy for me and my partner and for our family,

he is happy for the structure and for all of us, not just happy for me. At least the way compersion is talked about it seems too limited.

Mary also pointed out that a relationship built with transparency and a reciprocal love for one another leaves no room for jealousy.

I think we have a wonderful three-person relationship. I really do. I recommend it. Some people I know who know about us wish that they could have what we have. Others say I don't understand why you aren't jealous? And I say, of what? See that's what I don't understand, what would I be jealous of? Loving the same person? How can you be jealous of that? Don't you encourage people to have other relationships? Really, I mean I just don't understand.

Eleanor described the constant threat of jealousy in her relationship, which was due to one of her partners fearing being left out.

Whenever it would seem like the balance was not equal, I felt like I had to be very careful and cautious every time the three of us were together. If they hadn't been jealous or insecure then I wouldn't have had to worry about that constantly. At first he asked me to give her more attention because he thought she was more likely to become jealous. Then when I did, he started being feeling left out and felt that I loved her more than him, that I was giving her more attention and giving her more affection than him. He felt like that was so unacceptable for there to be any imbalance….It seems like the focus was always on her. He and I were always trying to make her happy.

Michele also articulated that jealousy was a signal for something missing or that needs to be attended to within an individual's self in context to the relationship.

Jealousy to me is a waving flag that says 'hey pay attention to me over here, there's a problem.' So jealousy might feel like 'hey I don't want you two to be doing this date,' or whatever it is but usually that's because something is going on within you. For me it might be something like not wanting my other two partners to be texting all of the time because it feels like I get left out. I don't get those texts so that's not fair. So what is the real issue here, which is 'hey I want texts throughout the day saying you are thinking of me,' and then making that request of my partners instead of making the issue about the two of them doing that, which is actually a good thing and something I support. To me jealousy is an opportunity to notice something that you are feeling that you need to have, or noticing something that you need to bring up to your partners.

Laurie's trauma background resulted in what she described as having 'special needs.' This meant that she struggled with trust, attachment, and interpersonal connections. Ironically she found herself in a triad that reenacted the very deficits she feared.

I struggle with compersion…it is because of my own insecurities. I don't want to see him happy because someone else is making him happy. I want to make him happy. I don't feel like I could joyously feel that. I am operating from a place of lack. How can I have compersion when I am not full? You go to her but I am empty. Why are you feeding a stranger when I am hungry? How is that fair?

Melissa believed that jealousy is socially influenced and therefore not escapable despite the type of relationship a person is in.

I have a hard time believing those people who say oh I never get jealous because our society doesn't really train us that way. Jealousy has definitely been something that all of us have dealt with to some degree or not and we try really hard to talk to each other about it and be open to talking about it when its happening.

Jealousy was a factor in Melissa's relationship based on gender. The men viewed themselves originally as rivals, but the women were able to quickly co-exist and relationally work through their female-to-female jealousy challenges.

We encourage the guys to spend time together and build their relationship. When we first started this relationship the two of them struggled with jealousy because they viewed themselves as rivals. But we were like no you need to go hang with each other and remember how to be friends. Not in the same way that the ladies have. Our jealousy hasn't threatened the friendship between us. We do a good mix of the five of us, date time or romantic time, and as a family, hanging out on the couch, family game night, or go to a movie.

Aaron also experienced gender-based challenges with jealousy or insecurity based on feelings of gender-inadequacy because they identify as Female-to-Male (FTM) transgender.

For me there's this fear that my male partner is going to win because he is more of a man and I have more femininity in me. But that's what they love about me.

What he has shown me is that there is no competition between us. There is this

part of me that is loved, appreciated, and valued. He genuinely loves me and loves

her for exactly who we are. He doesn't love her more or love me less, there's

nothing like that in this dynamic. It was like this from the get go, which is

probably smart.

Participants described an elevated level of vulnerability and exposure as the result

of being in a polyfi relationship compared to a dyad. Part of the anxiety was due to the

legal and social vulnerability placed on the individuals in these relationships due to social

prejudice. However, another level of anxiety was the result of insecure attachment. In

most cases insecure attachment as the culprit of subsequent anger and jealousy.

Exponential Dynamics

Part of helping a polyfidelity relationship involves understanding the relational

components that make up the relationship. Several of these elements contributed to the

challenges revealed between participants in the relationship, as well as outsiders. The

four subthemes derived from the narratives in this section include: (a) relationship

structures; (b) amplified reactivity; (c) personal accountability; and (d) village parenting.

Relationship structures. Participants described the structure of their

relationships, which were exponential in nature according to the number of partners.

Participants also described the unique interconnectedness of such relationships. For

example, Michele described how adding one partner to the relationship creates multiple

relationships according to group dynamics.

My most recent polyfidelitous relationship there were three of us and I would say there are four separate relationships. There's the relationship between me and my first partner, me and my second partner, and the relationship between the two of them. Then the three of us have a unique dynamic as well with all three of us. So there are four different relationships that all need to be nurtured and cared for and given priority.

Michele pointed out that when one of those relationships changes or ends it affects the entire family as a whole.

Each dyad affects the others. For example, when my triad split up one person leaving the dynamic threw everything else into question. I had to be very intentional about whether I wanted to stay in the dyad or not, because what I signed up for was the triad, not the dyad. So that completely changes the dynamic. If one person leaves, it breaks up that triad relationship and you have to decide if you're going to stay in a new dynamic or not.

Felicia found that socially her triadic relationship was often reduced to being recognized as individuals. This was invalidating and often resulted in her wanting to avoid those who did not recognize her relationship as equally valid as a dyad. She believed that polyfi relationships are more similar to monogamous couples than perhaps solopoly relationships.

I think in polyamory everything is done separately, but one thing we face is that we tend to have more in common with married couples. We tend to want to have married couple friends because that fits more for us… We are kind of at a

disadvantage, because I don't think many married couples see it that way…It

feels affirming of us as a group together. I think we are not always recognized in

that way. When it was just me and my husband we would both be automatically

invited to things. Now that it is three people it is assumed that we are three

separate entities and we are, but like on a Saturday night when we are invited to

something we would like it to be the same way as if you are inviting a couple over

where you invite their spouse. That's kind of how we consider ourselves. That of

course they would invite all of us. With our real friends that happens but

sometimes with new people that doesn't always happen.

Several participants expressed that polyfi has a higher initial investment than a

dyadic relationship. For example, Blake stated that polyfidelity requires more attention

than a dyadic relationship in terms of paying attention to multiple people.

You have to cultivate the patience, understanding, and the attention it takes to pay

attention to two other people. If you focus just on other people and their feelings

you are going to just get lost in a maze of imperfect communication. Take care of

you first, cultivate patience and understanding, your attention, and use those

things, don't punish yourself for making mistakes while doing that; it's a learning

process.

Laurie found that investing in an existing dyad that was not accountable for their

dyadic privilege made it difficult for her to find her place.

I struggled a lot to find my place. Ultimately that was a huge factor for me leaving

that situation. I didn't feel like I had a place. Or that the place I had was outside.

There were no Christmas parties, no dinners…You kind of want your partner to show you off, you want to meet his family, you want to feel a part of it. I felt very much an outsider.

Amplified reactivity. Kim described conflict in her triad as, "It's the same kind of problem, but its just multiplied." Felicia found that difficulties are also compounded, meaning if one person is in stress it places stress on the additional participants. She also found that with more people, there is also the benefit of having additional resources for resolving those difficulties.

I don't really know if we have ever really had a true conflict. Sometimes we have had an emotional disconnect, but I haven't really felt there was much we truly disagree about. It's more like scared, or feeling misunderstood. I guess one of the unique things in a triad, if something emotional happens with one of my partners the other partner is there to help us with it. Not that they are always able to help, but that is really nice. They can be a bit on the outside of it and if the two of us are more hyped up they can sort of be a calming influence and help us get back to a better place. I think from that standpoint in terms of relationships, in our situation it is helpful. Its like you have a built in therapist all of the time. It doesn't tend to turn into something bad. I think that overall just having three people has been good for conflict because if people are upset then there is always someone else to help who is not feeling that at the same time.

Patricia described this amplification effect with her five-person relationship. She pointed out that even being aware of this magnification has not made it easier to avoid.

We have the same set of stresses that any normal couple would feel facing major

life changes, but it is magnified because there are five of us. So any stress you

could put on a regular couple is the same as the five of us, but it is often amplified

because it can feed on itself. We frequently feed on each other. Each person feeds

off each other's mood. All of a sudden everybody is pissed off. That is definitely

something we have fallen into before and will again despite being more aware of

it.

In the same way that stress is amplified she also articulated how happiness in the

form of joy or support can feed on itself into something larger.

In the same way as stress, the happiness also feeds on itself. Joy is the most

rewarding aspect. If one person is happy it feeds on the other person's happiness.

I don't have to worry about putting too much burden on one person because I can

turn to someone else for support in the family. There is great joy in being able to

also provide that support for another person.

Personal accountability. Personal accountability was a common theme in terms

of dealing with feelings and address needs. This was also common when one individual

in the group did not take accountability for their own personal issues. For example,

Felicia found that she had similar core values and goals with her partners but that the

primary challenges in her relationship are focused on individual personal struggles, such

as anxiety. These struggles impacted everyone in the relationship.

I don't think there could be three people who are more similar in outlook or

values. We don't' really tend to have conflicts over the fundamentals of much of

anything. But we do have our emotional struggles, which are individual problems
that do affect one another. I think one of the struggles we have had is my life
partner has a lot of anxiety problems.... The thing is that all of our goals are
completely in alignment, but some of the psychological issues hold us back, and it
is so frustrating because the psychological issues affects us all.

Michele believed that because of this, personal accountability was a key
ingredient in the success of a polyfi relationship, primarily rooted in being accountable
for communicating an individual's needs.

We were really upfront that personal accountability was really big for us and the
partners that we seek. Because it just works so much better and so much simpler
when you have that in place. I think that again one of those things that really
makes it hard to find a good match because I don't think that is extremely
common in individuals or in relationships, people just really being accountable for
themselves. That's definitely a big piece in our relationships.

Blake also believed that being accountable for an individual's own feelings is one
of the most important factors in a healthy polyfi relationship.

The best advice I have come up with for people in polyfi relationships is be
responsible for your feelings first, and always be responsible for your own
feelings. You don't necessarily have to put you first, but you kind of do. You have
to take as good care of yourself in order to take good care of other people.

Karen pointed out that knowing an individual's self is beneficial in any
relationship, but perhaps more significant in a group relationship.

I think that ideally anyone in a relationship is going to kind of have figured out

who they are as a person already, so that they know what they bring to the table

and they know their worth. One of my partners was still figuring all of that out

and therefore it was hard for them to see themselves as an equal peer.

Patricia described personal accountability as a way to improve on an individual

level and that the need for personal accountability in a successful polyfidelity relationship

intrinsically encourages personal growth for this reason.

I have to be really aware of my own needs. I have to be aware of what's going on

with me and be conscious of who and what I am and what emotions I am feeling,

what needs I have, what wants I have. I have to be aware of that in order to be a

good partner for so many people. I can't just rely on everybody understanding my

idiosyncrasies and then understanding what's happening. I have to be really hyper

aware of what's going on with myself, which encourages me to be the best

version of me that I could be, or at least the most aware version of myself that I

could be.

Michele stated that personal accountability is a rare quality in any relationship but

that it is a major expectation when seeking a partner for a group relationship.

We were really upfront that personal accountability was really big for us and the

partners that we seek. Because it just works so much better and so much simpler

when you have that in place… I don't think that is extremely common in

individuals or in relationships, people just really being accountable for

themselves…. The personal accountability to really own what's mine and let go

of what is not. I was able to get the practice at doing that more in this relationship

than in a dyadic relationship. This relationship gives me the opportunity to

exercise many of the tools. It also brings out issues much clearer and much

sooner, it's a lot harder, whether intentional or unintentional, to have issues go

undetected under the surface. You can really tell when something is going on and

you can bring it up and resolve it much sooner than would otherwise occur in a

dyad.

Eleanor demonstrated how when individuals fail to take care of their own

personal issues it places a burden on the relationship, often resulting in maladaptive

adjustments in behavior.

The underlying unspoken rule was to keep (partner 1) happy, because if she

wasn't happy, none of us was happy. That meant that (partner 2) and I couldn't

have our nights together because there were several weeks in a row where she got

depressed. So (partner 2) and I didn't get to spend any alone time together

because she wanted both of us with her, which was uncomfortable for me.

Village parenting. The narratives revealed themes common to parenting. The

overarching theme focused on having more parenting resources in a polyfi relationship

than in a dyad. There were also themes focused on managing differences in styles of

parenting and dealing with a lack of legal protection. For example, Karen was not as

concerned about moralizing or judgment from prejudicial outsiders, but more about the

fact that there was no legal protection ensuring that her family would not be targeted.

Every once in a while some court case where people are being threatened with

having their child taken away because they are polyamorous…so we had to think

about socially what could potentially go wrong and then more internally, we had

to think about if that would affect our child at all and how it would affect our

child, and just the family dynamic how adding someone to the mix and another

person in the house, how that would affect our kid. We've always been really

careful about who we allow to spend time with our child.

Patricia was one of three in her quin or five-person relationship that is a childhood

abuse survivor. While she was building her family of choice, she liked the idea of giving

her children more options to find the type of support they might need.

The three women in the group all come from abusive backgrounds. We come

from a place where we have ideas of love, family, and how children should be

treated. We want our children to be comfortable with all of the parents and be able

to choose who they want to help them in whatever ways they can. Our plan is that

biology is not going to dictate a whole lot. We want to be intentional about that.

Michele used the word family throughout her interview, highlighting the fact that

in her eyes a polyfi relationship is similar to any other family in terms of prioritizing the

needs of the family and particularly the children within the family.

To me, my primary focus is the kids, the family unit. In my opinion, other types

of poly are more focused on personal pleasure, personal empowerment. I am very

self-sacrificing, where family comes first, I don't come first as an individual, I

think that is kind of the difference in polyfi. People are coming from the center of family rather than the center of themselves.

Kim appreciated having a third parent for making decisions regarding the children. Like a few other participants, children were a priority in the relationship and drove a lot of the decision-making dynamics.

I think that having children drives a lot of how we relate with each other because a lot of decisions are made surrounding that… During those formative years we had to talk a lot more about how we wanted to raised the kids, how we were raising the kids, decisions made around the kids. We found that a lot of times that having each other for support was so important.

She described how including children in the process for adding an additional member to the family was highly rewarding for her.

Having the kids and everybody on the same page is amazing. Being invited into a family by a child is a pretty magical experience honestly. My then seven-year-old son was making a wish on his birthday cake and was wishing that he could have two moms. That was just an amazing experience. Wishing that I could be his mom too, that was just a very heartfelt thing. So I think having the support of everyone in the household is such a great thing.

Melissa shared an anecdotal story about negotiating differences in parenting style. Her story was a reminder of how more people in the mix means more things to consider and more negotiation as part of that process.

One of the most intense conversations we have had with the five of us, I kid you not, was about Santa Claus. With my first partner and I the idea of having Santa Claus and the idea of him being real is very important to us and part of the magic of childhood. For one of my other partners Santa Claus is a lie and he doesn't believe in lying. It's just straight up falsehood that you are telling your children. So one of the things we have to figure out is how we are going to deal with Santa Claus.

As previously noted, the dynamics of a group relationship involves the abundance of both positive and negative influences on the relationship. This amplification was also evident in relational issues such as conflict and negotiating differing viewpoints. This amplification placed more stress on the individual in the relationship, but also contributed to the relationship's strength when directed in a helping fashion.

Experiences With Helping Professionals

Participants described a lack of poly-qualified professionals, as well as a lack of community or self-help resources for addressing challenges in a polyfi relationship. They also described both positive and negative experiences when seeking mental health counseling. Many participants described receiving individual counseling, however a few sought out family counseling, which proved to be more challenging. Finally, participants also shared what they believed might be helpful for those counseling a polyfi relationship. The four subthemes derived from the narratives in this section include: (a) resource deficits and isolation; (b) negative experiences; (c) positive experiences; and (d) ideal experiences.

Resource deficits and isolation. Many participants described little to no known polyfi-friendly mental health professionals. Not only that, but they also reported struggling to find friends or family who could relate to their own situation. There was also a lack of self-help resources or even public role models illustrating helpful strategies for working through challenges in a polyfi relationship. Because of these deficits, participants described turning to each other for support. For example, Aaron described a real struggle in terms of finding friend support that not only accepted their triad, but that could also relate.

> One of my frustrations as a triad is that all three of us feel like we have no one to talk to. So we end up talking to each other. When I am angry and need to vent to a friend, we don't have anybody to do that to, except with each other.

Kim described how the silence around not coming out also led to a resource deficit in terms of support for the relationship and individual challenges within the relationship.

> When we moved we moved to places where we didn't know anybody. The only people we knew when we moved some place was us. No family. Certainly none of us felt comfortable talking to our families about what we were doing. In fact I didn't talk to my family for years. I don't think she talked to her family about what she was doing and how that was going to work out. He didn't talk to his family about it either. We knew nobody where we moved and we knew nobody in the same kind of relationship. We didn't have anybody to ask for advice.

Felicia stated there are growing resources for polyamory but not necessarily for polyfidelity. She wished she could connect with other polyfi families because she believed that polyfi is perhaps more similar to monogamy than polyamory in terms of values or lifestyle.

> I wish to god we could meet another triad like us.... We have from time to time gone to polyamory groups. One thing we have found is there seems to be a real emphasis on the importance of being free and individual freedom stuff. There wasn't anyone in these groups that were polyfi, so we didn't meet anyone like us. I have to say that it took us a long time to figure out that I don't think we share that many values in common with polyamory because it seems to be very individualistic…A lot of what people were saying at the poly meeting would rub us the wrong way. A lot of things they would say sound very libertarian to me… It really didn't seem like a support to us. We felt like a minority within a minority… I think we have a much more communal orientation. Strangely enough I actually feel that we have more in common with a married couple. We tend to have more values in common with them.

Felicia also had a similar challenge as I did in terms of finding timely literature or resources available on polyfidelity.

> It looks like in the past there may have been more emphasis on polyfidelity but it doesn't seem like that now. There were books and things on polyfidelity in the 70s and 80s but it doesn't seem like I see much on that anymore. I'm not really

sure, but I am wondering whether people have gone towards a relationship anarchy kind of model over time.

Susan was one of several participants who had to figure out how to have a polyfi relationship through trial and error.

Honestly, trial and error, this is only my second poly relationship. Before I kind of came to the realization of being poly I was really more unfortunately kind of a serial cheater. I would be dating someone and then find someone else who I would fall in love with, instead of figuring out how to be honest about it and talk it through with people and work it out.

Kim truly believed she was forging the path for a type of relationship unlike any other.

I will confess that the idea of what was happening was not something that I would have thought would have happened. I knew nobody who had the same kind of relationship and I didn't know how to proceed with this relationship and it just kind of happened… For the first few months it was really difficult because none of us had any kind of blueprint or anybody to talk to that we knew. There was no such thing as social media or Internet at that time.

Several participants described the fact that they tended to isolate resulting in a lack of outside support mainly due to the risk of potential rejection. Tim described how this fear of disclosure contributed to this loss.

We have not had much until recently, we did not have really any support from anybody about this. We didn't allow others to know anything about this, so we weren't getting anything back of course. That was never helpful.

Negative experiences. Several participants had demoralizing and denigrating experiences with mental health professionals. As a result some participants avoided returning to mental health professionals for support. For example, Mary sought the help of a professional in order to work out some challenges that came up midway during their 40-year relationship and was met with indignity and dismissal.

When we had problems in the relationship, we went to a psychologist and her recommendation was that I am the intruder, I am the one who needs to leave the relationship, because there was a marriage intact when I came in and I was the one who had changed their relationship. Needless to say we didn't go back to her. We have not sought professional care since. The three of us feel we are educated enough to know the difference between right from wrong. And what we are doing is right.

Felicia pointed out how her experience with a mental health professional was challenging because even poly-friendly counselors tended to be more philosophically oriented towards solopoly rather than polyfidelity. She suggested that solopoly is perhaps more similar to monogamist ideals in many ways.

It would be really helpful if that for whatever problems we are having that all of us, including the counselor, are going to work together to make it better. Sometimes counseling is harmful because there isn't that support. When we have

found a poly-friendly counselor, they are more about libertarian polyamory, where we shouldn't measure our relationship by longevity. Our relationship is not so much a measurement, but instead is our conception of spending the rest of our lives together. I wish a counselor could adapt to and embrace that. I would like someone rooting for us in that way.

Michele stated that many therapists struggle with the concept of personal accountability and individuality. This involves helping each member in the relationship recognize boundaries and how to feel empowered without infringing on others.

It is important to help all parties involved to realize the impact they have on one another and to recognize what is in their control and what is not, the choices they have or don't have. Sometimes people think they don't have any control, or think they have more control than they do. So naming how other people's decisions are affecting you, having a right to the emotions, but not necessarily behaviors. Recognizing all of those parts is so important. Monogamous therapists really struggle with that concept, because they don't empower the individual well enough.

Positive experiences. A few participants reported having positive experiences with a mental health professional. Positive experiences were helpful in terms of providing external support, validation, and acceptance. Patricia stated that her therapist was her primary support system when it came to talking through issues in her five-person relationship.

I like having the ability to go to someone who is not going to judge me about it and be like oh my god everything is horrible. Since day one my therapist has not judged me about the poly thing or given any sign that she has judged me for it. Most people need a therapist who can accept it, move on, and not think it's a terrible life choice that's going to destroy my life. I have had someone who is just neutral or on my side, someone who can focus on the fact that this is just a person rather than a person who is in a weird relationship.

Melissa was also grateful for her therapist, as she was able to turn to someone when friends or family may not be able to relate.

I couldn't talk to my first partner because it was stressing him out, and I couldn't talk to my second partner because it was stressing her out, and I couldn't talk to the others because they had not yet been informed of the issue and we wanted to inform them all together. So instead I just had to drive over to my therapist and kind of freaking out, not being able to connect to anybody, because it's a family issue and I couldn't talk to my family I went and talked to my therapist about it instead.

Ideal experiences. Some participants shared ways in which mental health professionals could improve their service to those in nonmonogamous relationships. This primarily included multicultural concepts such as recognizing an individual's own value system, approaching difference with dignity, and providing unconditional positive regard without judgment. Mary acknowledged that the primary role of a therapist is to help maintain a fair and cooperative spirit among the group.

A therapist could help with making it a level playing field and that's what we

have done well at, is making it a level playing field. We have always been honest

with our children and told them that they need to be civil. Therapists as much as

they want to help, just need to listen. If everyone is handled fairly and

individually everything will work out. You know when you meet someone if they

are a selfish person or a loving person.

Eleanor suggested that counselors consider incorporating psychoeducation on

how to become more self-accountable in dealing with issues that lead to jealousy.

I think counselors should teach compersion because I didn't feel a lot of that from

my previous relationship, but I feel a lot of that now in my open poly relationship.

Dealing with those insecurities as they come along to see if they are reacting to

something because they are worried about being left out or not being the favorite.

Also help in Identifying the insecurities as part of the problem. And teaching

someone how to act out compersion, such as volunteering to watch the kids so we

can go out on a date. Acting in a compersive manner by giving them alone time

even though you would rather be with them.

Melissa believed that an emphasis could be placed on relationship counseling in

general and not just romantic relationships, since ultimately a lot of problems stem from

relational issues between companions or friends.

One of the issues that they are facing, and probably an issue that would come up

as a dynamic in a poly family, is that unfortunately in this culture we don't really

teach men how to talk about their emotions with other men. So both of them were

talking to the three of us about things instead of talking to each other. And talking to each other would have been much better. It's kind of a weird thing, you don't really talk about relationship counseling for friends, and then you throw in a weird factor like oh by the way these two men share three women between them. So having a therapist in that situation would have probably made things go a lot smoother.

Participants described a variety of experiences when it comes to interacting with the professional community, including both medical and mental health. Negative experiences with a mental health professional often resulted in a sense of disenfranchisement that contributed to subsequent isolation. The overall lack of polyfi resources and visibility also contributed to participant's stress.

Summary

Throughout this chapter I identified themes that emerged from the data differentiated between what might be helpful for better understanding polyfidelity and what might be helpful for better serving the counseling needs of individuals in a polyfidelitous relationship. When it comes to understanding a polyfi relationship, abundance was predominant throughout the narratives. Participants expressed having more love, security, and support when compared to their previous dyadic relationships. Participants also revealed the philosophy behind forming such relationships including choosing a family, building an egalitarian but not equal connection to those within the group, and entering the relationship with a spirit of inclusion and reciprocity.

It was also revealed that polyfidelity relationships are often the result of an evolution that began as a dyad. Most relationships transitioned and developed over time, focused on open and honest communication, balancing the needs of everyone within the group, and allowing a sense of fluidity regarding individual roles. The narratives revealed a strong sense of egalitarian valuing of partners that included a particular balance between meeting each individual's needs. Many participants did not express the need to build an equal relationship between each partner but instead focused on building a unique relationship that was fulfilling and allowed for greater self-growth or self-expression.

There were a number of dynamics, challenges, and suggestions expressed throughout the narratives focused within the helping polyfi relationships. Increased levels of discrimination and rejection were common in terms of family, friends, and society. Navigating polyfi relationships also involved more communication skills in terms intentional and attentive styles of communication. Such relationships did not come without challenges including jealousy, anger, resentment, anxiety, and vulnerability.

When deconstructing some of the relationship dynamics, the narratives revealed exponential components in terms of the number of relationships within the group relationship and how such relationships potentially magnify both positive and negative emotions. Finally, participants shared some of their challenges in terms of a deficit of resources, role models, and poly-competent counselors. The shared both positive and negative experiences, as well as suggestions for improving polyfi counseling.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to better understand the lived experiences of individuals participating in a closed group romantic relationship described as polyfidelity. The guiding research questions were focused on revealing internal and external factors that both helped and interfered with the success of the relationship. The nature of hermeneutic phenomenology is based on the dynamics between the participant and researcher. Therefore by its very nature the results of this study are influenced or limited by the areas in which the participant and I have focused on. Regardless of which, the information revealed in this study serves as a foundation for future inquiry. My ultimate goal was to help counselors better serve the needs of these individuals when seeking counseling.

In this chapter I will focus on the potential implications or significance of my findings in relationship to the literature review. Using a relational cultural theory (RCT), social constructionism (SC), and queer theory framework, I offer potential insight on how those findings may help counselors and counselor educators better understand the nature and dynamics of polyfi relationships in order to better assist with potential challenges and help individuals sustain a healthy relationship. Finally, I will discuss potential limitations, recommend ideas for potential future research, and describe how this research might assist in affecting positive social change.

Interpretation of Findings

Philosophical Differentiation Between Polyamory and Polyfidelity

It soon became apparent that defining polyfidelity was more complex than imagined. I learned of an interesting context-based differentiation between polyfidelity and polyexclusivity. Fidelity denotes a level of commitment to a relationship, while exclusivity denotes closing the relationship to other possibilities. Fidelity in open polyamory is often viewed as a commitment to an individual or group, but is often stratified by hierarchy, such as primary partner and secondary partner (Crosswell, 2014).

Fidelity in this context means that an individual may have a primary commitment and fidelity to an individual or group, but not an exclusive commitment. Therefore, several polyamorous individuals defined themselves as polyfidelitous in behavior. This definition of polyfidelity created a noteworthy distinction: a person could be engaged in a long-term multiperson relationship but have the fluidity or option to romantically engage with others outside of the primary relationship. With this definition, findings from this study suggest that fidelity could either be defined as a type of hierarchal commitment or as fluid with the potential to change. This evolution is similar to relationship movement or fluidity over time—as well as orientation fluidity—as suggested by Diamond (2008), Diamond and Butterworth (2008), Eldridge et al. (2010), Manley et al. (2015), and Mereish and Poteat (2015a).

Social constructionism (SC) describes how language can shape an individual's understanding of a particular culture, revealing new meaning behind the lived experiences of marginalized cultures (Efran et al., 2014). The term *polyexclusivity* then becomes a designator of whether or not the individual is currently only with the primary group or is seeing others outside of the primary. This definition could be based on

behaviors or intentions. For example, a polyfi group that is nonexclusive may behave exclusively for several years.

However, a polyfi and polyexclusive group may base their intention on the idea that partners within the group are both committed to one another and are not engaging with others romantically outside of the group. This type of definition broadens the idea of polyfidelity to include anyone who is in a fidelitous or committed relationship with more than one person regardless of the nature of the relationship(s). Queer theory (Halberstam, 2014) is useful for revealing the multitude of potential relationship dynamics in existence that are perhaps still systemically or historically erased.

Second, with this expanded understanding of these concepts it is also interesting to observe that polyfidelitous behavior may be separate from a polyfidelitous philosophy. In the same way that sexual behavior can be different than sexual identity, a relationship label can oftentimes be different than the relationship's behaviors. For example a triad may label themselves as polyfidelitous but not polyexclusive, yet behave exclusive for several years.

As Aguilar (2012) pointed out, individuals may not seek or intend on being in a closed group relationship, but engage in a polyfi relationship out of adapting to others they are involved with (such as a dyad that seeks a polyfi relationship). An additional differentiation is that some individuals seek time-limited relationships that are also committed or exclusive. In this case there are multiple exclusive relationships versus one long-term exclusive relationship. One participant described this as "serial polyfidelity." For the sake of this study however, polyfidelity was originally differentiated as a

synchronous and polycommunal relationship, in which the participants often co-domesticate and have deeper-than-friendships with everyone in the group.

Third, solopoly and relationship anarchy are often concepts based on individuality and autonomy (Crosswell, 2014). In this context, all relationships are polyamorous and there are components of domesticity, fidelity, exclusivity, and synchronicity (Graham, 2014). This differentiation helped reveal why the term polyfidelity may have become less popular over the past several decades (Lano & Parry, 1995). However, this diminishes the philosophical ideology behind contemporary self-identified polyfidelitous relationships.

The ideologies revealed in my narratives suggest that polyfidelity was not exploitive in nature, as is often described when polygamy and polyfidelity are interchanged. The definition of contemporary polygamy is often intertwined with the definition of polyfidelity (Bennion, 2012). Similar with queer theory and the struggles faced by LGBT individuals, a mono-normative culture may simply erase or overlook significant differences among any identity outside of a monogamous norm (Green, 2014). With the exception of potentially one subject who was brought into an existing dyad without equal consideration, I found very little evidence that polyfidelity was exploitive of women or other social groups. This was in contrast to a handful of researchers who describe the potentially exploitive and sexist nature of contemporary polygamy (Bertone & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2014; Buck, 2012; Chapais, 2013; Cherlin, 2010; Clark, 2011; McDermott, 2011; Whitehurst, 2011; Zuk, 2014).

This does not negate the findings of those researchers, but instead suggests that polyfidelity and polygamy deserve differentiation and are perhaps founded on differing

values. For example, polyfi may be more philosophically linked to monogamy and less to solopoly (the classic definition of open polyamory). One participant differentiated this by stating solopoly is often rooted in libertarian ideals based on the idea that individuality and autonomy is of primary concern. In several cases the narratives of participants reflected a more communal philosophy rather than individualistic.

However, individuality was still a significant component to an enduring polyfi relationship. Many participants were drawn to polyfidelity because of the family component, which is based less on individuality and focused more on the mutual benefit of the group as a whole. This included the acceptability of compromise and sacrifice when it comes to meeting personal needs. It also included the idea that the group as a whole was often the central focus and not any one individual. These types of mutual growth-fostering relationships are consistent with relational cultural theorist's views on the benefits behind such connections (Eldridge et al., 2010; Headley & Sangganjanavanich, 2014; Jordan, 2010b).

Therefore polyamory, from an individualistic perspective, may be in contrast to the concept of polyfidelity or chosen dependency, in which an individual chooses to concede, compromise, or sacrifice by following the lead of a collective for the sake of benefiting the whole. This was perhaps the primary contrast between those who identify as polyamorous (often more closely aligned to solopoly) and those who identify as polyfidelitous (often more closely aligned to monogamy). This distinction could help future researchers understand the difference between the intention of self-identified polyamorists and those who identify as polyfidelitous.

Benefits of Polyfidelity

Participants described a variety of benefits associated with being engaged in a polyfi relationship. This was consistent with my findings in the literature as well. For example, Barker (2005) highlighted that polyfidelity has benefits associated with both monogamy and solo poly. The benefits appear to be multifold, with an emphasis on more of nearly everything one finds in a dyadic relationship. Individuals in polyfi relationships indicated that those relationships were similar or better in quality than their previous dyadic relationships, as also described in the findings of Bonello and Cross (2010), Conley et al. (2013), and Parsons et al. (2012).

These benefits included greater rewards and more resources across several domains including love, help, finances, and security. The benefits were also helpful for addressing individuals who have special needs, such as a chronic physical or mental health problem. Finally, contrasting between sexual partners was also found to be beneficial in potentially sustaining new relationship energy. This abundance model is in line with the core tenets of RCT growth-fostering relationships as described by Frey (2013) and Headley and Sangganjanavanich (2014), which focus on a variety of acceptable relationships where individuals are empowered and can meet their needs.

More love. Abundance was a ubiquitous theme among most participants. This included the philosophical notion of love abundance rather than scarcity, as well as the pragmatic notion that there are more resources when there are more people (Aguilar, 2013; Graham, 2014). Sex was a factor, but not a central factor when discussing abundance of love. In fact, sex was not a driving factor for forming a polyfi relationship,

which was similar to what I found in the literature (Chapman, 2010; Conley et al., 2013; Ley, 2009). Relational cultural theory suggests that individuals are drawn towards relationships which foster self-growth and exploration, meeting deeper needs of finding an individual's existential place (Szymanski et al., 2015).

The love abundance model is common among proponents of polyamory who argue that individuals have virtually unlimited capacity for providing love, with the caveat of having only a limitation in time (Aguilar, 2013; Anapol, 2010a; Chapman, 2010; Graham; 2014; Weitzman, Davidson, & Phillips, 2010; Wosick-Correa, 2010). In this model additional romantic relationships when successful do not diminish but instead have the potential to enhance an already existing relationship. This is also consistent with queer theory and RCT, which focus on a variety of acceptable relationships outside of the monogamous norm (Chevrette, 2013; Frey, 2013; Green, 2014).

More depth. Mitchell et al. (2014) also suggested that the desire to seek connections with additional partners was often not based on a lack of connection towards an individual's current partner. Instead, additional connections are viewed as adding additional resources to the relationship resulting in a greater abundance of resources overall. Relational cultural theorists describe these types of connections as growth-fostering relationships, which are not limited by the concept of scarcity (Szymanski, et al., 2015). Abundance was also defined in terms of depth, with respondents stating that when compared to their previous dyadic relationships, their polyfi relationships had: deeper attachment, deeper relationships, deeper level of authenticity, deeper friendships, deeper connections, and deeper emotional experiences.

Participants also used words like, "super close, super bonded, super easy" to describe their relationship connections. Secondary gains include: increase in self-esteem due to more individuals giving positive reinforcement. For example, one participant stated, "Each partner makes me feel sexy in a different way." This finding was unique to the literature and adds to an individual's understanding of how polyfidelity for some individuals, might be viewed as having more robust potential than a dyadic relationship.

More financial security. Several participants reported having a stronger sense of financial security, as well as financial resources, due to additional income earners and economy of scale. Economy of scale is when common domestic needs can be met for less cost per individual than if the individuals were in a dyadic relationship (Glick & Van Hook, 2011). For example, cable television and Internet was the same cost with two people versus five people. While water, electric, or consumption of household goods increased with more people, the increase was less than if the individuals were furnishing their own homes.

Additional income earners meant that individuals had less risk if they were to lose their job. This meant that individuals within the relationship could work less hours without a decline in lifestyle. Participants also reported that an increase in expendable income translated to the ability to pay long-term debt off more quickly such as student loans, mortgages, and car payments. More income earners was also helpful for managing cash flow, as well as assisting someone while under financial strain. While this was a concept found in the literature (Nearing, 1992; Pines & Aronson, 1981), very few recent

studies address the economical significance of a mono-normative economy as revealed in this study.

More time. The idea of abundance also translated into more time. Not only did economy of scale increase financial security and a sense of well-being, but it also meant that there was potentially more time with family and friends as a result. Nearing (1992) and Kerista Commune (1984) were consistent with my findings that domestic needs such as chores, maintenance, and other obligations were split between more individuals lowering the amount of time that any single individual needed to commit to those tasks. This resulted in more time for individuals to pursue their relationships, raise children, engage in hobbies, or develop their career.

More strength. An additional common theme consistent in both my findings and the literature (Nearing, 1992; Lano & Parry, 1995) was the fact that a group relationship has the potential to exploit an individual's strengths. More resources or options then increases the chance of matching strengths to specific roles, resulting in potentially higher odds of personal role fulfillment. In other words, an individual might feel less burdened by the need to do less desirable tasks when there are more partners who may potentially find those tasks desirable. This was also the case when a member of the family had special needs, such as a mental health problem or emotional/physical disability, as there were more potential care providers to divide those tasks.

More assistance for special needs. A few participants described that either they or someone in their group had either physical or emotional special needs. Two participants who had a disability require financial, emotional, and physical support. One

participant identified as Female-to-Male (FTM) transgender and two participant partners also identified as transgender, which may increase healthcare needs such as costs associated with hormone replacement therapy or gender realignment surgeries.

Several participants described intrapersonal struggles surrounding chronic mental health issues such as depression, mood regulation, anxiety, shame, addiction, and trauma history. The dynamic of a group relationship allowed multiple partners to distribute the burden of addressing those needs and also may have given the special need individual a stronger sense of attachment as a result. While resources overall were addressed in the literature (Nearing, 1992) the focus on providing for special needs was a new theme revealed in this study.

More attachment and connection. Similar to the literature, a few participants described that the benefit of a group relationship also follows a similar benefit of finding community (Kerista Commune, 1984; Nearing, 1992). The concept of community or family attachment resonated in several areas including same-sex expression, deeper emotional experiences, and a stronger sense of belonging. Relational cultural theory (RCT) focuses on growth-fostering relationships based on the variety of ways in which an individual might find such attachment or connection (Szymanski et al., 2015). A polyfi relationship may have the potential of providing a deeper sense of community acceptance and the existential opening for finding an individual's place in the world when otherwise an outsider. This parallels similar struggles among individuals who identify as LGBT as articulated by queer theorists (Halberstam, 2014; Zeeman, 2014).

Better Sexual and Gender Expression. Several participants reported having a better sex life than when they were in a monogamous relationship, mainly due to the ability to contrast sexual partners. Some participants described that the circulation of partners strengthens the other partner's bonds. One participant introduced the term polysaturation, which meant that they felt they had come to an ideal number of participants in the relationship without wanting more. As previously noted however, sex was not a driving factor for seeking a polyfi relationship, which was consistent with the literature (Chapman, 2010; Conley et al., 2013; Ley, 2009).

One unique benefit in the quality and quantity of a polyfi relationship that I revealed in this study extended from the already established concept of love abundance. In polyamory literature there are several references to the philosophy of love abundance versus love scarcity (Aguilar, 2013; Anapol, 2010a; Chapman, 2010; Graham; 2014; Weitzman, Davidson, & Phillips, 2010; Wosick-Correa, 2010). This is based on the idea that an additional romantic partner added to an existing relationship does not diminish or take away from the existing relationship. Love is viewed in an abundance framework, in which it is not considered limited, but instead considered a plentiful resource (Bettinger, 2005; Veaux & Rickert, 2014).

What I found was that for many participants who already identified as polyamorous, there wasn't a need for continually circulating through new partners, but that the rotation of a handful of partners was sufficient enough to sustain the desired amount of new relationship energy. This is analogous to desirability surrounding food, in which an individual does not need to have a large number of differences in food, but if

able to rotate between a few favorites, may feel fulfilled longer versus eating only one type of food. I revealed that for many individuals there might be a point of poly-saturation, in which an individual limits the number of romantic partners to a set number who then form a group relationship. This would support RCT's tenet that individuals gravitate towards growth-fostering relationships (Eldridge et al., 2010; Lenz, 2014).

Challenges Regarding Same-Sex Expression

It was interesting to note that every group relationship, whether comprised of mixed-sex or same-sex, involves at least one relationship between two individuals of the same sex. In many cases participants were drawn towards polyfidelity and polyamory in general due to the desire to connect with someone of the same sex or same gender. Some participants downplayed their same-sex involvement and did not view themselves as Bisexual, Gay, or Lesbian. For others, same-sex expression was a source of conflict and anxiety due to perceived social negativity, a common theme in queer theory (Better, 2014; Halberstam, 2014; Zeeman et al, 2014). Similar to the findings of Robinson (2011), Sheff (2014), and Weitzman (2006), some individuals in polyfi relationships were able to advocate and express their same-sex attraction as part of a strategy for social or family acceptance.

A polyfi relationship gave permission for one or more of the participants to engage in same-sex sexual behavior without having to be labeled as Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual. Burleson (2005), Hegarty (2013), MacDowall (2009), and Owen (2011) described similar socio-acceptance challenges in same-sex sexual expression. For those who fall more within a bisexual constellation, there may be the potential to fluidly

express same-sex interests without the stigmatization of being same-sex oriented. The exploration of their same-sex interest may then lead to an awareness or discovery of deeper same-sex attractions.

This fluidity supports Kolesar's (2011), Walker (2014), and Weitzman's (2006) suggestion that pansexuality and bisexuality are more likely tied to alternative relationships such as polyfidelity or polyamory. This was particularly true in the case of one participant who did not publicly identify as gay or bisexual. He transitioned from being physical with his female partner to being exclusively physical with his male partner without protest or expressing a sense of loss, and without identifying as Gay or Bisexual.

Removing Gender Role Rigidity

When discussing relationship roles it was interesting to note that participants were given the opportunity to redefine their roles in the relationship regardless of gender. Deconstructing gender role rigidity is a central component to queer theory, opening the possibilities for more robust and unique roles to emerge (Halberstam, 2014). Consistent with Better (2014) and Diamond and Butterworth (2008) it would appear that in many cases individuals in polyfi relationships are able to define their roles in the relationship outside of traditional gender norms.

There wasn't a need to compulsorily fill a prescriptive gender role but instead define their roles based on strengths, interests, and desires. Role fluidity was also an option as some participants described that their roles in the relationship have changed over time. This was consistent with the literature (Better, 2014; Manley et al., 2015). While care giving was often a role tied to a female participant it did not appear to be out

of duty but based more on a strong desire. In some cases, information from this study helped acknowledge or confirm that participants were able to more effectively balance multiple roles such as being both career-focused and a quarter-time parent.

In contrast, one of the participants prioritized the need of fulfilling her traditional gender role. This included the role of being a mom, having children, being part of a family, finding a monogamous relationship (even if it is with a group). She focused more on fulfilling that collective gender role than on being an individual focused on meeting her own needs. For a few participants, the idea of being a mother seemed to play a bigger role in their life than focusing on what type of relationship they wanted. This brings up the question of whether or not gender roles are a bigger force for some than perhaps their sexual orientation or relationship style?

Relational Components

A core component to relational-cultural therapy involves assessing intrapersonal relationships (Frey, 2013). Both queer theory and social constructionist theory focus on cultural systems and how individuals within a particular culture or group influence one another. In a monogamous relationship this dynamic is straightforward and involves a relationship between two individuals. However, in polyfi relationships there are a variety of relationships to consider in the equation. As researchers know from group counseling, each relationship changes when even one additional member is brought into the group (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). When assessing a group relationship, each relationship combination brings forth a unique relationship dynamic. From a social constructionist perspective those relationships do not act independently from one another but are

influenced by each other and influence other relationships in the group (McNamee &
Hosking, 2012).

As pointed out in the literature, there is very little research or information on the
dynamics of a polyfi group relationship in particular (Pincus, 2011; Tabi, Doster &
Cheney, 2010). Therefore counselors working with polyfi relationships need to take into
consideration all of the potential relationship combinations within the overarching group.
This includes understanding how participant A and B relate differently to each other
when it is just the two of them versus when it is A, B, and C. It also includes recognizing
how the dynamics of A and C influences the relationships between A and B, as well as B
and C. The data from this study as viewed through RCT and SC (Downie & Llewellyn,
2011; Frey, 2013), could help counselors better understand the relational complexity of
counseling a polyfi relationship .

Relationship exponential. Increasing the number of participants in a polycule
dictated additional and unique dynamics. Poly groups estimate that the most common
group relationships are triads, followed by quads (Fleckenstein, Bergstrand, & Cox,
2012). It was discovered that every time a participant is added to a group relationship it
creates an exponential set of unique relationships. This is because one has to consider
both the dyadic and group combinations. While this may not be unique from the literature
(Nearing, 1992), the significance of the number and potential influence of each group
combination is uniquely revealed in this study. For example in triads, as graphed in
Figure 1, the counselor must consider the following dyadic relationships: A – B, B – C,

A – C, as well as the triadic relationship A – B – C. This means there are four separate

and unique relationships that could all be playing a factor in the overall relationship.
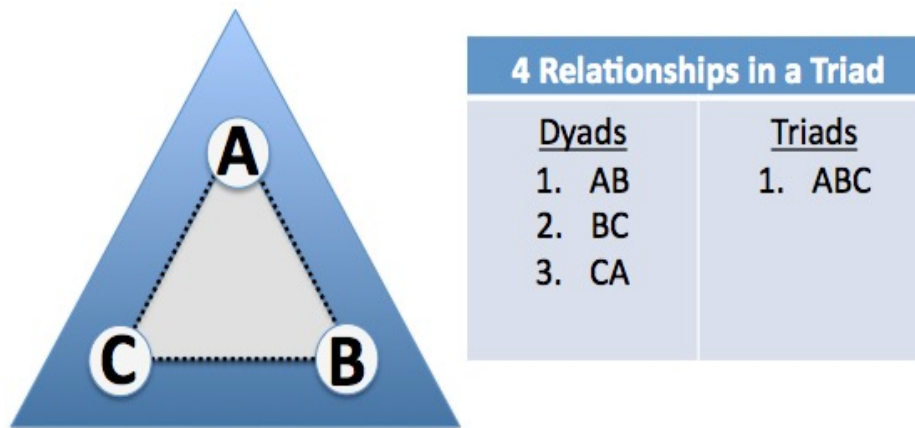
Figure 1. Number of counseling relationships in a triad relationship of three.

However, when introducing one more person into a triad, the relationship

becomes significantly more complex. For example, as previously noted in Figure 1, a

triadic relationship is comprised of four unique relationships that include: A – B, B – C,

C – D, and A – B – C. But when adding an additional partner to make a quad there are

now eleven unique relationships to consider as depicted in Figure 2. This included six

dyads of: A – B, B – C, C – D, D – A, B – D, and C – A; four triads of: A – B – C, A – C

– D, A – B – D, and B – C – D; plus the quad consisting of: A – B – C – D.

Using a relational-cultural theory (RCT) model could help counselors better

understand how the dynamics of a polyfi relationship are often fluctuating or changing

based on the context of the individuals interacting at any particular moment. RCT helps

us understand potential vulnerabilities or disconnections that might arise from the shifting

of such dynamics (Headley & Sangganjanavanich, 2014). RCT and queer theory also

help us recognize how each relationship dynamic has unique power dynamics that might

contribute to researchers' understanding of how each individual is shaped not only by

their connection, but also by the dynamic of those connections to one another (Downie &

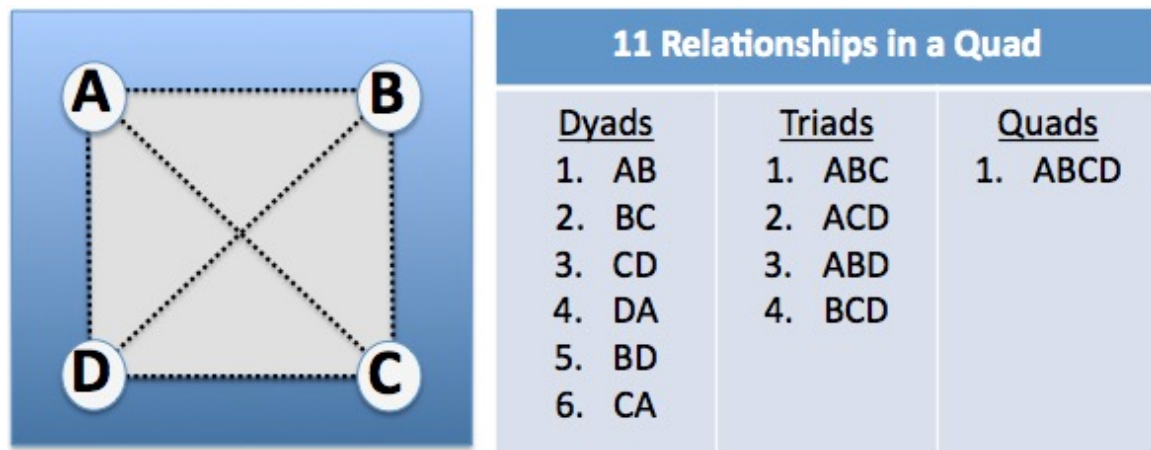Llewellyn, 2011; Halberstam, 2014).

Figure 2. Number of counseling relationships in a quad relationship of four.

I also included a quin (5 person relationship) in this study that incorporated both

polysexual and polyaffective components. In a quin relationship as depicted in Figure 3,

there are ten dyadic relationships that include: A – B, B – C, C – D, D – E, E – A, A – C,

A – D, A – E, B – D, B – E, and C – E; plus ten triadic relationships of A – B – C, A – B

– D, A – B – E, B – C – D, B – C – E, B – D – E, C – D – A, C – D – E, C – E – A, and

D – E – A; plus five quadratic relationships of A – B – C – D, A – B – C – E, A – C – D

– E, A – B – D – E, and B – C – D – E; and the quin of A – B – C – D – E, totaling 26

relationships overall to consider when counseling their family system. It was revealed

from this study that challenges often stem from one or a few of these relationships, but as

noted in RCT, SC, and queer theory this affects and is affected by the relationship

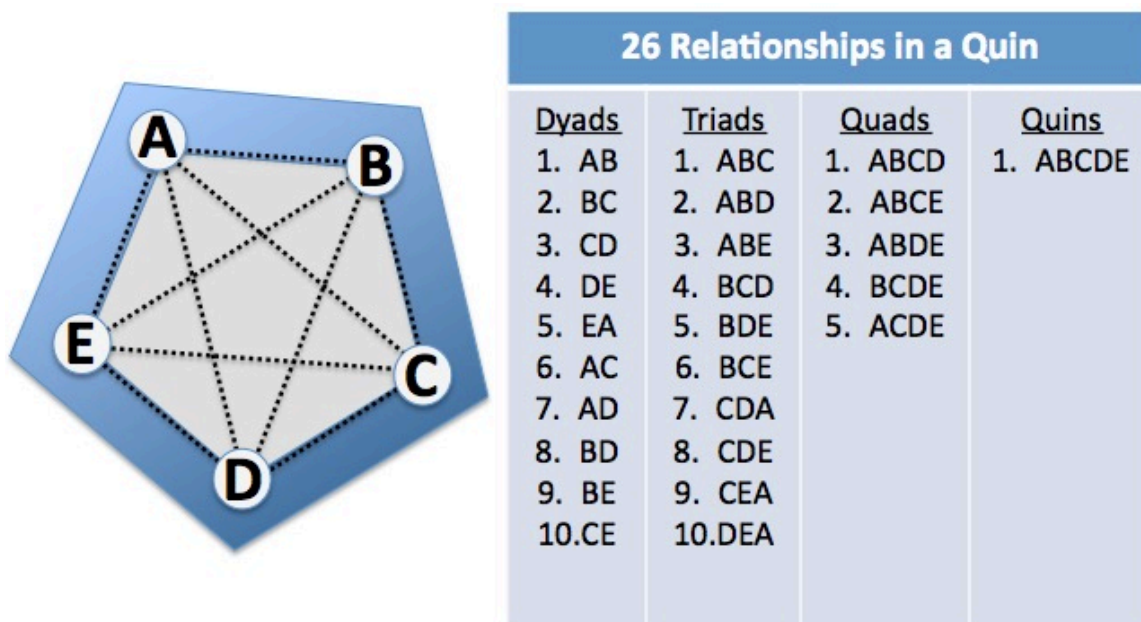dynamic as a whole (Efran, 2014; Halberstam, 2014; Szymanski, 2015).

26 Relationships in a Quin			
Dyads	Triads	Quads	Quins
1. AB	1. ABC	1. ABCD	1. ABCDE
2. BC	2. ABD	2. ABCE	
3. CD	3. ABE	3. ABDE	
4. DE	4. BCD	4. BCDE	
5. EA	5. BDE	5. ACDE	
6. AC	6. BCE		
7. AD	7. CDA		
8. BD	8. CDE		
9. BE	9. CEA		
10.CE	10.DEA		

Figure 3. Number of counseling relationships in a quin relationship of five.

Multiple sides of self. Also noteworthy was the fact that each relationship

(multiple dyads, triads, etc.) within the family relationship brings out different aspects of

the individual depending on who they are with. Participants expressed that this allowed

each individual to feel more fulfilled in being able express multiple dimensions of their

personality. Queer theorists would also argue that this could include same-sex sexual

expression (Halberstam, 2014; Zeeman et al., 2014). Eliason et al. (2012), Sheff (2011),

and Weitzman (2010) discussed some of the parallels that polyamory has with the

struggles encountered by LGBT individuals, such as stigma associated with same-sex

identities. The dynamic of bring out multiple-side of self could also include the less

positive aspects of a person, as well. However, most of the subjects reported more positive results than negative. While this finding was consistent with polyamory literature (Aguilar, 2013; Chapman, 2010; Ferrer, 2007), I was unable to find literature measuring multiple-sides of self in polyfi literature.

Check and Balance Resiliency. In addition to an increase in resources was also an increase in resilience. Relational cultural theory (RCT) focuses on the importance of resilience and how the human desire for growth leads us towards resilience-building strategies (Mereish & Poteat, 2015a). It would appear that a polyfi group relationship has a significant advantage over a dyad in terms of check and balance. Participants described that this was because it is harder for one individual to manipulate or behave unfairly towards one individual without the behavior going unchecked from others in the group. This type of accountability checking seems to reduce the threat of exploitation or unfair behaviors in the relationship when compared to monogamy. This finding was unique from the literature and contributes to researchers' understanding of the benefits of a polyfi relationship.

Drawbacks of a Polyfidelity Relationship

Greater risk of miscommunication. As noted previously in the abundance section, while there are greater resources, there are also greater challenges. It could perhaps go without saying that having more people in a relationship also means there is a greater need for more communication. This type of communication was described by Downie and Llewellyn (2011) and Headley and Sangganjanavanich (2014). All of the participants described the need for regular, open, and transparent communication. It was

not uncommon that a lapse in communication would be the source for at least part of a relationship challenge. An increase in communication not only required more energy to sustain but may also impede on some individual's communication style. Several of the participant's partners were described as introverts. While this did not dictate the amount or ability of communication, I found that most individuals, as also articulated through the framework of RCT, naturally communicate differently or at different intervals (Frey, 2013).

Greater initial attachment risk. While polyfi relationships have the potential for greater attachment in the long run, early on these relationships have some significant challenges regarding developing attachment. This is compounded, much like a dyadic relationship, when a particular individual also suffers with his or her own personal attachment challenges. This was particularly the case for an individual coming into an existing dyad, triad, or more. For example, one of the participants who entered an existing dyad expressed higher levels of anxiety during the formation of her relationship primarily due to the perception that she had to win over two people rather than just one. Themes of vulnerability were common in the narratives, focused largely on a lack of legal recognition or protection. This was similar to the findings in the literature about polyamory or polygamy (Ashbee, 2007; Duff, 2010; Melloy, 2010; Sheff, 2011; Tweedy, 2011; Zoe, 2010).

Greater amount of energy. Participants described that it takes more work and energy to initiate, maintain, and sustain a polyfi relationship. They expressed a need to work harder at the relationship in sustaining other areas of abundance, such as more

communication or meeting more needs. Therefore a polyfi relationship may require someone with greater emotional endurance. Participants of a polyfi relationship have to make a greater investment with the potential for greater rewards, but also greater losses. While there may be more opportunities to relax or do less because of a larger group of people, there is also the emotional burden of having to put forth more energy in engagement and inclusion.

Two participants expressed the need to pay attention to two people rather than just one in and of itself took more energy. This included simply engaging two individuals versus one, as well as inclusivity of multiple people. Another participant expressed that maintaining reciprocity requires effort and therefore is an active process. Previous studies did not specifically address these concerns. Both subthemes of the need for a greater amount of energy and the need for more attention were unique findings resulting from this study.

Halving existing resources. There were also examples of when the abundance model was replaced with the more traditional idea of sharing or halving a resource. This was primarily the case when it comes to attention and time. Participants expressed multiple instances in which they would have liked to have accessibility to their partner and he or she was unavailable. In contrast, several participants also expressed that they fostered a spirit of inclusion. This meant that when one person desired accessibility they could simply engage both partners and always feel included. This was a common challenge described in polyamory literature (Graham, 2014; Pincus, 2011).

Stress magnification. A few participants also described the magnification aspect of a group dynamic in terms of stress magnification. This is perhaps similar to the idea of group hysteria, in which individuals become activated by group emotion or group thoughts. This was described as when one person or dyad is having a conflict or dealing with stress it amplifies the issue by spreading stress throughout the relationship. This happened even in cases when the group was aware of such an effect.

In contrast, one participant described that like stress magnification, there is also magnification of positive emotions or thoughts in the relationship. She described this as happiness that feeds on itself. This is perhaps helpful in understanding polyfi resilience and how to focus on the group's strengths during treatment. Relational cultural theory (RCT) focuses on honing in on strengths within a relationship and how those relationship dynamics might shift at various points in time (Lenz, 2014; Mareish & Poteat, 2015a). Both the concept of stress magnification and how it could be applied within a resilience framework are unique findings from this study.

Increased liability. While there are more resources with more people, it was also demonstrated that there is more potential liability. My findings were consistent with the literature (Lano & Parry, 1995; Nearing, 1992) in terms of increased benefits and liabilities. This included the need to expend more energy through greater communication and engagement; compromise more or take into account more divergent needs; process more conflict and misunderstanding; manage more personal baggage from each individual; and statistically deal with more individuals who could suffer negative life experiences from legal liability such as lawsuits, accidents, and loss of face to personal

liability such as risk-taking, disease transmission, becoming sick, disabled, or incapacitated.

The majority of participants however believed that the benefit of the additional resources outweighed the detriment of potential liabilities. For example, if someone in the family were to become disabled there are still more resources to draw from to handle the additional liability. This is potentially similar to polyamory literature (Sheff, 2014; Veaux & Rickert, 2014), in which this philosophy is compared to the love abundance expressed by a dyad that chooses to have greater numbers of children. The idea is that with more people comes the potential for more future support when things do not go according to plan.

Rejection and threat of rejection. As illustrated by Conley et al. (2012b), Diamond and Butterworth (2008), Goldfeder and Sheff (2013), Klesse (2013), and Labriola (2010), monogamy is often socially considered the only valid relationship construct. Heckert (2010), Emens (2004), Rich (1994) described compulsory monogamy as a driving force that shapes American's choice of engaging in solely two-person relationships. Therefore individuals who present relationships to family and friends outside of such a construct are indeed subject to significant rejection and social stigma. Queer theorists describe similar struggles surrounding rejection and frame the differentiation of power between dominant culture and sexual or gender minorities (Better, 2014; Green, 2014).

The threat of rejection was an ongoing and very real stressor on polyfi relationships. As demonstrated in the literature by Barker and Langdridge, (2010b),

Conley et al. (2013), and Sheff (2014), polyfi individuals were at higher risk for social and family rejection. Rejection can take shape in a variety of forms, but the most common was family, friend, and workplace rejection. It should be noted that microaggressions that occur from like-minded people or people with core similarities are oftentimes more impactful than from outsiders (Galupo, Henise, & Davis, 2014).

While most of the participants had the financial means to own their own home it should also be noted that like other minorities, it is likely that polyfi families experience housing discrimination, neighborhood rejection, spiritual rejection, and rejection within other aspects of each individual's social ecology (McCombs, 2014). The two most caustic forms of rejection took shape in the form of family and friend rejection, consistent to the literature (Sheff, 2014). This was also consistent with sexual and gender minorities, as revealed through the lens of queer theory (Halberstam, 2012).

Regarding jealousy. While jealousy did not appear to be a central problem among many of the participants, it appears to be the primary presumed problem in a polyfi relationship as articulated by a monogamy-centric culture (Bevan, 2011; Dijkstra, Barelds, & Groothof, 2013; Hanson-Sobraske, Boster, & Gaulin, 2013; Luscombe, 2012; Marsh, 2013; McDermott, 2011). Therefore it should be noted that many participants felt the most jealousy when there was a perception that someone in the relationship was behaving unfairly; when an individual failed to take accountability of their own personal attachment challenges, when an individual was viewed as having significantly less value. From the narratives, it would appear that jealousy was actually insignificant or played a small factor in stress placed on a polyfidelity relationship, as previously found in the

literature (Attridge, 2013; Chapman, 2010; Emens, 2004; Gatzeva & Paik, 2011; Harris & Darby, 2010; Rydell, McConnell, & Bringle, 2004; Sheff, 2014).

Bonello and Cross (2010) and Conley et al. (2013) highlighted the fact that higher rates of compersion in polyamorous relationships may account for lower or similar rates of jealousy. Jealousy seems to be a primary fear of outsiders looking in on a polyfidelity relationship. Jealousy was often associated with insecure attachment. However, a unique finding from this study was that a successful polyfidelitous relationship may contribute to higher rates of secure attachment. As noted previously there were also participants who described having special emotional needs and being drawn to polyfi as a result. Therefore it may even be appealing to those with previous attachment challenges.

Mental Health Treatment Themes

There were several subthemes that emerged that could potentially be helpful for counseling treatment, as well. This included: Individuality versus enmeshment, utilizing group magnification, developing relationship skills, developing communication skills, family planning, social support, dealing with loss and rejection, anxiety treatment, and providing resources. Some participant's experiences in counseling were limited in terms of being value or culture bound. Below I described some of these challenges through the lens of social constructionism (SC), relational cultural theory (RCT), and queer theory.

A few described instances where counselors imposed their own moral views of nonmonogamy and even condemned partners that joined a previous dyad for interfering in a dyadic marriage. This was also consistent with the literature that suggested a lack of cultural competency for working with nonmonogamous relationships (Eldridge, 2010;

Halberstam, 2012, Moon, 2008; Pincus, 2011; Shaw et al., 2012; Shelton & Delgado-

Romero, 2011; Walker, 2010; Weitzman, 2006, Zeeman et al., 2014).

Finally, participants expressed the need for counselors to act more in a facilitative

role in order to avoid imposing personal values. Frey (2013) suggested a similar

relationship concept in counseling in general and McCoy et al. (2015) suggested similar

ideas when counseling polyamorous partners. For example, a few participants shared

examples of when their therapist imposed what is often considered a universal value of

equality. However the philosophy in many polyfi relationships is based on reciprocity

and meeting needs not on the idea of splitting something in two equal halves.

As Barker and Langdridge (2010a) and Strauss (2012) pointed out, polygamy or

polyfidelity could indeed be inherently unequal, which does not necessarily mean that

partners are unequally valued. Strauss (2012) also suggested that group relationships

might have varying levels of bonding depending on the partners involved. Therefore

equality or relationship parity was based more on equal value rather than equal share.

This concept is articulated through the lens of RCT, as individuals are continually shaped

by the changing dynamics of all relationships (Lenz, 2014).

Individuality versus enmeshment. While individuality seems to be more central

to solopoly, my findings suggest that maintaining individuality is also important for the

success of a polyfidelity relationship. While this is common to polyamorous literature

(Crosswell, 2014), the importance of individuality may be a unique contribution to

researchers' understanding of polyfi relationships. Several participants expressed the fact

that each individual within the group must recognize his or her needs and be able to

articulate those needs in an open and forthcoming manner. Challenges arose when group members lost their sense of individuality and felt enmeshed in the family system. Therefore as suggested in the literature, enmeshment within group relationships, much like enmeshment in family systems, is still detrimental to health and happiness (Walker, 2010; Weitzman et al., 2010).

Utilizing group magnification. A few unique strengths were identified as part of a polyfi group relationship. First, while stress magnification had a diminishing effect on the relationship the reverse may have the opposite effect. Participants noted that when one in the relationship was happy it also magnified happiness throughout the group. This could be used as a source of resilience-building, in which participants could learn to redirect negative emotions with a focus on what is working in the family. This was a unique contribution found in this study and was in line with RCT's focus on resiliency (Syzymanski et al., 2015).

Triangulation for conflict resolution. Some participants pointed out that because of the dynamic of a group relationship, which involves three or more people, there is a built in mechanism of check and balance among the group members. This was also a unique finding from my study. For example, if there is a conflict between one dyad and one person is recalling a situation in a biased manner, outside group members can call that person out. While technically this is a form of triangulation, it could be used in these instances as a way to prevent bias in conflict resolution. RCT focuses on empowering individuals to capitalize on relationship strengths (Headley &

Sangganjanavanich, 2014). Therefore while triangulation is often considered problematic, in this case it could be helpful.

Developing relationship skills. Polyfi individuals could benefit from assistance with relationship skills in general, such as emotional intelligence, active listening, and validation. These skills could help an individual better meet reciprocity and communication goals. Several participants described that a successful polyfi relationship involved the ability to take ownership of an individual's own issues. This included any emotional baggage, chronic attachment struggles, or deficits in emotional intelligence. This also included managing expectations and managing fears of the unknown. RCT highlights the importance of relational awareness in terms of the challenges or strengths one brings to a relationship (Mereish & Poteat, 2015a).

There was also an emphasis on awareness building, such as being aware of other's needs, being aware of dyadic privilege, and being sensitive to reciprocity and inclusion. This was consistent with polyamory literature and can be applied to polyfidelity relationships as well (Mitchell & Bartholomew, 2014; Ritchie & Barker, 2006). Building these skills is perhaps even more important in a polyfi relationship, because like a dyad, when left unchecked may fester into a larger problem down the road. One participant reported that her experience was caustic when she realized that she was excluded from many activities between the original dyad.

Developing communication skills. As noted by Ritchie and Barker (2006), the systemic erasure of polyamory has contributed to a lack of language in describing the dynamics of nonmonogamous relationships. Social constructionism highlights the

importance of language and how language essentially frames a culture's experience of a phenomenon (Efran et al., 2014; McNamee & Hosking, 2012). Yet communication is perhaps the number one skill needed to successfully navigate a polyfi relationship. It was certainly the most common theme among participants engaged in current long-term polyfi relationships. Therefore a polyfi relationship most likely requires more communication and perhaps keener communication skills than a dyadic relationship. Polyfi individuals may benefit from learning how to communicate openly and directly. Many participants expressed an expectation of transparency, self-awareness, and assertiveness consistent with polyamory literature (Ritchie & Barker, 2006; Sheff 2014; Veaux & Rickert, 2014). They may also require assistance with learning how to bridge the gap between differences in communication style.

There was also an emphasis placed on having a clear understanding of roles and expectations in the relationship, oftentimes requiring greater amounts of communication. An emphasis was placed on an increased amount of intentional communication, such as formal family meetings, weekly check-ins, and even going to therapy together. As mentioned previously, polyfi relationships likely require greater levels of invested energy, at least at the beginning. Some participants suggested that the complex nature of group communication may require a greater effort when it comes to communicating.

While this was not unique from findings in the literature (Sheff, 2014; Veaux & Rickert, 2014), some of the dynamics of these complexities were revealed from this study. Winkielman et al. (2015) expressed ways that social constructionism can assist in generating new language from lived experiences within a culture. In this case, my study

was able to differentiate and reinforce some existing terminology, while also utilizing existing terms for better communicating relationship dynamics.

Family planning. Participants experienced some discrimination in terms of child rearing and took measures to protect themselves. Discrimination was often focused on parenting competency, which was similar to the findings of Amato (2012), Marks (2012), and Pallotta-Chiarolli et al. (2013) who described a similar unsubstantiated challenge posited against LGBT parents. Bennion (2012), Sheff (2014), and Schilling (2012) found that parenting within nonmonogamous relationships does not appear to be any more or less detrimental than other family units, which was consistent with my findings as well. Social constructionism described how truth is often defined on what is considered socially acceptable (Efran et al., 2014). Using this framework it was possible to understand how polyfi and polyamorous families could also be targeted as unhealthy by a mono-normative culture.

Yet challenges remain around child rearing, which included the need to procure legal protection for all of the parents involved, such as nonbiological parents who were also considered a primary parent. Sheff (2014) revealed many of these challenges in terms of how polyamorous families may need to creatively navigate such challenges. This may include helping a polyfi family deal with social discrimination towards both the family and children, such as within the school system, or from community members who file a complaint out of the unfounded fear for child wellbeing. A counselor could also help polyfi participants determine contingency plans in the event of a break-up, death, or when things do not go according to plan.

Social support. Shaw et al. (2012) also found a lack of social support and relatability among several gender and sexual minorities. Pallotta-Chiarolli (2014) and Weitzman et al. (2010) described how historical prejudice, systemic erasure, compounded by intersecting identities can indeed increase the potential for greater mental and physical health challenges. Using a queer theory framework to deconstruct social prejudice, it is possible to see how polyfi relationships struggle with many of the same challenges faced by other minorities (Green, 2014).

As seen in gender transition, same-sex relationships, and inter-racial relationships, the individuals involved often have to keep to themselves isolated early on during the formation of the relationship to avoid external influence or bias (Amato, 2012; APA, 2014; IOM, 2011; Morandini et al., 2015). Consistent with findings similar to other minorities, my findings suggest that isolation serves as a protective factor initially but also results in a loss of social and emotional support. An affirming counselor will therefore be able to provide individuals and families the support they may be lacking during sensitive times in the relationship.

Dealing with loss and rejection. Helping individuals deal with family and friend rejection is most likely a common need. This was consistent with the findings of Emens (2004), Fleckenstein et al. (2012), and Sheff (2014) who found that polyamorous individuals were more likely to report experiencing discrimination then those in a monogamous relationship. When rejected individuals often avoided or were not welcome to family functions, such as holiday gatherings. Therefore many polyfi individuals do not have allies or friends who can relate with them. Participants often isolated from both

family and neighbors out of fear of rejection, reporting that many already experienced

microaggressions in their neighborhoods. This was similar to findings consistent with

LGBT identities as well (Morandini, 2015) as well as polyamorous individuals (Sheff,

2014).

Some participants described rejection from both conservative and liberal friends,

including both the straight and gay community, which was similar to the findings of

MacDowall (2009), Owen (2011), and Page (2004). Common microaggressions were

parallel to LGBT microaggressions described by Shelton and Delgado-Romero (2011)

which included systemic erasure, lack of language for understanding their relationship

dynamic, dismissive attitudes, moralizing judgment, assumptions, and nonverbal cues

such as staring, looks of disapproval, or disgust. These are common themes within queer

theory, as well, which helps deconstruct heterosexist, and in this case mono-normative,

bias (Halberstam, 2014).

The most common assumption by outsiders was that participants who engage in

these relationships are primarily sex seeking, despite the evidence in both the literature

and the data from this study showing that there are a variety of factors that contribute to

why an individual seeks a polyfi relationship including additional resources, family of

choice, and ability to meet a broader variety of needs, such as bisexual connections (Lano

& Parry, 1995; Nearing, 1992; Sheff, 2014).

Galupo et al. (2014) found that microaggressions often have a greater impact

when they come from friends or those who have previously accepted them. One

participant described how it was not only conservative people who discriminated against

her, but also several of her liberal and LGBT friendly allies. Another participant stated that friends often encroached on boundaries by imposing their own values onto the individual. This included imposing monogamous ideals about gender roles of husband and wife, fairness and equality, as well as ideas that polyfidelity is pathological. Therefore, as Conley et al. (2013) suggested, there may indeed be stress and other mental health challenges experienced by polyfidelitous individuals who experience rejection from family, friends, and other social ecologies.

It was also learned that unfortunately racial discrimination was a much larger factor than poly discrimination. Therefore individuals in a mixed-race polyfi relationship will likely need greater support due to compounded rejection. Two participants shared stories of times when their family was in public and people would assume the individual of minority race was not with them. Participants reported greater levels of anxiety when compounded with the threat of legal rejection, as well.

Providing resources. Many participants reported having a lack of role models or that their role models were invisible. They also felt a loss of relatability in terms of a lack of external understanding and lack of professional understanding when seeking mental health guidance. As a result one participant stated that most of their relationship has been "trial and error that turned out to be something beautiful." A mental healthcare professional may be able to provide resources that helped polyfi groups connect with others, as well as resources for finding a poly-competent counselor. In many cases individuals reported local Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) organizations were a good place to find such groups. There was also a reported growing

number of online communities and support groups through social media sites like Facebook and Meetup.

Anxiety treatment. Polyfi participants reported similar minority stress as other sexual and gender minorities, which was in line with the literature (Goldfeder & Sheff, 2013; MacDowall, 2009; Sheff, 2011). Anxiety was a common theme when polyfi individuals had to deal with outsiders who learned about an individual's polyfi relationship and reacted negatively. One participant stated, "Our very existence brings up potent issues for people (outside of the relationship)…and our relationship structure brings up insecurities in others." This was similar to concepts expressed in queer theory in terms of the existence of LGBT relationships (Zeeman et al., 2014). Queer theory allows a space for alternative experiences to exist, ultimately reducing anxiety and attachment challenges in socially-rejecting environments (Better, 2014).

Like minority stress treatment, anxiety based on both real and perceived threats will likely be a common treatment theme (Kleinplatz & Diamond, 2014). This included a lack of legal protection resulting in elevated feelings of exposure and vulnerability. Additional insecurities arose when the relationship had open or changing components, such as a triad in which one individual was fidelitous to the other two but was not exclusive. It is important that a counselor not impose values or moralize the situation due to prejudice, but simply help the individuals involved reduce their anxiety surrounding these differences.

Therapist's Role

Counselors lack education in alternative family structures as pointed out by Conley et al. (2012), Ley (2009), Pincus (2011), and Weitzman (2006). This was consistent with my findings as well indicating a need for developing alternative family cultural awareness. This was compounded by a lack of legal and systemic protection. Goldfeder and Sheff (2013) and Whitehurst (2011) found that polyamorous individuals lack legal protection or legal rights that could protect individuals in a nonmonogamous relationship.

Facilitative Role. It should also be noted that as pointed out previously, acceptance does not equate to competency or relatability, as described in the literature (Arredondo et al, 2014; Berry & Barker, 2014; Melloy, 2010). When looking at Bronfenbrenner's (1995) concept of social ecology and the ecology of human development, it is arguable that each group in and of itself constitutes what could be defined as a culture. Relational cultural theory (RCT) furthers an individual's understanding of culture by describing the contextual nature of relationships (Greenwood, 2014; Headley & Sangganjanavanich, 2014; Lenz, 2014). Therefore according to RCT, a multicultural counselor will always be working outside of his or her own personal culture and within the culture of the relationship(s) of between their clients. A few participants pointed out that they would like their therapist to truly be a facilitator rather than attempting to provide philosophical insight or direct advice regarding the group component of the relationship.

Analyzing Fairness. A few participants encouraged counselors to not view fairness with a reductionist or simplistic lens. This included a desire for the therapist to

explore relationship inequities without the bias of worrying about specific equalities. RCT, Social Constructionist, and Queer theory all help deconstruct power-differences and could be useful in facilitating a better understanding of unequal-yet-balanced relationships (Downie & Llewellyn, 2011). In these frameworks, relationships are continually in motion and contextual-based rather than empirical-based McNamee & Hosking, 2012; Greenwood, 2014). Fairness can then be viewed in terms of what is desired rather than a fixed understanding of parity.

As noted previously, polyfi relationships are often egalitarian but nearly impossible to be completely fair or balanced. In this case, balance is negotiated by understanding differences and making sure that everyone's needs are met, which was consistent with the literature (Barker & Langdridge, 2010a; Strauss, 2012). However previous polyamory studies to date have not gone into much depth regarding an unequal-yet-balanced relationship.

Desire to Be Understood

Finally, while conducting this study I was met with warmness and expressions of gratitude. In terms of these participants, it was clear that there was a desire to have their story told and to be better understood in society. Several participants thanked me for addressing this topic in a positive manner and in a way that was focused on better serving the needs of polyfi relationships in a mental health counseling setting. Participants also recommended me to friends and other individuals who were in similar relationships. The fact that I had made connections and established reputability within some polyfi communities perhaps contributed to building a strong rapport.

Some polyamorous researchers have had challenges identifying individuals largely because of the risk of stigmatization (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2013; Sheff, 2014). However the literature indicates that poly families desire more visibility and understanding in order to address the risks and challenges they face (Fleckenstein et al., 2012; Graham, 2014; Luscombe, 2012; Melloy, 2010). I believe that my ability to establish a strong rapport was based on my own personal disclosure identifying as polyfidelitous. This included establishing a credible relationship with some existing polyamorous researchers. I also used affirming language in my marketing and recruitment announcements (see Appendices A & G). Finally, my emphasis on the confidentiality of the study and how seriously I viewed participant confidentiality may have also contributed to participants referring me to others.

Limitations of the Study

Sampling Limitations

The limitations on sample size are a significant factor in this study. First, the sample was gathered through snowball or convenience methods, in which participants were recruited primarily through a word-of-mouth and potentially homogenous network. Second, while the sample included 12 unique relationships, including heterosexual, bisexual, and queer identified participants, they were limited in their age, longevity, scope, and nature. For example, the majority of the participants ranged between 26 – 46 years old, with two participants who were over the age of 60. While at least three groups had been together for 10 years or longer, most of the relationships were also fairly new or less than 5 years in duration. I also did not include exclusive Gay or Lesbian-identified

same-sex group relationships, nor did I include relationships with greater degrees of complexity such as live-action-role-play or kinksters.

While I attempted to gather participants from a variety of geographical locations, there were still limitations based on the particular cultures specific to this sample. A third limitation was the fact that several of my participants were cisgender, and only one identified as queer. One group was comprised of three biological women, two who identified as FTM transgender and pansexual, while the other identified as heterosexual. I did not include any gay or lesbian oriented polyfi relationships comprised of all of the same gender because no one in that category responded to my marketing outreach.

As described in Chapter 1, the results of the study were limited to primarily middle class, well-educated Americans. Almost all of the participants were White but four of the participants were in mixed-race relationships. I was able to interview two individuals who were part of the same poly-triad and two individuals who were part of the same poly-quin. There were no ethical issues that arose as a result of having more than one individual from the same relationship. Not only that, but the experiences of each of those individuals in the same relationship was quite unique in comparison with their partner. Participants were given the option to voluntarily provide nonidentifiable demographic information. Not all of the participants included the full details of their demographics. However, In Table 3, I outlined the majority of the participant's demographics.

Table 3

Voluntary demographics of most of the participants interviewed

Race	Age	Education Level
White	65	Doctoral
White	45	Doctoral
White	41	Doctoral
White	63	Masters
White	30	Masters
White	31	Masters
White	35	Masters
Asian Pacific Islander	34	Masters
White	29	Bachelors
White	32	Trade School
White	37	GED

Data and Analysis Limitations

There were also limitations with my data collection process, as I did not have participants fact check or transcript check, nor did I verify my interpretations of their statements. The nature of this study limited the number of questions I could address and therefore the findings are specific to specific topics chosen by the researcher and not necessarily central to the lived experiences of polyfi individuals. Therefore data from this study does not represent the complete lived experience of polyfi individuals, nor does it address the full range of both strengths and limitations of such relationships.

An additional limitation may be due to the fact that despite my original sampling intention of finding individuals who were all romantically involved with one another, I ended up sampling a large number of relationships that had at least one component of polyaffectivity rather than everyone in the relationship being sexually involved with one another. This was largely due to a lack of established language or standard definitions, which made the definition of polyfidelity quite broad and open-ended with most of the participants who responded.

I also ended up gathering all of my interview information via electronic phone interviews, in which case I was not able to observe the participant directly. Gathering information in such a manner is considered self-reporting, which has limitations. The first limitation is the fact that individuals are sharing information based on their perception of an event and not from an outside individual who is observing the event. The participant runs the risk of conveying memories that are biased due to personal feelings, thoughts, or historical inaccuracies. For example, a participant may unknowingly or knowingly recall a past memory in a way that makes them look more favorable or omits unpleasant memories.

The same risk is true in terms of self-report studies conducted within stigmatized populations. Marginalized populations at times run the risk of wanting to be viewed more favorably and therefore may omit or adjust information shared in order to do so (Ahmed, 2006b; Palmer et al., 2010). This limitation is significant in hermeneutic research primarily because participant narratives are left unchallenged in order to allow themes to emerge from the participant's actual words. The goal is to reveal themes based on the

individual's narrative that help the researcher understand how those individuals construct meaning in context to their lived experiences (Armour, 2009; Lopez &Willis, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Other types of phenomenological studies may incorporate methods based more on researcher observation and assessment (Finlay, 2012). In this case, however, the information that is revealed is solely dependant on the accuracy of the participant's recollection and willingness to share. Therefore data from this study runs the risk of omitting deeper more significant challenges encountered by engaging in a polyfi relationship. There may be a tendency for information gathered in this study to be distorted in a more favorable manner.

Recommendations

Consistent with Barker (2005), Bertone and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2014), and Manley et al. (2015), it was evident that polyfi relationships have been systemically and historically omitted or invalidated. In the very least, information from this study has brought to light some of the strengths and challenges unique to a polyfidelity relationship and could act as a starting point for future research. Information from this study also helps polyfidelity become recognized as a unique component to polyamory and helps represent polyfi in academic literature since there is very little literature focused specifically on this topic (Anderson, 2010; Baker, 2005; Chapman, 2010; Conley et al., 2013; Sheff, 2014). The robust information gathered in this study suggests that there are significant components unique to group relationships worthy of further exploration. From

a relational psychology perspective it may even be helpful for deconstructing or better understanding organizational leadership and group dynamics.

I was able to recruit participants fairly easily and continue to receive inquiries from interested parties. This suggests that individuals in these relationships desire representation and wish to further social understanding of dynamics of these relationships. It was evident that polyfi individuals struggle from a variety of rejection. Information from this study has the potential to help outsiders, as well as professionals, better understand and humanize the struggles that individuals face in these relationships. It can also help outsiders recognize the value behind such relationships and why an individual may desire to engage in a polyfi group relationship. Chevrette (2013), Green (2014), Halberstam (2014), and Zeeman et al. (2014) helped reveal these power imbalances, in terms of rejecting behaviors by society and family, towards anyone engaged in a relationship that is outside of the dominant monogamous norm.

Information from this study was also helpful in terms of recognizing that regardless of gender there is the potential for expanding relationship roles. For example, it was determined that polyfi participants have a wide variety of relationship roles that do not necessarily follow gender norms or convention. Participants were able to create roles based on individual strengths, interests, and needs. This could aid in further supporting the idea that gender is socially constructed and the process behind which gender identity is socially embedded in terms of relationship roles. Additional studies could use this narrative data to aid in better understanding social patterns regarding gender construction.

Information from this study provides new perspectives on themes that are common in any relationship and perhaps sheds light on relational aspects of monogamy. These findings could support the idea of polyfi being a relationship orientation as suggested by several researchers (Barker & Langdridge, 2010a; Ferrer, 2007; Kolesar, 2011; Manley et al., 2015; Tweedy, 2011). This information could better inform mental health professionals on how to work through some of those issues regardless of whether the relationship is polyfi or monogamous. For example, one dynamic that was unique to a group relationship was the ability to have an additional participant regulate or check other partners in the relationship if they are behaving or reacting in an unfair manner. While this does not come without its own set of challenges and limitations, it was helpful to recognize that in monogamous relationships there was the potential for one person to be unfairly bullied or leveraged by the other.

Greenwood (2014) described the ontological limitations of contemporary research when it comes to investigating phenomena outside of the social norm. Greenwood suggested that shifting how one frames cognitive, emotional, and behavioral choices by utilizing social constructionism and cultural psychology could ultimately aid in creating social change. Information from this study could also help in providing new ways to define kinship and the meaning of family by demonstrating that there are all types of family structures that successfully exist.

It could help aid future polyamory research in general to better understand how monogamy is a socially constructed dynamic that is not necessarily definitive as the only ideal family-focused relationship. This research could also help contribute to the study of

relationship orientation. For example, there were several narratives that focused on a natural draw towards polyfidelity and that once revealed that option resonated more than compulsory-monogamy.

It should also be noted that one of the participants suggested that a future study on children within polyfi relationships might be helpful when it comes to advocating for social change. As noted previously, polyfi and polyamorous relationships in general, struggle with combating unfounded myths around how such relationships exist. Individuals in these relationships run the risk of being investigated by child protective services, being targeted during child custody cases, and being questioned by dominant culture as to the fitness of the individual when it comes to child rearing. The information from this study has demonstrated a handful of group relationships that have successfully reared children and also helps dispel myths about the assumed highly-sexualized nature of nonmonogamous relationships in general.

Implications for Social Change

The American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2014) Standard A.4.b highlights the fact that counselors must avoid imposing their own personal values, especially if those values interfere with the goals of the client or are based on a history of discrimination. The information gleaned from this study sheds light on the fact that both polyamorous and polyfidelitous individuals have often been met with prejudice, counselor bias, and social discrimination. Therefore counselors need to be aware of their own values and the affect those values could have on individuals in relationships outside of a monogamous norm.

Standard A.7.a (ACA, 2014) also focuses on a counselor's role as an advocate for those who have been historically discriminated against due to their identity or personal choices. Information from this study has brought forth insight on the social and legal struggles faced by polyfi individuals and their families including family and friend rejection, polynegativity or microaggressions resulting in avoidance of institutionalized healthcare services, and the lack of legal protection for loss of employment, housing, or child custody. The information gathered from this study could help counselors better understand and appreciate those viable threats and struggles in the day-to-day lives of a polyfi family, ultimately leading to a counselor advocating for clients within their family of origin, neighborhood, schools, or workplace.

Standard E.5.c (ACA, 2014) states that counselors are to avoid pathologizing individuals who have historically been discriminated against. The information from this study could be helpful for raising awareness of cultural bias in relationship counseling focused on pathologizing poly individuals as cheaters or antifamily. The narratives of several participants should aid counselors in further identifying areas where counselors have historically made assumptions based on dominant culture and therefore could improve upon by challenging such assumptions and encouraging a spirit of diversity and pluralistic thinking.

Downing and Gillett (2010) and McNamee and Hosking (2012) described movement within social change begins with this same spirit of plurality, the value of culturally constructed understanding, and the development of inclusive language. The terminology in this study alone could help counselors become better informed on the

culture-bound terminology used by dominant culture and how to more appropriately

communicate concepts behind nonmonogamous relationships. Simply an improvement in

language and understanding of basic polyfi concepts could help individuals who present

for counseling feel better validated and understood. In turn, participants who are treated

with humanistic empathic positive regard are also more likely to return to the healthcare

system and therefore avoid delays or barriers of access to mental healthcare.

The results from this study also humanize individuals who are outside of the

monogamous norm by describing relatable commonalities between polyfi and

monogamous relationships. Developing a more humanistic understanding of polyfi could

prepare counselors on how to view such individuals as equally valid to their

monogamous counterparts. Hopefully this will contribute to a better understanding of

nonmonogamy in the counseling profession, as well as society in general, and ultimately

reduce polynegativity in mental health and healthcare settings.

The findings from this study could help counselors increase their ability to

accomplish what the Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014) Standard A.1.a. stated as a counselor's

"primary responsibility," which is "…to respect the dignity and promote the welfare of

clients" (p. 4). Counselors are more likely able to develop empathy towards a group when

they have witnessed the lived-experiences of those individuals. Counselors will also be

more likely to have a greater understanding of polyfi as a result of this study.

It is also critical that counselors understand the complexity of such relationships

in order to better understand whether or not they are culturally competent to best serve

the needs of a polyfi group, including legal and social acceptance challenges as pointed

out in the literature (Barker & Langdridge, 2010; Goldfeder & Sheff, 2013). Standard

A.11.a (ACA, 2014) stated that counselors who are unable to provide culturally

competent services for a particular client should avoid engaging in a counseling

relationship with them. The information from this study could aid a counselor in

determining whether or not they are able to adequately provide for the needs of

individuals in such a relationship or whether they should refer those individuals to

someone more qualified.

Conclusions

Like polyamory, polyfidelity helps an individual bring more into his or her life.

However, polyfidelity does so in a shared or cooperative manner. Open polyamory is

similar, in regards to bringing more into an individual's life, but does so in an

individualistic manner, focusing on more narrow intentions of one rather than the

collective intentions of a group. One argument that supports polyfidelity is the fact that

an individual's life is often enriched with what others bring into the mix, even if it is off

the radar of the individual. In other words, following a narrow path towards a specific

intention does not always yield the intended outcome and sometimes that outcome is

revealed to us through involvement with others.

An argument that supports solopoly is the fact that historically individualism has

been squelched due to an imbalance in power, which includes prejudice, manipulation,

and exploitation. This is evident when looking at gender disparity and expectations that

women are subservient to the interests of men. Polygamy certainly follows that ugly path,

as it has historically been rife with exploitation, sexism, and atrocity. However, an

egalitarian framing of collectivism can yield the same benefits found in families and communities. Historically this includes the shear safety of higher numbers, the addition of resources such as labor and income, an economy of scale in terms of cost of living, and the richness of achievement or culture that occurs when groups of humans work together.

An interesting philosophical question is also raised in terms of whether or not segmentation is tied to an individual's value system or worldview. Open poly relationships are often based on segmenting an individual's needs autonomously among multiple individuals or groups, which is also common in terms of acting individually rather than collectively. Polyfi relationships, however, are more focused on dividing needs within a cohesive structure (similar to monogamy). The concept of segmentation may be influential in mononormative individual's perceived threat to their core values, primarily the value they place on conjoining needs rather than segmentation.

References

Adams, V. (1980). Poly-fidelity—the Kerista village ideal. *Psychology Today*, *13*(12), 42-43.

Aguilar, J. (2013). Situational sexual behaviors: The ideological work of moving toward polyamory in communal living groups. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *42*(1), 104-129. doi:10.1177/0891241612464886

Ahmed, S. (2006a). *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, objects, and others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Ahmed, S. (2006b). Orientations: Toward a queer phenomenology. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, *12*(4), 543-574.

Ajjawi, R., & Higgs, J. (2007). Using hermeneutic phenomenology to investigate how experienced practitioners learn to communicate clinical reasoning. *Qualitative Report*, *12*(4), 612-638.

Altman, I., & Ginat, J. (1996). *Polygamous families in contemporary society*. New York, NY: Press Syndicate, University of Cambridge.

Amato, P. (2012). What can we learn from children raised by Gay or Lesbian parents? *Social Science Research*, *777*(1), 123-128.

American Counseling Association - Association of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Issues in Counseling. (2012). *Competencies for counseling LGBQQIA individuals*. Retrieved April 14, 2015, from http://www.algbtic.org/resources/competencies

American Counseling Association. (2014). *2014 ACA code of ethics*. Retrieved from

http://www.counseling.org

American Institute of Bisexuality. (2014). *Am I Bisexual?* Retrieved June 4, 2015, from

http://bisexual.org/am-i-bi/

American Psychological Association. (2010). *Ethical principles of psychologists and

code of conduct.* Retrieved from http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx

American Psychological Association. (2014). *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender

health*. Retrieved from https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/lgbt-health.aspx

American Psychological Association. (2015). *What is sexual orientation*? Retrieved from

http://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/orientation.aspx

Anapol, D. (2010a). *Polyamory in the 21st century: Love and intimacy with multiple

partners*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Anapol, D. (2010b). The upside of polyamory: Does polyamory have social value?

Psychology Today. Retrieved from https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/love-

without-limits/201012/the-upside-polyamory

Anderson, E. (2010). At least with cheating there is an attempt at monogamy: Cheating

and monogamism among undergraduate heterosexual men. *Journal of Social and

Personal Relationships*, *27*(1), 851-872.

Antalffy, N. (2011). Polyamory and the media. *Journal of Media Arts Culture*, *8*(1), 126-

132.

Armour, M., Riveaux, S., & Bell, H. (2009). Using context to build rigor: Application to two hermeneutic phenomenological studies. *Qualitative Social Work, 8*(1), 101-122. doi:10.1177/1473325008100424

Arredondo, P., & Tovar-Blank, Z. (2014). Multicultural competencies: A dynamic paradigm for the 21st century. In F. Leong, L. Comas-Díaz, G. Nagayama Hall, V. McLoyd, & J. Trimble (Eds), *APA handbook of multicultural psychology, Vol. 2: Applications and training* (pp. 19-34). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. doi:10.1037/14187-002

Ashe, M. (2011). Women's wrongs, religions' rights: Women, free exercise, and establishment in American law. *Temple Political and Civil Rights Law Review*, *21*(1), 163-189.

Ashbee, E. (2007). Polyamory, social conservatism, and the same-sex marriage debate in the U.S. *Politics*, *27*(2), 101-107.

Astramovich, R. L., & Coker, J. K. (2007). Program evaluation: The accountability bridge model for counselors. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *85*(2), 162–172.

Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development. (2014). *About AMCD*. Retrieved from http://www.multiculturalcounseling.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=62&Itemid=82

Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development. (2014). *AMCD multicultural counseling competencies*. Retrieved from

http://www.counseling.org/docs/competencies/multcultural_competencies.pdf?sfv
rsn=5

Attridge, M. (2013). Jealousy and relationship closeness: Exploring the good (reactive
and bad (suspicious) sides of romantic jealousy. *Sage Open Publication*, *Jan-Mar
2013* (pp. 1-16). doi:10.1177/2158244013476054

Aumer, K., Bellew, W., Ito, B., Hatfield, E., & Heck, R. (2014). The happy green eyed
monogamist: Role of jealousy and compersion in monogamous and nontraditional
relationships. *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality*, *17*(1), November 28, 2014.

Barker, M. (2005). This is my partner, and this is my…partner's partner: Constructing a
polyamorous identity in a monogamous world. *Journal of Constructivist
Psychology*, *18*(1), 77-88.

Barker, M., & Langdridge, D. (Eds.). (2010a). *Understanding nonmonogamies*. New
York, NY: Routledge Press.

Barker, M., & Langdridge, D. (2010b). Whatever happened to nonmonogamies? Critical
reflections on recent research and theory. *Sexualities*, *13*(6), 748-772.

Bailey, M., Baines, B., Amani, B., & Kaufman, A. (2006). Expanding recognition of
foreign polygamous marriages: policy implications for Canada. *Queen's
University Legal Studies Research Paper No. 07-12*. Retrieved from
http://ssrn.com/abstract=1023896.

Bennett, J. (2009). *Polyamory: The next sexual revolution?* Retrieved from
http://www.newsweek.com/polyamory-next-sexual-revolution-82053

Bennett, J., & Douglass, K. (2013). Growing pains: An Eriksonian view of the arc of presenting concerns in an LGBT community mental health center. *Journal of Clinical Social Work*, *41*(1), 277-287. doi:10.1007/s10615-013-0442-5

Bennion, J. (2012). *Polygamy in primetime: Media, gender, and politics in Mormon fundamentalism*. London, UK: Brandeis University.

Bergstrand, C., & Blevins Sinski, J. (2010). *Swinging in America: Love, sex, and marriage in the 21ˢᵗ century*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Publishing.

Berry, M., & Barker, M. (2014). Extraordinary interventions for extraordinary clients: Existential sex therapy and open nonmonogamy. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, *29*(1), 21-30. doi:10.1080/14681994.2013.866642

Bertone, C., & Pallotta-Chiarolli, M. (2014). Putting families of origin into the queer picture: introducing this special issue. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, *10*(1-2), 1-14.

Better, A. (2014). Redefining queer: Women's relationships and identity in an age of sexual fluidity. *Sexuality & Culture*, *18*(1), 16-38. doi:10.1007/s12119-013-9171-8

Bettinger, M. (2005). Polyamory and gay men: A family systems approach. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, *1*(1), 97-116.

Betzig, L. (1992). Roman monogamy. *Ethology and Sociobiology, 13*(5-6), 351-383. doi:10.1016/0162-3095(92)90009-S

Betzig, L. (1993). Sex, succession, and stratification in the first six civilizations: How powerful men reproduced, passed power on to their sons, and used power to

defend their wealth, women, and children. In Ellis, L. *Social Stratification and socioeconomic inequality Vol. 1*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Betzig, L. (1995). Medieval monogamy. *Journal of Family History*, *20*(1), 181–216.

Bevan, J. (2011). The consequence model of partner jealousy expression: Elaboration and refinement. *Western Journal of Communication*, *75*(5), 523-540. doi:10.1080/10570314.2011.608408

Bonello, K., & Cross, M. (2010). Gay monogamy: I love you but I can't have sex with only you. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *57*(1), 117-139.

Brandon, M. (2011). The challenge of monogamy: Bringing it out of the closet and in to the treatment room. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, *26*(3), 271-277. doi:10.1080/14681994.2011.574114.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1995). Developmental ecology through space and time: A future perspective. In P. Moen, G.H. Elder, Jr., & K. Lüscher (Eds.), *Examining lives in context: Perspectives on the ecology of human development* (pp. 619–647). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Brown v. Utah County. (2013). *Memorandum decision and order granting in part plantiff's motion for summary judgment*. Case 2:11-cv-00652-CW-BCW, Document 78.

Buck, T. (2012). From big love to the big house: Justifying antipolygamy laws in an age of expanding rights. *Emory International Law Review*, *26*(2), 939-996.

Burleson, W. E. (2005). *Bi-America: Myths, truths, and struggles of an invisible minority*. Binghamton, NY: Harrington Park Press.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, NY: Routledge Press.

Calsyn, D., Campbell, A., Tross, S., & Hatch-Maillette, M. (2011). Is monogamy or committed relationship status a marker for low sexual risk among men in substance abuse treatment? Clinical and methodological considerations. *American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, *37*(1), 294-300.

Chapais, B. (2013). Monogamy, strongly bonded groups, and the evolution of human social structure. *Evolutionary Anthropology*, *22*(2), 52-65.

Chapman, M. (2010). *What does polyamory look like?: Polydiverse patterns of loving and living in modern society*. Bloomington, IN: Iuniverse Publishing.

Cherlin, A. (2010). *The marriage-go-round: The state of marriage and the family in America today*. New York, NY: Knopf Doubleday Publishing.

Chevrette, R. (2013). Outing heteronormativity in interpersonal and family communication: Femnist applications of queer theory 'beyond the sexy streets.' *Communication Theory*, *23*(2), 170-190.

Clark, A. (2011). James Hinton and Victorian individuality: Polygamy and the sacrifice of the self. *Victorian Studies*, *54*(1), 35-61.

Community-Academic Consortium for Research on Alternative Sexualities. (2014). *About us*. Retrieved from https://carasresearch.org/

Conley, T., Moors, A., Matsick, J., & Ziegler, A. (2013). The fewer the merrier? Assessing stigma surrounding consensually nonmonogamous romantic relationships. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, *13*(1), 1-30.

doi:10.1111/j.1530-2415.2012.01286.x

Conley, T., Ziegler, A., Moors, A., Matsick, J., & Valentine, B. (2012b). A critical examination of popular assumptions about the benefits and outcomes of monogamous relationships. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *17*(2), 124-141.

Constantine, L., & Constantine, J. (1973). *Group marriage: A study of contemporary multilateral marriage*. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing.

Counselors for Social Justice. (2014). Mission statement. *American Counseling Association (ACA)*. Retrieved from http://counseling-csj.org/about/

Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (3ʳᵈ Ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Crosswell, M. (2014). *Relationship anarchy vs. nonhierarchical polyamory*. Retrieved from https://thethinkingasexual.wordpress.com.

Dale, E. (2013). Neo-Piagetian transpersonal psychology: A new perspective. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, *45*(2), 118-138.

Derrida, J. (1979). *The post card: From Socrates to Freud and beyond*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Descartes, R. (1641). *Meditations on first philosophy, in which the existence of god, and the real distinction of mind and body, are demonstrated*. New York, NY: Hackett Publishing.

Des Forges, A. (2012). Polygamy and sublime passion: Sexuality in China on the verge of modernity. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, *72*(1), 148-155.

Diamond, L. (2006). Careful what you ask for: Reconsidering feminist epistemology and autobiographical narrative in research on sexual identity development. *Signs*, *31*(2), 471-491.

Diamond, L. (2008). Female bisexuality from adolescence to adulthood: Results from a 10-year longitudinal study. *Developmental Psychology*, *44*(1), 5-14.

Diamond, L., & Butterworth, M. (2008). Questioning gender and sexual identity: Dynamic links over time. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, *59*(1), 365-376.

Diamond, L., & Huebner, D. (2012). Is good sex good for you? Rethinking sexuality and health. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *6*(1), 54–69. doi:10.1111/j.1751-9004.2011.00408.x

Dijkstra, P., Barelds, D., & Groothof, H. (2013). Jealousy in response to online and offline infidelity: The role of sex and sexual orientation. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 54*(1), 328-336. doi:10.1111/sjop.12055

Dow, M., & Eff, A. (2013). When one wife is enough: A cross-cultural study of the determinants of monogamy. *Journal of Social, Evolutionary, and Cultural Psychology*, *7*(3), 211-238.

Downie, J., & Llewellyn, J. (2011). *Being relational: Reflections on relational theory and health law*. Vancouver, Toronto: UBC Press.

Downing, L., & Gillett, R. (2011). Viewing critical psychology through the lens of queer. *Psychology & Sexuality*, *2*(1), 4-15.

Duff, Z. (2010). *Is polyamory "the new gay"?* Retrieved May 10, 2014, from http://polyadvocacy.ca/is-polyamory-the-new-gay.

Easton, D., & Hardy, J. W. (2011). *Ethical slut*. New York: NY, Random House
Publishing, LLC.

Eastwick, P., Finkel, E., & Eagly, A. (2011). When and why do ideal partner preferences
affect the process of initiating and maintaining romantic relationships? *Journal of
Personality and Social Psychology*, *101*(1), 1012–1032. doi:10.1037/a0024062

Efran, J., McNamee, S., Warren, B., & Raskin, J. (2014). Personal construct psychology,
radical constructivism, and social constructionism: A dialogue. *Journal of
Constructivist Psychology*, *27*(1), 1-13.

Eldridge, N., Surrey, J., Rosen, W., & Miller, J. (2010). What changes in therapy? Who
changes? In J. Jordan, (Ed.), *The power of connection: Recent developments in
relational-cultural theory*. New York, NY: Routledge Press.

Eliason, M., DeJoseph, J., Dibble, S., & Chinn, P. (2012). LGBT health research. *Journal
of Homosexuality*, *59*(1), 761-764.

Emens, E. (2004). Monogamy's law: Compulsory monogamy and polyamorous
existence. *New York University Review of Law and Social Change*, *29*(1), 277–
376.

Erickson-Schrotha, L., & Mitchell, J. (2009). Queering queer theory, or why bisexuality
matters. *Journal of Bisexuality, 9*(3/4), 297-315.

Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Childhood and society*. New York, NY: Norton Press.

Ferrer, J. (2007). Monogamy, polyamory, and beyond. *Tikkun: Duke University Press*,
22(1), 37-62.

Ferrer, J. (2008). Beyond monogamy and polyamory: A new vision of intimate
relationships for the twenty-first century. *ReVision*, *30*(1&2), 53-58.

Finlay, L. (2012). Debating phenomenological methods. *Hermeneutic Phenomenology in
Education: Practice of Research Method*, *4*(1), 17-37.
doi:10.1007/978-94-6091-834-6_2

Finn, M., Tunariu, A., & Lee, K. (2012). A critical analysis of affirmative therapeutic
engagements with consensual nonmonogamy. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*,
27(3), 205-216.

Finn, M. (2012). Monogamous order and the avoidance of chaotic excess. *Psychology &
Sexuality*, *3*(2), 123–136.

Fleckenstein, J., Bergstrand, C., & Cox, D. (2012). What do polys want?: An overview of
the 2012 loving more survey. *Loving More*. Retrieved from
http://www.lovemore.com/polyamory-articles/2012-lovingmore-polyamory-
survey/

Fletcher, G., Simpson, J., Campbell, L., & Overall, N. (2015). Pair-bonding, romantic
love, and evolution: The curious case of homo sapiens. *Perspectives on
Psychological Science*, *10*(1), 20-26. doi:10.1177/1745691614561683

Fletcher-Stack, P. (2013). Laws on Mormon polygamists lead to win for plural marriage.
Salt Lake Tribune. Retrieved from http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/news/57264020-
78/church-polygamy-mormon-says.html.csp

Foucault, M. (1976). *The history of sexuality volume 1: An introduction.* New York, NY:
Random House.

Foucault, M. (1969). *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge Press.

Frank, K., & DeLamater, J. (2010). Deconstructing monogamy: Boundaries, identities, and fluidities across relationships. In M. Barker & D. Langdridge (Eds.), U*nderstanding nonmonogamies* (pp. 9-20). New York, NY: Routledge Press.

Freud, S. (1920). The psychogenesis of a case of homosexuality in a woman. *Standard Edition, 18*, 155–72.

Freud, S. (1922). Certain neurotic mechanisms in jealousy, paranoia and homosexuality. *Standard Edition, 18*, 221–34.

Frey, L. (2013). Relational-cultural therapy: Theory, research, and application to counseling competencies. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, *44*(3), 177-185. doi:10.1037/a0033121

Frost, D. (2013). Stigma and intimacy in same-sex relationships: A narrative approach. *Qualitative Psychology*, *1*(S), 49-61. doi:10.1037/2326-3598.1.S.49

Fry, A. (2010). Polygamy in America: How the varying legal standards fail to protect mothers and children from its abuses. *St. Louis University Law Journal*, *54*(3), 967-995.

Gabrinetti, P., & Ozler, S. (2014). Defenses and morality: Adam Smith, Sigmund Freud, and contemporary psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Review*, *101*(5), 735-765.

Galupo, P., Henise, S., & Davis, K. (2014). Transgender microaggressions in the context of friendship: Patterns of experience across friends' sexual orientation and gender identity. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *1*(4), 461-470.

Gatzeva, M., & Paik, A. (2011). Emotional and physical satisfaction in noncohabiting, cohabiting, and marital relationships: The importance of jealous conflict. *Journal of Sex Research*, *48*(1), 29-42. doi:10.1080/00224490903370602

Glick, J., & Van Hook, J. (2011). Does a house divided stand? Kinship and the continuity of shared living arrangements. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *73*(5), 1149-1164.

Goldfeder, M., & Sheff, E. (2013). Children of polyamorous families: A first empirical look. *Journal of Law and Social Deviance*, *5*(1), 150-243.

Graham, N. (2014). Polyamory: A call for increased mental health professional awareness. Archives of Sexual Behavior, *43*(1), 1031-1034. doi:10.1007/s10508-014-0321-3

Green, A. (2014). *Sexual fields: Toward a sociology of collective sexual life*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Greenwood, J. (2014). The social in social psychology. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *8*(7), 303-131. doi:10.1111./spc3.12113

Halberstam, J. (2003). Reflections on queer studies and queer pedagogy. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *45*(2-4), 361-364.

Halberstam, J. (2012). *Gaga feminism: Sex, gender, and the end of normal*. Boston, MA: Boston Press.

Hall, D. (2009). *Reading sexualities: Hermeneutic theory and the future of queer studies*. New York, NY: Routledge Press.

Hanson-Sobraske, K., Boster, J., & Gaulin, S. (2013). Mapping the conceptual space of jealousy. *Ethos Journal*, *41*(3), 249-270. doi:10.1111/etho.12021

Harris, C., & Darby, R. (2010). Jealousy in adulthood. In S. Hart & M. Legerstee (Eds.), *Handbook of jealousy: Theory, research, and multidisciplinary approach* (pp. 547-571). New York, NY: Wiley-Blackwell.

Hassouneh-Phillips, D. (2001). Polygamy and wife abuse: A qualitative study of Muslim women in America. *Health Care for Women International, 22*(8), 735-748.

Hays, D., & Wood, C. (2011). Infusing qualitative traditions in counseling research designs. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *89*(3), 288-295.

Headley, J., & Sangganjanavanich, V. (2014). A recipe for change: Promoting connection through relational-cultural theory. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, *9*(2), 245-261.

Heckert, J. (2010). Love without borders? Intimacy, identity and the state of compulsory monogamy. In M. Barker & D. Langdridge (Eds.), U*nderstanding nonmonogamies* (pp. 255-266). New York, NY: Routledge Press.

Hegarty, P. (2013). Deconstructing the ideal of fidelity: A view from LGB psychology. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, *13*(1), 31-33. doi:10.1111/j.1530-2415.2012.01298.x

Heise, T. (2013). Marking Mormon difference: How western perceptions of Islam defined the Mormon menace. *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, *25*(1), 82-97.

Hendricks, G., & Hendricks, K. (1990). *Conscious loving: The journey to co-commitment.* New York, NY: Bantom Doubleday Books.

Henrich, J., Boyd, R., & Richerson, P. (2012). The puzzle of monogamous marriage. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, 367*(1589), 657-669.

Hindle, T. (2012). *The economist guide to management ideas and gurus.* New York, NY: Bloomberg Press.

Howe, T. (2011). *Marriages and families in the 21st century: A bioecological approach*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Impett, E., Muise, A., & Peragine, D. (2014). Sexuality in the context of relationships. In D. Tolman, L. Diamond, J. Bauermeister, W. George, J. Pfaus, & L. Ward, (Eds.), *APA handbook of sexuality and psychology, Vol. 1: Person-based approaches* (pp. 269-315)*.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Inman, A., & Ladany, N. (2014). Multicultural competencies in psychotherapy supervision. In F. Leong, L. Comas-Díaz, G. Nagayama Hall, V. McLoyd, & J. Trimble (Eds.), *APA handbook of multicultural psychology, Vol. 2: Applications and training* (pp. 643-658). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. doi:10.1037/14187-036

Institute of Medicine of the National Academies (IOM). (2011). *Health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender people: building a foundation for better understanding*. Retrieved from http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2011/The-Health-of-Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-and-Transgender-People.aspx

Janesick, V. (2011). *"Stretching" exercises for qualitative researchers (3rd Ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Jean Baker Miller Training Institute. (2015). *Glossary of relational-cultural theory key terms.* Retrieved from http://www.jbmti.org/Our-Work/glossary-relational-cultural-therapy

Johnson, K., & Martinez-Guzman, A. (2013). Rethinking concepts of participatory action research and their potential for social transformation: Post-structuralist informed methodological reflections from LGBT and trans-collective projects. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *23*(1), 405-419. doi:10.1002/casp.2134

Joint Commission. (2011). *Advancing effective communication, cultural competence, and patient- and family-centered care for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community*. Retrieved from http://www.jointcommission.org/assets/1/18/LGBTFieldGuide.pdf

Jordan, J. (2011). The Stone Center and relational–cultural theory. In J. Norcross, G. VandenBos, & D. Freedheim (Eds), *The history of psychotherapy: Continuity and change (2nd ed.)* (pp. 357-362). Washington, DC. doi:10.1037/12353-012

Jordan, J. (Ed.). (2010a). *The power of connection: Recent developments in relational-cultural theory*. New York, NY: Routledge Press.

Jordan, J. (2010b). *Relational-cultural therapy*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association Press.

Keenan, J. (2013). Legalize polygamy, I am not kidding. *Slate Magazine.* Retrieved January 18, 2015, from

http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2013/04/legalize_polygamy_mar

riage_equality_for_all.html

Keppel, B. (2006). Affirmative psychotherapy with older bisexual women and men. *Journal of Bisexuality, 6*(1/2), 85-104.

Kerista Commune. (1984). *Polyfidelity: Sex in the Kerista commune and other related theories on how to solve the world's problems*. San Francisco, CA: Performing Arts Social Society, Inc.

Kidd, S. A., & Kral, M. J. (2005). Practicing participatory action research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *52*(2), 187-195.

Kimmel, D. (2015). Theories of aging applied to LGBT older adults and their families. In N. A. Orel & C. A. Fruhauf (Eds.), *The lives of LGBT older adults: Understanding challenges and resilience*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. doi:10.1037/14436-004

Kleinplatz, P., & Diamond, L. (2014). Sexual diversity. In D. Tolman & L. Diamond (Eds.), *APA Handbook of Sexuality and Psychology: Vol. 1. Person-Based Approaches.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. doi:10.1037/14193-009

Klesse, C. (2013). Loving more than one: On the discourse of polyamory. In A. Ferguson & A. Jónasdóttir (Eds.), *Love in our time*. London, England: Routledge Press.

Klesse, C. (2011). Notions of love in polyamory: Elements in a discourse on multiple loving. *Laboratorium*, *3*(2), 4-25.

Klesse, C. (2011). Shady characters, untrustworthy partners, and promiscuous sluts: Creating bisexual intimacies in the face of heteronormativity and biphobia. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *11*(2-3), 227-244.

Kohlberg, L. (1984). *The psychology of moral development: The nature and validity of moral stages*. San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row Publishing.

Kohlberg, L., & Power, C. (1981). Moral development, religious thinking, and the question of a seventh stage. *Zygon*, *16*, 203–259.

Koktvedgaard Zeitzen, M. (2008). *Polygamy: A cross-cultural analysis*. New York, NY: Berg Publishers.

Kolesar, A. (2011). *Identity development at the intersections of bisexuality and polyamory*. American Psychological Association 2011 Convention Presentation.

Komaja Meditation School. (2015). About Komaja: The spiritual art of loving and living. Retrieved from http://www.komaja.org/en/makaja_achievements.php

Kraut, R., Olson, J., Banaji, M., Bruckman, A., Cohen, J., & Couper, M. (2002). *Psychological research online: Opportunities and challenges.* Board of Scientific Affairs (BSA) Advisory Group on Conducting Research on the Internet. Retrieved from http://www.apa.org/science/leadership/bsa/internet/internet-report.aspx

Kuykendall, M. (2012). Equality federalism: A solution to the marriage wars. *Journal of Constitutional Law*, *15*(1), 377-462.

Labriola, K. (2010). *Love in abundance: A counselor's advice on open relationships*. Gardena, CA: Greenery Press.

Langdridge, D. (2004). A hermeneutic phenomenological investigation of the construction of sadomasochistic identities. *Sexualities*, *7*(1), 31-53. doi:10.1177/1363460704040137

Langdridge, D. (2008). Phenomenology and critical social psychology: Directions and debates in theory and research. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *2*(3), 1126-1142.

Lano, K., & Parry, C. (Eds.). (1995). *Breaking the barriers to desire: Polyamory, polyfidelity, and nonmonogamy: New approaches to multiple relationships*. London, England: Five Leaves Publications.

Larkin, M., Watts, S., & Clifton, E. (2006). Giving voice and making sense in interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 102-120. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp062oa

Laumann, E. O., Paik, A., Glasser, D. B., Kang, J., Wang, T., & Levinson, B. (2006). A cross-national study of subjective sexual well-being among older women and men: Findings from the global study of sexual attitudes and behaviors. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *35*, 145–161.

Laverty, S. (2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology: A comparison of historical and methodological considerations. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *2*(3), 21-35.

Lefmann, T., & Combs-Orme, T. (2013). Early brain development for social work practice: Integrating neuroscience with Piaget's theory of cognitive development. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, *23*(1), 640-647.

Lenz, S. (2014). Integrating relational-cultural theory concepts into supervision. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, *9*(1), 3-18. doi:10.1080/15401383.2013.864960

Lewin, G. (Ed.). (1948). *Resolving social conflicts*. New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishing.

Lewis, J. A., Arnold, M. S., House, R. & Toporek, R. L. (2002). *Advocacy competencies: Task force on advocacy competencies*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association. Retrieved from http://www.counseling.org/Content/NavigationMenu/resources/advocacycompetencies/ advocacy_competencies1.pdf

Ley, D. (2009). *Insatiable wives: Women who stray and the men who love them*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Lopez, K., & Willis, D. (2004). Descriptive versus interpretive phenomenology: Their contributions to nursing knowledge. *Qualitative Health Research*, *14*(5), 726-735. doi:10.1177/1049732304263638

Luscombe, B. (2012). I do, I do, I do, I do: The same-sex-marriage debate—and polygamy's rising cultural profile—has encouraged once secretive plural families to fight for recognition of their unions. *Time Magazine*, *180*(6), 1-7.

Lukas, D., & Clutton-Brock, T. (2013). The evolution of social monogamy in mammals. *Science Magazine*, *341*(6145), 526-530.

MacDowall, L. (2009). Historicizing contemporary bisexuality. *Journal of Bisexuality, 9*(1), 3-15.

Makaja, A.A. (2003). *Eros & logos: The books for saints and sinners*. Zurich, Switzerland: Komaja Press.

Manley, M., Van Anders, S., & Diamond, L. (2015). Polyamory, monoamory, and sexual fluidity: A longitudinal study of identity and sexual trajectories. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *2*(2), 168-180. doi:10.1037/sgd0000098

Marks, L. (2012). Same-sex parenting and children's outcomes: A closer examination of the American Psychological Association's brief on Lesbian and Gay parenting. *Social Science Research*, 748.

Marques, I. (2010). Confused "slaves" of many traditions: The search for the freedom dance in Chiziane's Niketche: A tale of polygamy. *Research in African Literatures*, *41*(2), 133-159.

Marsh, K. (2013). Legalize polygamy, I am not kidding. *Slate Magazine.* Retrieved from http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2013/04/legalize_polygamy_marriage_equality_for_all.html

Maxwell, J. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.

McCombs, B. (2014). *Evictions begin in Utah polygamous community*. Retrieved from http://www.ksl.com/?nid=148&sid=32630637

McCoy, M., Stinson, M., Ross, D., & Hjelmstad, L. (2015). Who's in our clients' bed? A case illustration of sex therapy with a polyamorous couple. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, *41*(2), 134-144. doi:10.1080/0092623X.2013.864366.

McDermott, R. (2011). Polygamy: More common than you think: Data show that plural marriage is a disaster for women's rights. *Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB100014240527487038063045762345515963226 90

McDermott, R., Fowler, J. & Christakis, N. (2013). Breaking up is hard to do, except when everyone else is doing it too: The spread of divorce over 32 years in a large social network. *Journal of Social Forces, 92*(2), 491-519.

McLean, K. (2011). Bisexuality and nonmonogamy: A reflection. *Journal of Bisexuality, 11*(4), 513-517.

McLeod, D., & Day, T. (2014). Sexually transmitted infection and the evolution of serial monogamy. *Proceedings of the Royal Society, 281*(1796). doi:10.1098/rspb.2014.1726

McNamee, S., & Hosking, D. (2012). *Research and social change: A relational constructionist approach*. New York, NY: Routledge Press.

Melloy, K. (2010). *The "new gay?' polyamorists pursue legitimacy.* Retrieved from http://www.edgeboston.com/news/national/news//110153/the_'new_gay?'_polya morists_pursue_legitimacy.

Mendelson-Maoz, A. (2009). The question of polygamy in Yehoshua's a journey to the end of the millennium: Two moral views—two Jewish cultures. *An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies, 28*(1), 15-31.

Mereish, E., & Poteat, V. (2015a). The conditions under which growth-fostering relationships promote resilience and alleviate psychological distress among sexual

minorities: Applications of relational cultural theory. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *2*(3), 339-344.

Mereish, E., & Poteat, V. (2015b). A relational model of sexual minority mental and physical health: The negative effects of shame on relationships, loneliness, and health. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *62*(3), 425-437. doi:10.1037/cou0000088

Miles, M., Huberman, M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook (3rd Ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.

Miller, J. B. (1976). *Toward a new psychology of women.* Boston, MA: Beacon Publishing Press.

Miller, T. (1999). *The 60s communes: Hippies and beyond*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Minkler, M., & Wallerstein, N. (2008). *Community-based participatory research for health: From process to outcomes*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley Publishing.

Mitchell, M., Bartholomew, K., & Cobb, R. (2014). Need fulfillment in polyamorous relationships. *Journal of Sex Research*, *51*(3), 329-339. doi:10.1080/00224499.2012.742998

Moon, L. (Ed.). (2008). *Feeling queer or queer feelings: Radical approaches to counseling sex, sexualities, and genders*. New York, NY: Routledge Press.

Morandini, J., Blaszczynski, A., Ross, M., Costa, D., & Dar-Nimrod, I. (2015). Essentialist beliefs, sexual identity uncertainty, internalized homonegativity and

psychological wellbeing in gay men. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *62*(3), 413-424. doi:10.1037/cou0000072

National Association of Social Workers. (2008). *Code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers*. Retrieved from http://socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp

Nearing, R. (Ed.). (1992). *Loving more: The polyfidelity primer*. London, England: Pep Publishing.

Nearing, R. (2000). *Polyamory demography: The ''LovingMoreMagazine'' study*. Bloomington, IN: The Kinsey Institute. Retrieved August 22, 2015, from http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/resources/Nearing.html

Newbigin, J. (2013). Psychoanlysis and homosexuality: Keeping the discussion moving. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, *29*(3), 276-291.

Nolen, A., & Talbert, T. (2011). Qualitative assertions as prescriptive statements. Educational Psychology Review, *23*(2), 263-271. doi:10.1007/s10648-011-9159-6

Obergefell v. Hodges. (2015). *Supreme court decision on fourteenth amendment and same-sex marriage*. Docket No 14-556. Retrieved November 14, 2015, from http://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/obergefell-v-hodges/

Onwuegbuzie, A., & Leech, N. L. (2005). On becoming a pragmatic researcher: The importance of combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 8*(5), 375–387.

Opie, C., Atkinson, Q., Dunbar, R., & Shultz, S. (2013). Male infanticide leads to social monogamy in primates. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS)*, June 28, 2013. doi:10.1072/pnas.1307903110

Oppenheimer, M. (2011). Married with infidelities. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/03/magazine/infidelity-will-keep-us-together.html

Owen, M. (2011). Still sitting on fences: Reflections on overstepping the bounds: Bisexuality, gender, and sociology. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *11*(4), 493-497.

Page, E. (2004). Mental health services experiences of Bisexual women and Bisexual men: An empirical study. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *4*(1-2), 137-160.

Pallini, S., & Barcaccia, B. (2014). A meeting of the minds: John Bowlby encounters Jean Piaget. *Review of General Psychology*, *18*(4), 287-292.

Pallotta-Chiarolli, M. (2010). *Border sexualities, border families in schools: Queering education*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Pallotta-Chiarolli, M. (2014). Erasure, exclusion by inclusion, and the absence of intersectionality: Introducing bisexuality in education. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *14*(1), 7-17.

Pallotta-Chiarolli, M., Haydon, P., & Hunter, A. (2013). These are our children: Polyamorous parenting, in: *LGBT parent families: innovations in research and implications for practice*. New York, NY: Springer.

Pallotta-Chiarolli, M., & Pease, B. (2014). Recognition, resistance and reconstruction: an introduction to subjectivities and social justice. *The politics of recognition and*

social justice: Transforming subjectivities and new forms of resistance. New York, NY: Routledge Press.

Palmer, M., Larkin, M., De Visser, R., & Fadden, G. (2010). Developing an interpretative phenomenological approach to focus group data. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *7*(2), 99-121.

Parsons, J., Starks, T., Gamarel, K., Grove, C. (2012). Nonmonogamy and sexual relationship quality among same-sex male couples. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *26*(5), 669-677.

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods (3rd Ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.

Pawlicki, P., & Larson, P. (2011). The dynamics and conceptualization of nonexclusive relationships in gay male couples. *Sexual & Relationship Therapy*, *26*(1), 48–60.

Pedersen, W., & Blekesaune, M. (2003). Sexual satisfaction in young adulthood: Cohabitation, committed dating or unattached life? *Acta Sociologica*, *46* (3), 179–193.

Pincus, T. (2011). What is polyamory, and why do social workers need to know about it? *Greater Washington Society for Clinical Social Work*. Retrieved from www.gwscsw.org/PDFs/2011_12NV.pdf

Pines, A., & Aronson, E. (1981). Polyfidelity. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, *4*(3), 373-392.

Pines, A. (1987). Polyfidelity-An alternative to monogamous marriage. In Y. Gorni, Y. Oved, & I. Paz (Eds.), *Communal life* (pp. 622-626). Tel Aviv, Israel: Transaction Books.

Pistrang, N. (2012). Varieties of qualitative research: A pragmatic approach to selecting methods. In H. Cooper, P. Camic, D. Long, D., A. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. Sher (Eds.), *APA Handbook of research methods in psychology (Vol. 2)*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Profanter, A., & Cate, S. (2009). Deal justly with them: Injustice in polygyny, the male perspective. *Journal of Social Psychology, 149*(3), 223-241.

Psychologists for Social Responsibilty. (2014). *Psychology for social change: Strategies that work*. Retrieved from http://www.psysr.org/about/pubs_resources/social_change-brochure.php

Reichard, U. H. (2003). Monogamy: past and present. In U. H. Reichard, & C. Boesch (Eds.), *Monogamy: Mating strategies and partnerships in birds, humans and other mammals*. London, England: Cambridge University Press.

Rich, A. (1994). Compulsory heterosexuality and Lesbian existence. *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*. New York, NY: Norton Paperback.

Ritchie, A., & Barker, M. (2006). There aren't words for what we do or how we feel so we have to make them up: Constructing polyamorous languages in a culture of compulsory monogamy. *Sexualities*, *9*(5), 584-601.

Robinson, M. (2011). Polyamory and monogamy as strategic identities. *Journal of Bisexuality, 13*(1), 21-38.

Rosik, C., Dinges, L., & Saavedra, N. (2013). Moral intuitions and attitudes toward gay men: Can moral psychology add to our understanding of homonegativity? *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, *41*(4), 315-326.

Ryan, L. (2006). A marriage of many. *Washington Blade*, *37*(8), 39-52.

Ryan, C., & Jetha, C. (2010). *Sex at dawn: The prehistoric origins of modern sexuality*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.

Rydell, R., McConnell, A., & Bringle, R. (2004). Jealousy and commitment: Perceived threat and the effect of relationship alternatives. *Personal Relationships*, *11*, 451-468.

Salamon, G. (2009). Justification and queer method, or leaving philosophy. *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, *24*(1), 225-230. doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2009.00015.x

Salhi, Z. S. (2010). Polygamy and law in contemporary Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, *6*(1), 134-137.

Sandelowski, M. (2012). Metasynthesis of qualitative research. In H. Cooper, P. Camic, D. Long, A. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology (Vol. 2)*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Sartorius, A. (2004). Three and more in love: Group marriage or integrating commitment and sexual freedom. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *4*(3-4), 79-98.

Schilling, C. (2012). *Love, American style: Polygamy gets sizzle 'We should strive to have it legalized'.* Retrieved from http://www.wnd.com/2012/08/love-american-style-polygamy-gets-sizzle/#oOJYgIEK7QyY1oJj.99

Sedgwick, E. K. (1990). *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Shaw, L., Butler, C., Langdridge, D., Gibson, S., Barker, M., Lenihan, P., das Nair, R., & Richards, C. (2012). Guidelines and literature review for psychologists working therapeutically with sexual and gender minority clients. *British Psychological Society*. Retrieved from http://www.bps.org.uk/content/guidelines-and-literature-review-psychologists-working-therapeutically-sexual-and-gender-min

Sheff, E. (2014). *The polyamorists next door: inside multiple-partner relationships and families.* Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Sheff, E. (2011). Polyamorous families, same-sex marriage, and the slippery slope. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *40*(5), 487-520. doi:10.1177/0891241611413578

Sheff, E. (2010). Strategies in polyamorous parenting. In M. Barker & D. Langdridge, (Eds.), *Understanding nonmonogamies (*pp.169-181). New York, NY: Routledge Press.

Sheff, E., & Hammers, C. (2011). The privilege of perversities: Race, class and education among polyamorists and kinksters. *Psychology & Sexuality*, *2*(3), 198-223.

Shelton, K., & Delgado-Romero, E. (2011). Sexual orientation microaggressions: The experience of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer clients in psychotherapy. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 58(2),* 210–221.

Smith, J., & Osborn, M. (2003). Interpretive phenomenological analysis. In J. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practice guide to research methods* (pp. 51-80). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.

Smythe, W., & Baydala, A. (2012). Hermeneutic background of C.G. Jung. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, *57*(1), 57-75.

Sowe, B., Brown, J., & Taylor, A. (2014). Sex and the sinner: Comparing religious and nonreligious same-sex attracted adults on internalized homonegativity and distress. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *84*(5), 530-544. doi:10.1037/ort0000021

Sprott, R., & Bienvenu, R. (2007). CARAS: An initiative to link alternative sexuality communities and academic researchers. In D. Langdridge & M. Barker (Eds.), *Safe, sane and consensual: Contemporary perspectives on sadomasochism* (pp. 243- 260). New York, NY: Palgrave-MacMillan.

Stacey, J. (2011). *Unhitched: Love, marriage, family values from West Hollywood to Western China*. New York, NY: NYC Press.

Strauss, G. (2012). Is polygamy inherently unequal? *Journal of Ethics, 122* (1), 516-544. doi:0014-1704/2012/12203-0003

Stein, S. (2012). Obama backs gay marriage. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/09/obama-gaymarriage_n_1503245.html

Sue, D., Arredondo, P., & McDavis, R. (1992). Multicultural counseling competencies and standards: A call to the profession. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 70,* 477-486.

Sue, D. W., & Sue, D. (2008). *Counseling the culturally diverse: Theory and practice.* (5th ed.). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

Swan, W. (2015). *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender civil rights: A public policy agenda for uniting a divided America.* Boca Raton, FL: Taylor & Francis.

Sweet, J. (2013). Equality, democracy, monogamy: Discourses of Canadian nation building in the 2010–2011 British Columbia polygamy reference. *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*, *28*(1), 1-19.

Szymanski, D. , Ikizler, A. , & Dunn, T. (2016). Sexual minority women's relationship quality: Examining the roles of multiple oppressions and silencing the self. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *3*(1), 1-10. doi:10.1037/sgd0000145

Tabi, M., Doster, C., & Cheney, T. (2010). A qualitative study of women in polygynous marriages. *International Nursing Review*, *57*, 121–127.

Tolman, D., & Diamond, L. (2014). Sexuality theory: A review, a revision, and a recommendation. *APA Handbook of Sexuality and Psychology Vol. 1 Person-Based Approaches.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. doi:10.1037/14193-001

Tomkins, L., & Eatough, V. (2013). Meanings and manifestations of care: A celebration of hermeneutic multiplicity in Heidegger. *Humanistic Psychologist, 41*(1), 4-24. doi:10.1080/08873267.2012.694123

Trau, R., Hartel, C., & Hartel, G. (2013). Reaching and hearing the invisible: Organizational research on invisible stigmatized groups via web surveys. *British Journal of Management*, *24*(1), 532–541. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8551.2012.00826.x

Tweedy, A. (2011). Polyamory as a sexual orientation. *University of Cincinnati Law Review*, *79*, 1461-1515. Retrieved from http://ssrn.com/abstract=1632653

United States v Windsor. (2013). *Syllabus prepared by the Reporter of Decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. 12-307.

United States v Brown. (2015). *Syllabus prepared by the Reporter of Decisions of the United States District Court.* Case 2:11-cv-00652-CW-BCW.

University of California Davis. (2007). *Bisexual resource center: Beyond binaries.* Retrieved from http://www.biresource.org.

Veaux, F., & Rickert, E. (2014). *More than two: A practical guide to ethical polyamory*. Portland, OR: Thorntree Press.

Waite, L. J., & Joyner, K. (2001). Emotional satisfaction and physical pleasure in sexual unions: Time horizon, sexual behavior, and sexual exclusivity? *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *63*, 247–264.

Walker, A. (2014). I'm not a lesbian; I'm just a freak: A pilot study of the experiences of women in assumed-monogamous other-sex unions seeking secret same-sex encounters online, their negotiation of sexual desire, and meaning-making of

sexual identity. *Sexuality & Culture, 18*(1), 911-935. doi:10.1007/s12119-014-9226-5

Walker, M. (2010). How therapy helps when the culture hurts. In J. Jordan (Ed.), *The power of connection: Recent developments in relational-cultural theory*. New York, NY: Routledge Press.

Wallerstein, J., & Blakeslee, S. (1996). *The good marriage: How and why love lasts*. New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing.

Wallerstein, N., & Duran, B. (2006). Using community-based participatory research to address health disparities. *Health Promotion Practice*, *7*(3), 312-323. doi:10.1177/1524839906289376

Wallerstein, N., & Duran, B. (2010). Community-based participatory research contributions to intervention research: the intersection of science and practice to improve health equity. *American Journal of Public Health*, *100*(S1), S40-S46. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2009.184036

Warner, D. N. (2004). Towards a queer research methodology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *1*(1), 321-337.

Warren, J., Harvey, S., & Agnew, C. (2012). One love: Explicit monogamy agreements among heterosexual young adult couples at increased risk of sexually transmitted infections. *Journal of Sex Research*, *49*(2-3), 282-289. doi:10.1080/00224499.2010.541952

Washington State University. (2014). *Gender identity/expression and sexual orientation resource center: Definition of pansexuality*. Retreived from https://thecenter.wsu.edu/resources/pansexuality/

Weitzman, G. (2006). Therapy with clients who are bisexual and polyamorous. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *6*(1/2), 137-164.

Weitzman, G., Davidson, J., & Phillips, R. (2010). What psychology professionals should know about polyamory. *National Coalition for Sexual Freedom*. Retrieved from https://ncsfreedom.org/images/stories/PolyPaper/72548_NCSF_2012poly7.pdf

West, C. (1996). *Lesbian polyfidelity: A pleasure guide for all women whose hearts are open to multiple sensual loves, or, how to keep nonmonogamy safe, sane, honest & laughing, you rogue!* San Francisco, CA: Booklegger Publishing.

Weston, K. (1997). *Families we choose: Lesbians, Gays, kinship.* New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Whitehurst, L. (2011). Polygamists challenge Utah's antipolygamy law. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/07/14/utah-polygamy_n_897491.html

Winkielman, P., Niedenthal, P., Wielgosz, J., Eelen, J., & Kavanagh, L. (2015). Embodiment of cognition and emotion. In M. Mikulincer, P. Shaver, E. Borgida, & J. Bargh (Eds.), *APA handbook of personality and social psychology, Volume 1: Attitudes and social cognition* (pp. 151-175). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Wolfinger, N. H., & Wilcox, W. B. (2008). Happily ever after: Religion, marital status, gender, and relationship quality in urban families. *Social Forces*, *86*, 1311–1137.

Wosick-Correa, K. (2010). Agreements, rules and agentic fidelity in polyamorous relationships. *Psychology and Sexualit*y, *1*(1), 44–61. doi:10.1080=19419891003634471

Yalom, I., & Leszcz, M. (2005). *The theory and practice of group psychotherapy*. New York, NY: Perseus Books Group.

Zeeman, L., Aranda, K., & Grant, A. (2014). Queer challenges to evidence-based practice. *Nursing Inquiry, 21*(2), 101-111.

Zoe., J. (2010). *Is Polyamory "the New Gay"?* Retrieved February 6, 2015, from http://polyadvocacy.ca/is-polyamory-the-new-gay.

Zuk, T. (2014). Proud Mormon polygamist: Assimilation, popular memory, and the Mormon churches in "Big Love." *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, *26*(1), 93-106.

Appendix A: Marketing and Outreach Letter

Dear (Name),

My name is Jeff Peterson and I am a doctoral student in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at Walden University. I am conducting dissertation research on Polyfidelity, a term used to describe a closed group romantic relationship between three or more adults. I self-identify as polyfidelitous, am supportive of the polyamory community, and am a member of a few polyamory organizations, including Loving More, based out of Colorado. I would appreciate your assistance in helping me identify any individual who has been or is currently in a group romantic relationship (three or more consenting adults). While this may include those in a polygamous relationship, a defining feature of polyfidelity is that all participants are equally considered and are romantically or affectively involved with one another in the relationship. This may involve a group relationship where all individuals cohabitate and identify themselves as a family, such as two paired-couples, regardless of their sexual dynamics.

Participants will be interviewed via telephone, videoconference, or in-person and are free to discontinue participation at any time. There is little risk for participating, with the exception of bringing up difficult memories and minor social stigma. Therefore great measures will be taken to protect the identities, as well as any potentially identifiable information, of the participants involved in this study.

This study is approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) through Walden University and is under the advisement of Dr. Jason Patton (Jason.Patton@waldenu.edu). I will provide further information to potential participants and am also happy to visit by phone or email with anyone who may have questions concerning this study. I can be reached at 816-866-5524 or emailed at jeff.lubsen@waldenu.edu.

Sincerely,

Jeff Peterson, M.S., L.C.P.C., N.C.C.
Doctoral Student in Counseling Education & Supervision
Walden University
100 Washington Avenue South, Suite 900
Minneapolis, MN 55401
www.waldenu.edu

Appendix B: Letter to Participant

Date:

Name of Participant
Address

Dear (Participant Name),

My name is Jeff Peterson and I am a doctoral student in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at Walden University. I am conducting dissertation research on Polyfidelity, a term used to describe a closed group romantic relationship between three or more adults. I self-identify as polyfidelitous, am supportive of the polyamory community, and am a member of a few polyamory organizations, including Loving More, based out of Colorado. Even though there is a growing body of research in the field of polyamory, little is known about the dynamics that specifically influence group romantic relationships (between three or more consenting adults). Involvement in this study could help counselor educators attain better research, data, and evidence-based practices for helping counsel individuals in this type of relationship.

I would appreciate any help you might be able to offer in completing this study. All information gathered during this study was held in strictest confidence assuring that no one's identity is revealed. Participants would need to meet with me two times (with a maximum of 2 hours each time), and potentially a third time (with a maximum of 1 hour) either via phone, videoconference, or in-person. The total time commitment would be no longer than five hours over the duration of the study. Participants can determine how we communicate or which location they would like to meet at. Participants will not be pressured to share any information or experience that they are not comfortable sharing and are also free to discontinue involvement at any time. The meetings are designed to help me learn about the dynamics of each individual's experience in a group romantic relationship.

Please feel free to contact me or provide me a time when I can contact you to schedule an initial meeting. My telephone number is 816-866-5524 or you can email me at jeff.lubsen@waldenu.edu. Thank-you for your help.

Jeff Peterson, M.S., L.C.P.C., N.C.C.
Doctoral Student in Counseling Education & Supervision
Walden University
100 Washington Avenue South, Suite 900
Minneapolis, MN 55401
www.waldenu.edu

Appendix C: Interview Protocols

Interview #1 Protocol

Date/Time:_____

Location/Phone/Video:_____

Name of
Interviewer:_____

Code # of
Interviewee:_____

1. Could you describe to me how you define(d) your relationship?

2. What is or was the significance of being in a relationship with more than one individual?

3. What drew you towards polyfidelity rather than an open polyamorous relationship?

4. What are or were the dynamics, rules, or norms of your relationship when it came to engaging one another? Making decisions? Being romantically involved?

5. How did you meet your partners?

6. What factors influenced (both positive and negative) the formation of your relationship?

Interview #2 Protocol

Date/Time:_____

Location/Phone/Video:_____

Name of
Interviewer:_____

Code # of
Interviewee:_____

1. How did you experience each individual in context to the group?

2. What was the most challenging aspect of the relationship? How did those challenges impact the relationship or your experience in the relationship?

3. How did you overcome the challenging aspects in the relationship?

4. What was the most rewarding aspect of the relationship?

5. What were the strengths of your relationship? How did you utilize those strengths?

6. How do you describe or define your role in the relationship and is this different from what you learned growing up in relation to gender or monogamous norms?

7. How did those who knew about your relationship perceive you?

8. What are your experiences when interacting with others in the community?

Optional Follow-up Interview #3 Protocol

Date/Time:_____

Location/Phone/Video:_____

Name of
Interviewer:_____

Code # of
Interviewee:_____

1. There were some topics that we discussed previously that I would like to ask some follow-up questions, or further inquire about.

       a) Topic A

       b) Topic B

       c) Topic C

       d) Topic D

Appendix D: Voluntary Demographic Questionnaire

This questionnaire will be completed during the informed consent process. You are not required to answer any of these questions. However, should you chose, this information could be helpful for future polyfidelity research.

You have been selected to participate in this study because you have met the criteria of having participated in a polyfidelity (egalitarian group) relationship at some point in your life. You are being asked to voluntarily provide information that will not be associated with your identity. Such information will only be included for statistical reference if such information is pertinent to the findings of the study.

How many group romantic relationships have you been a part of: _____

How many members were in each group relationship: _____

Your Age: _____

Your Race: _____

Gender Identity: _____

Sexual Orientation: _____

Highest Level of Education Completed: _____

Appendix E: Exit and Debriefing Protocol

I would like to thank-you for participating in this study. Your participation helped counselor educators, supervisors, and clinicians become better prepared for serving the needs of those living in a nonmonogamous or alternative relationship. I will share the results of this study once it is completed, which will most likely be within one year.

I would like to remind you that your identity will be kept strictly confidential throughout the research process (as stated below). If you experience stress or anxiety after your participation in this study, I encourage you to contact me so that I can help provide you with referrals for appropriate mental health counseling in your area. If you find yourself in a crisis situation, including thoughts of suicide, violence, or regret and are unable to get help, I encourage you to call 911, go to the nearest emergency room, or call your family on-call provider.

If at any time you have questions or concerns regarding this study, the outcome, or publication of this study, or your participation in this study, I encourage you to contact me or one of the research affiliates listed below.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study, including your identity, will be kept strictly confidential in an electronic password protected document. Careful effort will be taken to review the material you provided in order to make sure your identity is not vicariously or accidentally revealed. Any audio recordings of all interviews or any email correspondence will be securely deleted 5 years after the completion of the study.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Jeff Peterson. This study is approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) through Walden University and is under the advisement of Dr. Jason Patton. If you have questions at any time, you may contact Dr. Patton at Jason.Patton@waldenu.edu or via telephone at: 512-426-9425. I am also available at anytime to address any questions or concerns by phone or email. I can be reached at 816-866-5524 or emailed at jeff.lubsen@waldenu.edu. The Research Participant Advocate at Walden University is Dr. Leilani Endicott, you may contact her at 1-800-925-3368 extension 3121210 or email at irb@waldenu.edu if you have questions about your participation in this study.

Appendix F: Initial Email Outreach to Potential Participant

Date:

Dear (Participant Name),

My name is Jeff Peterson and I am a doctoral student in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at Walden University. It was suggested by (referral source) that you might be someone who would be a good fit for a dissertation research study that I am conducting on romantic relationships.

In order to maintain your confidentiality, I was wondering if it would be ok to contact you during a time when you could speak privately with me? The call will be no longer than 10 minutes, during which I can give you more detailed information to help you determine whether or not you would be willing to voluntarily participate.

You are also welcome to contact me at anytime when it is convenient between the hours of 7:00am-10:00pm any day of the week. My telephone number is 816-866-5524 or you can email me at jeff.lubsen@waldenu.edu.

Sincerely,

Jeff Peterson, M.S., L.C.P.C., N.C.C.
Doctoral Student in Counseling Education & Supervision
Walden University
100 Washington Avenue South, Suite 900
Minneapolis, MN 55401
www.waldenu.edu

Appendix G: Phone Script to Potential Participant

Hello (Participant Name),

My name is Jeff Peterson and I am a doctoral student in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at Walden University. I am calling because it was suggested by (referral source) that you might be someone who would be a good fit for a dissertation research study that I am conducting on romantic relationships. Would you have a moment to visit with me on the phone about the study and your potential participation?

First off, all information gathered during this study, including today's phone call, will be held in strictest confidence assuring that no one's identity is revealed. This is a voluntary study and should you chose to participate you can withdraw from the study at any time. The study is focused on better understanding the dynamics of a polyfidelity relationship, defined as a closed group relationship of three or more consenting adults. I self-identify as polyfidelitous, am supportive of the polyamory community, and am a member of a few polyamory organizations, including Loving More, based out of Colorado. While there is no compensation for your participation, this study has the potential to improve counselor's understanding of poly relationships and therefore help better address the counseling needs of individuals engaged in such relationships.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked a series of questions during two (2-hour) and potentially a third (1-hour) individual interviews via telephone, videoconference, or at a location of your choice. You are not required to answer any question that you find to be invasive or stressful. If you experience stress or anxiety during your participation in the study you may discontinue your participation at any time. You will also be given the opportunity to see the completed project in order to benefit from my findings. Do you have any questions so far about this process?

There are few risks associated with participating in this study, with exception of the emotional vulnerability when discussing potentially painful experiences with previous romantic partners. For example, some questions may probe challenging dynamics of your relationship or ask for you to share details regarding a potential breakup. An additional minor risk may come from being associated with this study and then targeted due to social prejudice. Therefore strict safeguards will be in place to protect your identity and to prevent revealing any identifiable information about you throughout our entire correspondence.

The records of this study will be kept confidential in an electronic password protected document, on a password-protected computer, on a secure socket encrypted server or in a locked location. Any information from this study, whether published or not, will not include any information that will make it possible to identify any participant, including yourself or your partners. Interviews will be audio recorded for purposes of providing an accurate description of your experience and only the researcher will have access to the

interviews. Audio recordings of any interviews or any email correspondence will be securely stored in a locked safe for 5 years (as part of the dissertation auditing process) and then was securely deleted and destroyed. Do you have any questions about anything I have covered today?

I can mail or email you additional information, as well as a consent form for you to complete. You are also welcome to contact me at anytime when it is convenient between the hours of 7:00am-10:00pm any day of the week. My telephone number is 816-866-5524 or you can email me at jeff.lubsen@waldenu.edu. Before I end the call are there any other questions I might be able to answer? Thank-you again for taking time to visit today.

Appendix H: Identity Coding Procedure and Master List

Before conducting any data collection an identity code was assigned to each participant's name to help maintain confidentiality. Below is the master list that identifies each participant according to their code. This list was kept electronically, was password protected on a password-protected computer in a locked room.

Participant Name	Contact Phone, Email, Address	Date Entered, Date Withdrawn	Unique Indentifying Code
1)			P101
2)			P102
3)			P103
4)			P104
5)			P105
6)			P106
7)			P107
8)			P108
9)			P109
10)			P110

Appendix I: Screening Interview Questions

1) Have you been or are you currently in a group romantic relationship that involves more than one other consenting adult (over the age of 18)?   YES   NO

If yes, continue to question 2. If no, continue to question 7

2) Was the nature of the relationship exploitive, coercive, possessive, or based solely on providing for your basic needs? (This could include the classic definition of polygamy, where a husband possesses multiple wives but those wives are not romantically or affectively (beyond friendship) involved with one another; human trafficking; or sex/romance for the trade of money, housing, or other personal gain)   YES   NO

If no, continue to question 3. If yes, continue to question 7

3) Were each of the members of the romantic relationship engaged romantically, sexually, or affectively (intimate beyond friendship) with one another?   YES   NO

If yes, continue to question 4. If no, continue to question 7

4) Was the nature of your group relationship committed and closed? In other words, did the relationship occur with an understanding that there was an exclusive romantic/sexual commitment to only those in the relationship (regardless of infidelity or mistakes)?   YES   NO

If no, continue to question 5. If yes, continue to question 8

5) Was the nature of the relationship based on a mutual understanding that members of the relationship have the opportunity to date others outside of the primary group relationship?   YES   NO

If no, clarify why question 4 was no. If yes, continue to question 6

6) Even though there was the opportunity to date others outside of the primary relationship, was the primary relationship considered a significant priority over your other relationships? (In other words were partners outside of the primary considered less important or given less consideration)

If no, continue to question 7. If yes, continue to question 8

7) Script: "It would appear that the nature of your relationship(s) does not meet the criteria that is defined as "polyfidelity" in this study. I am willing to discuss or explain

this further if you have questions. If not, I appreciate your taking the time to answer these screening questions and appreciate your interest in this study. However, I will not be able to include you in the data collection process at this time. Everything we have discussed today was held in strict confidence and will not be recorded or documented. Thank-you again for your time."

8) Script: Thank-you for taking the time to answer these screening questions. Based on the information you provided you would indeed qualify as a participant in this study.

Are you still interested in being a part of the study?

If no, "Thank you for taking the time to visit with me today. Everything we have discussed today was held in strict confidence and will not be recorded or documented."

If yes, "The next step is for us to set-up a time to conduct the first interview and complete the informed consent process, as well as the voluntary demographic questionnaire."

Appendix J: Flier for Potential Candidates

Polyamorous Research Study on:
Polyfidelity

Polyfidelity - is a term describing a closed committed romantic, sexual, or affective (beyond friendship) relationship between three or more consenting adults.

This is a confidential interview-based study, which means all you have to do is visit over the phone, videoconference, or in-person.

Jeff Peterson, LCPC, LPC, NCC is a mental health professional and **an advocate for the polyamorous (polyfidelitous) community**. He organized the LGBTQ-Affirmative Therapist Guild (Healthcare Guild), a nonprofit organization that serves as an advocacy group for alternative relationships, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

This **confidential study helped mental health professionals better understand and support those in a polyfidelity relationship**. If you or someone you know, of any sexual orientation or gender identity, living anywhere in the United States, has previously been or is currently involved in a committed relationship with three or more consenting adults, please refer them to this study. Your help can make a huge difference!

You can participate without leaving your home and withdraw at anytime! Plus the time-commitment is very reasonable!

CONTACT: Jeff Peterson
jeff.lubsen@waldenu.edu
816-866-5524

Jeff Peterson is a doctoral student completing dissertation research in the Counselor Education and Supervision program at Walden University. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University