1-1-2017

"There Will Be More Cookies": A Discursive Exploration of Polyamorous Identity in a Monogamous World

Stephanie K. Webb
University of Denver

Recommended Citation

Webb, Stephanie K., ""There Will Be More Cookies": A Discursive Exploration of Polyamorous Identity in a Monogamous World" (2017). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 1279.
https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/1279

"There Will Be More Cookies": A Discursive Exploration of Polyamorous Identity in a Monogamous World

Abstract

Monogamous romantic relationships are the standard by which to engage in relationships in the United States. Despite the pervasiveness of monogamy, polyamorous romantic relationships are growing. Polyamory is an approach to romantic relationships that includes engaging sexually and emotionally with multiple people simultaneously, with the knowledge and consent of everyone involved (Polyamory, 2015). This study explores how individuals who identify as polyamorous construct personal and relational identities in a monogamous world. Using relational dialectics theory 2.0 and queer theory, the study examined self-recorded conversations of 21 polyamorous participants and their partner(s). Participant talk surrounding polyamorous personal and relational identity voiced the discourse of mono-deconstruction and the discourse of poly-production. The discourse of mono-normativity was also present in the data. Participant talk surrounding polyamorous personal and relational identity was dialogically rich, demonstrating interplay and transformative dialogue. Metaphoric transformation is introduced, which is the use of metaphor to create new meanings in communication.

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Ph.D.

Department
Human Communications

First Advisor
Elizabeth A. Suter, Ph.D.

Second Advisor
Erin Willer

Third Advisor
Bernadette M. Calafell

Keywords
Identity, Monogamy, Non-monogamy, Polyamory, Queer theory, Relational dialectics theory 2.0

Subject Categories
Communication

Publication Statement

"There Will be More Cookies": A Discursive Exploration of Polyamorous Identity in a

Monogamous World

_____

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Denver

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

_____

by

Stephanie K. Webb

June 2017

Dr. Elizabeth Suter

ABSTRACT

Monogamous romantic relationships are the standard by which to engage in

relationships in the United States. Despite the pervasiveness of monogamy, polyamorous

romantic relationships are growing. Polyamory is an approach to romantic relationships

that includes engaging sexually and emotionally with multiple people simultaneously,

with the knowledge and consent of everyone involved (Polyamory, 2015). This study

explores how individuals who identify as polyamorous construct personal and relational

identities in a monogamous world. Using relational dialectics theory 2.0 and queer

theory, the study examined self-recorded conversations of 21 polyamorous participants

and their partner(s). Participant talk surrounding polyamorous personal and relational

identity voiced the discourse of mono-deconstruction and the discourse of poly-

production. The discourse of mono-normativity was also present in the data. Participant

talk surrounding polyamorous personal and relational identity was dialogically rich,

demonstrating interplay and transformative dialogue. Metaphoric transformation is

introduced, which is the use of metaphor to create new meanings in communication.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Relationships are "ways of knowing, and they influence the ways you know the world, what you know, and how you know it" (Duck, 2011, p. 22). Extending Duck's conjecture, romantic relationships are epistemic ways of knowing, and in United States culture, monogamy has been positioned as the only way in which to engage in romantic relationships (Abbott, 2011; Anderson, 2012; Emens, 2004; McLean, 2004; Schippers, 2016). Monogamy can be defined as sexual and emotional exclusivity between two people (Wosick-Correa, 2010), and it is the cultural ideal for heteronormative romantic relationships in the United States (Abbott, 2011; Anderson, 2012). Monogamy is assumed as "an intrinsically superior characteristic of relationships" (Heckert, 2010, p. 258; Murray, 1995; Norrgard, 1991; Rust, 1993), and there is a conflation between monogamy (Anderson) and relational ideologies that typify romantic relationships, such as love, intimacy, honesty, communication, and commitment (Klesse, 2006). Monogamy is also perceived as the "natural" and "moral" way to engage in romantic relationships (Ritchie & Barker, 2006; Kean, 2015; McLean, 2004). Due to the aforementioned assumption that romantic relationships must be monogamous and the resulting perceptions of monogamous relationships, monogamy influences ways of knowing, what is known, and how it is known.

1

Furthermore, compulsory monogamy[1] is a way of knowing that is imbued with systemic overtures of power, which implicate gender, race, class, and sexuality (Rosa, 1994; Schippers, 2016; Willey, 2006), in addition to capitalism, economics (McPheeters, 1999), religion (Stelboum, 1999), and identity politics (Heckert, 2005). Due to monogamy's prolific influence on both personal relationships and sociocultural infrastructure in Western culture, monogamy does not typically fall under scrutiny in individual romantic relationships or in academic research (Anderson, 2012). Even in theories that work to address power and systemic oppression, such as queer theory, there have been a limited number of "interrogations of how monogamy is implicated in and productive of gender, race, and sexual hierarchies or the role of monogamy as an organizing rationale for regimes of normalcy and social structures of inequality" (Schippers, 2016, p. 0). Monogamy must be addressed as an institution that impacts not only the ways in which individuals choose to conduct romantic relationships, but also how it has influenced and continues to influence systemic power structures and social inequities.

One way to address the power of monogamy is to examine how polyamorous identities emerge despite compulsory monogamy. Examining polyamory via communication studies is an exemplary way to interrogate polyamorous identities because "The language around us shapes our self-identities (Burr, 1995) and our understanding of sexual identity depends on the language of sexuality available to us" (Ritchie & Barker, 2006, p. 585). Here, I contend that compulsory monogamy is

---

[1] The term "compulsory monogamy" is adapted from Rich's (1983) work, which examines compulsory heterosexuality as a "network or system of social beliefs, customs, and practices that compel women into intimate relationships with men" (Schippers, 2016, p. 5). Compulsory monogamy, then, refers to the ways in which monogamy is institutionalized and subtly enforced in romantic relationships (Emens, 2004).

constitutive of language development regarding romantic relationships; therefore, it limits

communication to monogamous ways of knowing the world. By researching

polyamorous identity from the lens of Communication Studies, specifically a Critical

Interpersonal and Family Communication (CIFC) lens, it is possible to understand how

polyamory discursively competes with monogamy.

As an introduction to this study, I will first define polyamory and situate

polyamorous identity as a relational culture that is reliant on communication. I will make

an argument for the use of relational dialectics theory and its methodological companion,

contrapuntal analysis, as means by which to frame the study, specifically noting the

significance of capturing the conversations of polyamorous individuals as data. Within

this argument, I will introduce queer theory and denote the ways in which queer theory

can advance this exploration into polyamorous identity. Finally, I will turn toward

Critical Interpersonal and Family Communication to explicate the understanding of

power in this work, defining the significance of this study as I situate it within previous

research. While Chapter Two will go into depth regarding all of the aforementioned

ideas, this introduction provides a foundational understanding for my rationale, as well as

an orientation to the terms and theories herein.

Defining Polyamory and Polyamorous Identity

Literally translated from Greek and Latin words, polyamory means "many loves"

(Klesse, 2011). It is an approach to romantic relationships that includes engaging

sexually and emotionally with multiple people simultaneously, with the knowledge and

consent of everyone involved (Polyamory, 2015). Polyamorous relationships are

characterized by love, commitment, and honesty, and they are highly reliant on extensive

3

communication between partners about emotional well-being and satisfaction (Anapol, 2010). Philosophically, polyamory is rooted in the idea that maintaining multiple intimate, sexual, and/or loving relationships at the same time is possible, valid, and worthwhile (Heritaworn, Lin, & Klesse, 2006). Becasuse polyamory departs from monogamy because it decenters relational coupling, the practice of polyamory also troubles the relational constructs that are associated with monogamy, such as marriage, romantic love, and commitment (Barker, 2005; Klesse, 2006; Klesse, 2011). As Barker (2005) contends, "Polyamory presents a fascinating avenue for exploring dominant constructions of relationships and the ways in which these may be challenged, since it involves an open refusal to conform to the standard ideals of monogamy and fidelity" (p. 76).

Individuals who identify as polyamorous construct their personal and relational identities in a culture where monogamy is the dominant discourse of romantic relationships. Exploring polyamorous personal and relational identities in depth allows for an opportunity to discover ways in which polyamory troubles the discourse of monogamy and its pervasive impact on romantic relationships. Per Faulkner and Ruby (2015):

> Relational identity refers to a shared relational culture, a privately transacted system of understandings that helps people coordinate meanings and behaviors…. Relational and personal identities enacted in talk contribute to a relational culture. (p. 210)

Understanding of identity is reliant on the language that is available (Burr, 1995) – "Discursive possibilities thus construct and constrain meaning" (Ritchie & Barker, 2006) – and polyamorous individuals and communities have had to invent words to make

sense of their relational constructions (Ritchie & Barker). An exemplar of this phenomenon is the word *metamour*, meaning my partner's love or my partner's partner (Ritchie & Barker). The term metamour is applied thusly: If Shaye and Elias are John's partners, then Shaye and Elias are metamours. The word "metamour" renders a partner's partner visible, meaning that there is an acknowledgement of this type of relationship that can be recognized by others within the community. Where "my partner's partner" has no place in the discourse of monogamy, "my metamour" opens up a discursive opportunity to understand a way of life that is not reflected in monogamy. This type of language creation is significant because it represents personal and relational lives that are distinct from those who engage in relationships rooted in the discourse of monogamy.

As the aforementioned example demonstrates, communication regarding polyamorous relationships has allowed individuals to create new words in order to develop polyamorous identity and shared culture. A high level of communication is required because the societal scripts of monogamy do not guide polyamorous relationships; therefore, communication is additionally essential as polyamory is unscripted and enacted differently for everyone involved (Wosick-Correa, 2010). Considering the breadth of relational constructions in polyamorous relationships (explored more in Chapter Two), polyamory requires a high level of communication between partners in order to develop and maintain relationships, signify needs, and indicate changes (Anapol, 2010). As previously noted, communication regarding polyamory is entrenched in compulsory monogamy. Here, where polyamory meets monogamy, communication is dialogically expansive. For communication to be dialogically expansive, multiple discourses must be present in the utterance. Different

from dialogically contractive communication – in which only one discourse is voiced – expansive communication is where researchers can make meaning through the interplay of multiple discourses (Baxter, 2011).

Theoretical Framework: RDT 2.0 and Queer Theory

In order to examine the dialogically expansive site of polyamorous personal and relational identity, participants for this study consisted of individuals who identified as polyamorous and their partner(s), all of whom agreed to personally record conversations. The data was chosen in accordance with relational dialectics theory 2.0 (Baxter, 2011) to examine how polyamorous identity is constructed within conversations. Baxter provides an outline of the five interrelated differences between the first and second versions of relational dialectics theory (see introduction Baxter, 2011, for details), noting that RDT 2.0 turns toward a critical examination of power in discourse.

Baxter (2011) indicates that an utterance is a turn of talk, which can be understood as a part of an utterance chain that has societal, relational, historical, and future components. The focus on a conversation between partner(s) puts emphasis on the proximal site of the utterance chain, as opposed to the distal site, which makes meaning of sociocultural discourses (Baxter, 2011). To date, studies have primarily focused on the distal site, as data collection techniques, such as interviewing, have been a productive means for exploring larger sociocultural discourses (Baxter). This study will contribute to the limited research that has focused on the proximal site of the utterance chain. In RDT 2.0 research, the proximal site of the utterance chain is important because it examines the ways in which new meanings are made relationally. Historically, relationship maintenance research has focused on preserving the continuity of

relationships, which asserts that discontinuity is a threat (Baxter). In privileging new

creation through the examination of the proximal site, discontinuity is not seen as a

threat; rather, it is a discursive representation of new identities and dialogic growth

(Baxter).

First, focusing on conversations between relational partners privileges the

examination of creation through communication. Baxter (2011) contends that historical

communication research has positioned change as a threat to relational communication;

however, in the dialogic tradition, change is expected. Examining recorded conversations

between polyamorous partners, renders visible the creation of new meaning:

> The potentiality for *pro*duction, not just *re*production, is present in every new
> encounter between relationship partners; partners continue to construct the
> meaning of their relationship, and through their adaptations in meaning, they
> construct new relationship identities. (Baxter, p. 93)

Therefore, in focusing on conversations, polyamorous personal and relational identity

creation will be accessible for analysis.

Second, the proximal is significant because previous interactional encounters in a

relationship constitute identity, and current talk is laced with "a myriad of interactional

practices, including reliance on taken-for-granted common joint experiences, referencing

a common joint network, and explicitly communicating about the past through

ritualizing, storytelling, and informal reminiscing" (Baxter, p. 93). Here, dialogic

expansion – where monogamy informs polyamorous identity – has the potential to be

visible, meaning that as relational partners talk, the influence of not only their personal

relationship, but also their understanding of monogamy's influence, will be at the fore.

Phrased a different way, in order to discuss polyamorous identity, participants will have

to make meaning of their understanding of monogamy. To make meaning of monogamy, they might call upon personal past monogamous relationships and/or sociocultural discourses that help them understand monogamy.

Self-recorded conversations with polyamorous participants are dialogically expansive, as they offer a look at how monogamy informs polyamorous identity. By focusing on the proximal site on the utterance chain – the conversations of participants – the production of identity can be examined. Additionally, in making meaning of polyamorous personal and relational identity, participants will have to call upon their understandings of monogamy. The goal of this study is to understand how polyamorous personal and relational identity is constructed in a culture where compulsory monogamy exists—and focusing on the dialogically expansive, proximal site of self-recorded communication will accomplish this goal.

One final consideration with regard to compulsory monogamy, polyamorous identities, and the use of RDT 2.0 is the integration of a queer lens on this research. By integrating queer theory, one can examine the significance of power imbalances. For example, instead of simply noting the centripetal and centrifugal discourses in an utterance, queer theory allows for an examination of how powerful discourses can be violent systems of meaning (Yep, 2003). Queer theory will be explicated in depth in the next chapter. Suter (Ch 19) demonstrates how RDT 2.0 engages the micro- and the macro-levels of relational talk to construct meaning:

> RDT facilitates unpacking the complexities of meaning-making, scaffolding examinations of how micro-level relational talk within the family intersects with macro-level socio-cultural discourses to construct meaning. In breaking down presumed barriers between the private lives of families and the public spheres within which families exist, RDT provides a way to understand not only how culture-at-large can influence families in their everyday lives, but also the

potential of everyday familial talk to shift and advance novel cultural norms about family. (p. 12)

While RDT 2.0 is the tool by which polyamorous identity is examined and power is analyzed, queer theory asserts how the meaning impacts the polyamorous population. As I work to show how these theories overlap to inform this study, it is important to note that the integration of RDT 2.0 and queer theory has yet to be approached. Scholars have argued that compulsory monogamy is moral, emphasizing that relationships that deviate from sexual and emotional exclusivity are rendered illegitimate and immoral (Heckert, 2012, p. 258; Murray, 1995; Norrgard, 1991; Rust, 1993). The result is a stigma for relationships such as polyamory, and that stigma has financial and legal repercussions, as well as interpersonal repercussions that implicate the meaning of family. Compulsory monogamy is a form of violence (Yep, 2003) for those who do not choose to be monogamous.

The violence of compulsory monogamy can be understood through the lens of queer theory, as queer scholars have worked for decades to call attention to the myriad ways in which heterosexuality is violent to those who do not perform it according to the status quo (Yep, 2003). Queer theory posits that literature, mass culture, and language shape understandings of human sexuality, and that these understandings are power-laden, working to affirm some people and relationships, while marginalizing others (Warner, 1993). Schippers orients polyamory as queer:

> One of the objects given to us by heterosexual culture is the monogamous couple. In order to live a 'good life' of sexual and emotional intimacy, we must turn away from other lovers. Perhaps, then, a queer life would mean reorienting oneself toward other lovers, and non-monogamy would constitute a queer life. (Schippers, 2016, p. 3)

9

In understanding polyamorous personal and relational identity through the lens of queer theory, the effects of compulsory monogamy on populations that deviate from the monogamous performance can be illuminated. RDT 2.0 is positioned to provide this research with the critical lens required to explore how communication allows for the creation of polyamorous identities in a monogamous culture, as well as a discursive exploration of how power implicates both personal and relational identities. Queer theory is the lens that shows how this power influences the individuals who choose to be polyamorous, as well as the societal structures that support romantic relationships. Queer theory is the application of a value system on RTD 2.0 work.

Implications for Critical Interpersonal and Family Communication

In using relational dialectics theory 2.0 and queer theory to frame the study of polyamorous personal and relational identity, I am contributing to the emergent critical turn in interpersonal and family communication, considered Critical Interpersonal and Family Communication (CIFC; Suter, in press). In this turn, I acknowledge the critical modernist view of power, which understands power as distinct from the individual and embedded within systems of oppression (Baxter & Asbury, 2015). I frame monogamy as compulsory, as an institution that lies outside of individuals who often are unaware of the implications of monogamous romantic relationships. However, this study is more firmly rooted in a critical postmodernist view of power, which claims power is not a stable force of systems, but rather unstable and unfinalizable. Here, power is voiced through communication: "In and through their everyday interactions, relational partners constitute and reconstitute power relations via their interplay with discourses at both the micro- and macro-levels" (Suter, in press, p. 9).

10

In this study, polyamorous personal and relational identity is being examined through the self-recorded conversations of polyamorous partners. As they discuss the creation of their identity, they will voice the discourses that jockey for power, including the influence of monogamy and their personal communicative creation. I work to encourage critical thinking regarding compulsory monogamy, not to push a polyamorous agenda, but rather to establish understanding of the societal and relational implications of taking monogamy for granted as the only way in which to conduct romantic relationships. Per CIFC, this work will empower critical thinking and encourage questions about the assumptions of interpersonal and family relationships (Suter, in press, p. 15).

A Summary of Significance

Ultimately, the goal of this study is to understand the discursive processes and influences of power that allow for the creation and development of polyamorous personal and relational identities. In order to achieve this goal, I am making the theoretical move of supplementing RDT 2.0 with queer theory. As a theory of discourse (Baxter, 2011), RDT 2.0 aligns with the pervading Western tradition of privileging words (Madison, 2012). I have struggled with focusing on the dialogue of participants to make meaning, while seemingly leaving out the physical body. The physical body is of import not only because of the additional meaning(s) gleaned from non-verbal communication, but also because "embodied practices...constitute knowledge, emotion, and creation" (Madison, p. 185). Conquergood (1998, 2002) argues that the body is a significant site because of interactive engagement (the experience of the senses), coevalness (the experience of bodies being together at the same time), and expression (the body expresses itself everywhere, writ large). In supplementing RDT 2.0 with queer theory, the body becomes

11

a relevant additional site to make meaning, specifically with regard to the implications of violence for those who do not conform to traditional monogamous relationships. For example, a polyamorous group showing affection in public has the potential to meet unwelcome observations about their lack of conformity to monogamy. In addition, this move addressed Suter and Norwood's (in press) call to use theories from disciplines other than interpersonal and family communication, as these theories have historically been limited in critical scope. As such, I situate myself as a scholar of the new, emergent field of Critical Interpersonal and Family studies (Suter, in press). I am also working to address Baxter's call for a turn toward the proximal. Through my methods, I gather the self-recorded conversations of relational partners in order to research the discourses of relational communication, specifically how history influences an utterance in the present. Data capturing the self-recorded conversations of polyamorous individuals is not limited to "couples," but rather extends to any available polyamorous relational partner, rendering visibility for multiple partners simultaneously. In order to achieve the goals of this study, I have engaged in "theoretical creativity" to forge new pathways (Suter & Norwood, p. 21) as an emergent scholar in Critical Interpersonal and Family studies. Taking Baxter's call for more work in the proximal seriously, I examine relational conversations in hopes of understanding polyamorous personal and relational identity. It is here, at the apex of established theory and creativity, where I hope to contribute as scholar and participant to the study of romantic relationships, especially those currently underrepresented in academic research.

An Invitation To Continue

Considering RDT 2.0 as the theoretical foundation for this study, the goal, then, is to examine how the discourses of polyamorous personal and relational identities are voiced through dialogue, and trouble monogamous practices and relational constructs in the discourse of monogamy. The discourses of polyamorous personal and relational identities communicatively compete with the dyadic emphasis found in the discourse of monogamy. This competition has repercussions that are meaningful to romantic relationships at large because they require a critical examination of the role the discourse of monogamy plays in relational constructs, such as marriage, commitment, and romantic love. In order to achieve this goal, the literature review will provide pertinent information on the discourse of monogamy, serving to expand on the significance of monogamism in United States culture. It will also expand on the aforementioned relational constructs that have developed to frame monogamy as a construct of their existence in romantic relationships. A section on polyamory follows, including specific demographics of the polyamorous population in the United States and an overview of the discourses of polyamory in current literature. Relational dialectics theory will then be unpacked to develop an understanding of how the theory is applied and how it illuminates power struggles through discursive analysis, paired with the application and meaning of queer theory. The methods and recruitment procedures will be reviewed, and the limitations of the proposal will be outlined. In addressing power and the critical nature of RDT 2.0, I will also assert my stance as a White, middle class, educated polyamorous woman, and the potential impacts of my positionality on this study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

To outline the foundation of this project, this chapter will cover not only the

current literature on polyamory, but will also explore the different perspectives on the

meanings of monogamy that are likely to surface as individuals engage in conversations

with their partners about their romantic relationships. The literature review begins with a

discussion of the ways in which United States culture understands monogamy, as these

understandings inform participants' process of meaning-making in their conversations.

This includes a discussion of mono-normativity, monogamism, and monocentricism, as

well as relational constructs that are often conflated with monogamy including marriage,

commitment, and romantic love. Next is a review of the scholarship on polyamory,

including the various structures of polyamorous relationships in order to develop an

understanding of the different ways in which polyamorous relationships can be enacted.

Advancing the discussion of polyamory, queer theory (Warner, 1993) is

introduced and connected to relational dialectics theory 2.0 through the dialogic self

(Baxter, 2011). I then situate myself with regard to the study as a polyamorous woman in

order to engage in a self-reflexive practice that will advance the critical nature of the

work. I establish queer theory as a means by which to engage politics and make meaning

of this research outside of the academy. Finally, I justify the use of relational dialectics

theory as a critical theory and method, outlining the methods of identifying discourses and discursive interplay, making a case for research questions that frame the study.

Monogamy

The discourse of monogamy is the cultural ideal for romantic relationships in the United States (Abbott, 2011) and holds socio-cultural power through discourse (Anderson, 2012; McLean, 2004). As the cultural ideal for romantic relationships, monogamy is normalized as the taken-for-granted way of constructing romantic relationships, and it is the measure by which romantic relationship are seen as good and moral (Yep, 2003). The discourse of monogamy, then, extends beyond the ways in which individual couples practice monogamy, and delves into additional relational constructs such as marriage, commitment, and romantic love. As the discourse of monogamy interweaves with these relational constructs, they become inextricably linked and can be difficult to distinguish from one another. For example, Webb (2015) noted that emerging adults described commitment as emotional and sexual exclusivity, and the idea of romantic love coincides with the idea of "one true love." In these examples, monogamy is invisible, as it is used as a measure of commitment and romantic love (Klesse, 2011). By "invisible," I mean that there is a cultural assumption that a committed romantic relationship is monogamous, and that romantic love is only seen as valid if monogamy is present (Klesse).

Additionally, when speaking of marriage, monogamy does not have to qualify the institution because the legal definition of marriage is exclusively between two people (Emens, 2004). In this example, monogamy transcends relational practice and informs laws that govern society. The invisibility of monogamy is integral to understanding how

it impacts power structures in United States culture. In order to critique monogamy's implicit power, scholars have coined the terms mono-normativity, monogamism, and monocentricism. Each of these terms will be discussed thoroughly in this section, preceded by an examination of the aforementioned relational constructs that are conflated with monogamy. Ultimately, I will establish an understanding of the centralized discursive power of the discourse of monogamy and how it undergirds everyday communication about romantic relationship development.

Mono-Normativity

In order to understand the term "mono-normativity," it is first important to understand its background and political implications. Mono-normativity is both a discourse and a queer theoretical term that has implications rooted in compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 2003).

The discourse of mono-normativity. The discourse of mono-normativity exemplifies the culturally dominant understanding that monogamy is the ideal way to engage in romantic relationships, and that those relationships are sexually and emotionally exclusive (Anderson, 2012). Webb (2015) outlined four tenets that reify the discourse of mono-normativity: (1) monogamy equals commitment (defined as sexual and emotional exclusivity), (2) "one true love" will meet all needs and desires, (3) monogamous relationships are moral, and (4) jealousy is normal in monogamous relationships. The discourse of mono-normativity voices the taken for granted, ordinary way to conduct romantic relationships. As such, it is the idealized, powerful, centered discourse that is generally assumed when speaking about romantic relationships and

16

partners; it does not allow for any other relational type except for monogamy, and it assumes that everyone engages in monogamous relationships.

History of mono-normativity. Mono-normativity pulls from the queer theoretical term "heteronormativity," which was popularized by Warner (1993) and is rooted in the conceptualization of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 2003). In an examination of how heterosexuality can be understood as compulsory, Rich examines four feminist texts, and notes:

> In none of these books, which concern themselves with mothering, sex roles, relationships, and societal prescriptions for women, is compulsory heterosexuality ever examined as an institution powerfully affecting all these; of the idea of 'preference' or 'innate orientation' even indirectly questioned. (p. 633)

Instead, heterosexuality is assumed, and is even perceived of as obligatory in Western culture (Rich). Furthermore, Rich contends that compulsory heterosexuality normalizes heterosexuality, and this "normalization" has moral implications, as well as an undergirding of power:

> Normalization is the process of constructing, establishing, producing, and reproducing a taken-for-granted and all-encompassing standard used to measure goodness, desirability, morality, rationality, superiority, and a host of other dominant cultural values. As such, normalization becomes one of the primary instruments of power in modern society. (Yep, 2003, p. 18)

Heterosexuality is assumed as obligatory and normalized in US culture, ultimately aligning a straight sexual orientation with goodness, normality, and power. Cohen (2005) discusses heteronormativity as fundamental and natural in society by pointing towards centralized institutions such as government, which uphold heterosexual romantic relationships as protected by law. The power of heteronormativity is reinforced and upheld by institutions and structures of meaning that privilege heterosexuality (Johnson,

17

2002). Yep (2003) goes on to say, "Normalization is a symbolically, discursively,

psychically, psychologically, and materially violent form of social regulation and

control" (p. 18). Hegemonic heterosexuality, Yep posits, is a site of pain for those who

do not align with the cultural ideal of heterosexuality. As this violence occurs on a daily

basis, the pain caused by heteronormativity is amplified by the encouragement to

conform and ignore suffering (Yep).

By extension, mono-normativity shares many characteristics of heteronormativity.

In 2005, Pieper and Bauer coined the term *mono-normativity* to acknowledge the power

of monogamy in Western culture (Ritchie & Barker, 2006). Kean (2015) situates

mononormativity in relation to heteronormativity, both of which act as modes of socially

organizing intimacy:

> Monogamy, like heterosexuality, is positioned as coherent and inevitable against
> the backdrop of 'intimate' and 'public' practices that congeal to give it a sense of
> rightness and inevitability, while sustaining its image as a private choice. This
> rightness has been dubbed 'mono-normativity, a neologism that works through
> analogy to 'heteronormativity' to announce a critique of 'the institutions,
> structures of understanding, and practical orientations' that make monogamy as a
> mode of relationality seem 'coherent and privileged'. (Kean, p. 699)

To unpack this quotation, Kean uses the analogy of scholarship on heterosexuality to

make sense of monogamy. Similar to heterosexuality, she points to the idea that

monogamy is perceived as both an intimate practice (or a function of a specific

relationship between two people) and a public practice (or as a recognized socio-cultural

relationship). Combined, these perceptions lead to the understanding that monogamy is

right and even inevitable (Kean).

However, there is still the notion that monogamy is a 'choice.' Mono-normativity

frames the choice: a person has the option either to engage in a monogamous romantic

relationship or stay single. Relational choices that fall outside of monogamy are not

offered, as non-monogamous practices are seen as less legitimate, less committed, and

less loving. Essentially, relationships that are not monogamous are not "real" romantic

relationships, or they are seen as a stage in life that will only last until settling down

occurs (Grindstaff, 2003).

Using the word "mono-normativity" is a strategic lexical move that inherently

troubles institutions that uphold monogamy. Scholars, however, have truncated the

definition to understand mono-normativity as a "cultural bias" that privileges monogamy

(Anapol, 2010, p. x) and a "dominant discourse of monogamy" (Ritchie & Barker, 2006,

p. 484). Kean (2015) argues that this truncation of mono-normativity is one of the ways

in which scholars rationalize emphasizing sexuality or gender, for example, instead of

monogamy when studying romantic relationships. The emphasis on social constructs

outside of monogamy allows for monogamy to retain power because it is not called into

question. It is my intention in this study to address mono-normativity and, in doing so, to

acknowledge the significant implications of Western society indiscriminately accepting

monogamy as the standard by which to engage in romantic relationships.

Monogamism

Anderson's (2012) discussion of mono-normativity posits that monogamy

maintains such a privileged social position that it is safe from critique of any kind. He

calls this hegemonic privilege *monogamism* (Anderson). We can see this adherence to

the cultural expectation of monogamy in the contemporary institution of marriage—even

same sex marriage—that assumes a monogamous bond between partners (Abbott, 2011;

Treas & Giesen, 2000). The monogamous relationship is assumed to be both emotional

and sexual, which creates limitations for any kind of relationship that deviates from this expectation.

For example, Anderson (2012) argues that infidelity actually supports monogamism because it maintains the expectation of monogamy. Infidelity punishes those who stray from sexual and emotional fidelity instead of turning a critical eye toward the system of relational limitation that creates cheating. Monogamy is not questioned or critiqued; instead, it remains unexamined while repercussions such as infidelity are addressed as the problem (see Duncombe, Harrison, Alan & Marsden, 2004; Hertlein, Wetchler, Piercy, 2005; McAnulty & Brineman, 2007). In this way, infidelity is an acceptable risk, whereas enacting any type of ethical nonmonogamy is not an option—this is the power of monogamism: it is nearly impossible to "break the social, interpersonal, and psychic script of monogamy" (Anderson, 2012, p. 193)

Monocentricism

Other scholars address monogamy with the term *monocentricism*, which changes the focus of the significance of the discourse of monogamy to the underlying presumption that all romantic relationships are dyadic couples (Sheff, 2011). This shift is a subtle one, but it is important because it underlies how individuals understand romantic relationships and relational and family scholarship. The assumption that everyone is monogamous renders other types of relationships, such as polyamory, invisible (Anderson, 2012; Kean, 2015; McLean, 2004). This invisibility is a practical challenge for those who do not engage in monogamous romantic relationships; it becomes the impetus of the polyamorous to call attention to additional partners and render them meaningful (Rambukkana, 2004). For example, a polyamorous person being asked, "Do

you have a significant other?" is being limited by the assumption that a person can have only one significant other. It is up to the polyamorous to call attention to the underlying assumption of monogamy. This is monocentricism. Assuming that all romantic relationships are monogamous reifies the power of the discourse of monogamy through an unspoken acknowledgement, which is resisted through discourse, as exemplified above.

The sociopolitical power of monogamy can be understood through the concepts of mono-normativity, monogamism, and monocentrism. Mononormativity is the cultural bias that privileges monogamy, monogamism notes that monogamy is so prevalent that other options are not seen as viable, and monocentricism focuses on the presumption that all romantic relationships are monogamous. These concepts work in concert to point to the cultural power of the relational expectation of monogamy.

Due to the power of monogamy, the meaning of relational constructs such as marriage, commitment, and romantic love are influenced by the perception that romantic relationships should be monogamous. As a result, these constructs are often seen as inextricably linked to monogamy, meaning that the connotations are often conflated with monogamous practices. It is important to understand the significance of these conflations, as the assumption that marriage, commitment, and romantic love are related to monogamy reifies mono-normativity and the power of monogamy. When individuals understand romantic love to be "one true love," for example, they do not question monogamy, but rather denounce any relationship type that does not align itself with their understanding of romantic love (Knee, 1998; Webb, 2015). In the next section, these three relational constructs are outlined.

Marriage, Commitment, and Romantic Love

  Marriage. In sociology and psychology literature, one definition of monogamy is "The practice or state of being married to one person at a time," (Overall, 1998, p. 2). This definition reflects how monogamy and the institution of marriage are interrelated, insofar as the definition of marriage is reliant on monogamy. In marriage, the socio-cultural expectation for monogamy in romantic relationships has transcended expectation and is ratified in law.

  Although legal now, contemporary marriage law was under scrutiny due to the push for legalizing same sex marriage (Emens, 2004). One argument against the legalization of same sex marriage was that allowing same sex partners to be married would lead to other reforms that could include bestiality, incest, and multi-partner marriage (Emens). Proponents of same-sex marriage drew distinct lines in favor of changing the gender requirements, but not the requirements of monogamy in marriage (Emens). Emens contends that there is a "paradox of prevalence" underlying the resistance to multi-partner relationships such as polyamory: "The potential for nearly everyone to imagine him or herself engaging in non-monogamous behavior leads outsiders to steel themselves against polyamory and to eschew the idea of legitimizing such relationships through law" (p. 284). While this cultural imaginary might be one reason for the unwavering support for monogamy, Emens also concludes that many people may engage in monogamous relationships because of social and legal pressures.

  These social and legal pressures are sustained in perceptions of family. The heteronormative, monogamous couple is still upheld as the ideal familial infrastructure for raising children, although many familial forms do not fit this expectation (Burman,

1994; Sheff, 2011). It is estimated that there are now over half a million openly polyamorous families with children in the Unites States (Bennett, 2009). Studies have shown that children of polyamorous parents are just as healthy, happy, and socially adjusted as those who have monogamous parents (Goldfeder & Sheff, 2013; Sheff, 2006; Sheff, 2008). Ultimately, the argument that the heteronormative, monogamous couple is ideal for raising children is simply unfounded. However, there is no institutional recognition for these relationships, leaving polyamorous families vulnerable to societal and legal repercussions, including housing and custody discrimination (Lesher, 2013).

Marriage is a way in which the discourse of monogamy has moved into legal sanction, thus bolstering its dominance as a relational form and limiting the options of other relational orientations. Multi-partner marriages, including polyamorous marriages, are illegal, rendering families defenseless against social and legal stigmatization. The communicative practices that follow this sort of legal sanctification allow for monogamy to escape visibility. Instead of having explicitly to note the expectation of monogamy, there is an implicit understanding that monogamy exists as a part of the governmental recognition of romantic relationships.

Calling attention to the expectation for monogamy in marriage is important because it highlights the implicit power of monogamy as a defining feature of a governmentally-recognized romantic relationship. The feature of monogamy is not always required in marriage, however, as many polyamorous relationships are bound by a marital contract (Sheff, 2013). Multiple marriages are not recognized as legal, so spouses often have other relationships that are not legally recognized—this does not mean that they should be perceived as less than (less meaningful, committed, or loving) the marital

relationship (Sheff). The idea of marriage is bound to the idea of commitment, which is

perceived as a trait of monogamous relationships. The importance of commitment is

detailed in the following section.

      Commitment. Commitment and monogamy are inextricably linked, as

monogamous marriage is often touted as the foundation of commitment to a romantic

partner, and this commitment leass to a happy family and an admirable life. In *Habits of*

the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan,

Swidler, & Tipton, 2008), romantic commitment is often typified by monogamy, but not

stated as such. Commitment is framed as being rooted in "virtues that make an admirable

life" (Bellah et al., p. 161). Celia is used as an example of commitment, and she explains

that her perceptions were based on her understanding of her parents' relationship (Bellah

et al.). Celia's parents married very young and engaged with the political community to

make a difference in their local labor union. While their engagement with politics is

noted as significant, the marital relationship is given credence by Cecilia to show how

she came to understand commitment: "Cecilia's self-image is rooted in a concept of the

virtues that make an admirable life, especially those exemplified in the lives of her

mother and father" (p. 161). Situated within the context of what it means to live a

"virtuous" life, Cecilia does not explicitly use the term "monogamy" when referring to

the commitment of family, marriage, and leading a good life. Instead, monogamy is

presumed. Although this presumption could be understood as insignificant, it is

important here to call attention to how monogamy is silently enforced. In this instance,

Celia's parents' marriage is more than a marriage: it is symbolic of an admirable life. As

she looks to them to shape her own adult life, her construction centers around her understanding of monogamous marriage.

While Celia is only one example provided in *Habits of the Heart*, her understanding of commitment points to the ways in which monogamy infiltrates relational and societal constructs. In Webb's (2015) study, emerging adults do not perceive a high level of commitment in relationships that are not monogamous. The assumption that monogamy equals commitment is harmful. First, it is harmful because it implies that relationships that are not monogamous are not committed. Those entering into adulthood seeking a romantic relationship are not encouraged to challenge the presumption of commitment as monogamy; instead, they receive messages that their presumption is correct. Second, it is harmful because the assumption that only monogamous relationships are committed is incorrect, and, subsequently, those engaged in polyamory have to do the work to deconstruct the image that their relationships are not committed. Polyamorous relationships are seen as "just a phase" and immature, and they receive the message that their relationships are not as valuable as monogamous relationships (Sheff, 2013). In order to validate polyamorous relationships in United States culture, commitment and monogamy need to be untangled, as commitment can manifest itself in forms that defy monogamy.

Marriage and commitment are relational constructs that are complemented by romantic love in the United States, and romantic love is another site where monogamy is assumed. The following section deconstructs the significance of romantic love and monogamy.

Romantic Love. Romantic love has a heightened role in United States culture, as it is a prerequisite for most marriages, and marriage implicates long-term commitment in romantic relationships. The ideal of romantic love has five pervading attributes: (1) love conquers all; (2) there is only one true love for each person; (3) the beloved will meet all wants and needs; (4) love at first sight is possible; (5) the heart is privileged over the mind in matters of love (Baxter, 2011; Knee, 1998). Of these attributes, it is important to note both the second and the third. The second, "there is only one true love for each person," moves monogamy to a place of romanticism (Webb, 2015). With this lens, monogamy is not only functional, it also fulfills the romantic perception of soul mates and one true love. In the third attribute, "the beloved will meet all wants and needs," the romantic perception of love is justified by fulfillment. By fulfillment, I mean that if an individual does not meet all wants and needs, even if at one time they were perceived of as "the one," then they fail to meet all of the qualifications of true love. If the third attribute does not remain true, infidelity can be justified because the relationship is not demonstrative of true love (Anderson, 2012).

The attributes of romantic love in United States culture are not realistic, especially as new relationships develop into companionate love – "happy togetherness with someone whose life has become deeply entwined with yours" (Fisher, 2016, 148). Here, in companionate love, the implicit expectation of monogamy is not apparent: companionate love can be felt for many partnerships. Polyamory is titularly about love, but the love in polyamorous relationships departs from the ideal of romantic love, which emphasizes "one true love," or monogamy. The problem with monogamy underpinning one true love is that love is delegitimized in other types of relationship. Interestingly,

Klesse (2011) posits that polyamory does, in fact, rupture the understanding of monogamous romantic love in the United States because it emphasizes love, and this is unexpected for those who have not questioned the monogamous expectation in romantic love.

Romantic love has been instrumental as a strategy by which monogamy maintains power: the practice of engaging with only one partner is correlated to an emotional expression that has deep meaning – it is associated with marriage and commitment, as previously noted (Klesse, 2011). However, polyamory reinforces the cultural significance of the discourse of love, as it emphasizes loving as a valuable connection for humans (Klesse). Polyamory essentially re-works the understanding of love to accommodate multiple relationships, but it does not trouble the significance of love that was generated in conjunction with the significance of monogamy (Klesse). From a dialogic standpoint, polyamory contributes to the unfixed understanding of romantic love and has the potential to shift romantic love away from being understood as a monogamous construct.

Marriage, commitment, and romantic love are relational constructs that enforce monogamy's implicit power in romantic relationships. In this section, I have explicated the significance of the power and introduced relevant elements of polyamory. In the next section, polyamory is explained, and I make meaning of how polyamory has the potential to shift the power dynamics of monogamy through conversation in polyamorous relational development.

Polyamory

Our monogamy-centrist culture tends to assume that the purpose and ultimate goal of all relationships – and, for that matter, all sex – is lifetime pair-bonding, and that any relationship which falls short of that goal has failed. We disagree.

-Dossie Easton and Janet Hardy, 2009, p. 23

With the pervasive impact of monogamy established, it is important now to expand on polyamory. In this section, polyamory will be defined. Then, I will turn toward the current academic literature to address how polyamory troubles the understanding of monogamy in this particular study. Exploring communication patterns specific to those in polyamorous relationships will show how polyamory challenges the ubiquitous discourse of monogamy, will develop an understanding of how polyamorous identities grow amidst such a hegemonically powerful discourse, and will establish potentially new and transformative ways of understanding romantic relationships outside of the monogamous standard.

Polyamorous Identity

Polyamory has the potential to undo binaries because it deconstructs monogamous relational constructs and practices (Klesse, 2014). Those in polyamorous relationships voice discourses of personal and relational identity that are alternatives to the monogamous standard. Following Faulkner and Ruby (2015), identity is self-declared: "We consider personal identity to be an individual's avowed identification with specific groups or categories" (p. 209). To adapt this definition to polyamory from a dialogic perspective, identity is self-declared, but it is fluid and unfinalizable. Identity is an ongoing process because polyamorous relationships are consistently in flux, as the

relational partners are always changing and the potential for new partners is on the horizon. The reliance on communication in polyamorous relationships is the ongoing voice of shifting identity. Polyamory offers an opportunity for people to live outside of, and enact agency to resist, the limitations of monogamy—it problematizes monogamy through dialogue and action; thus, it deserves investigation.

Polyamorous relationship models. In defining polyamory as a personal identity, there are issues with agreement on cohesive practices. In fact, the only attribute that truly encompasses all polyamorous relationships is that they are all different, based on the needs of those involved in the relationships. This can be seen in the various ways in which polyamorous relationships are enacted and maintained (Anapol, 1997; Klesse, 2013; Labriola, 1999; Munson & Stelboum, 1999; Weitzman, 1999). In the context of this study, participants described various models for their relationships. For example, the primary/secondary model contends that there is a primary relationship and all other relationships are secondary. Primary relationships take precedence over secondary partnerships with regard to important life and family decisions. They have been likened to a domestic partnership (Bettinger, 2005), in that the couple often lives together and the primary partner has significant interpersonal power. Secondary relationships have a much broader scope: they can be committed or casual, but they are typically relationships that last an extended period of time and involve emotional connection (Bettinger).

The multi-primary family model (Bettinger, 2005) is when three or more individuals have a primary relationship, each in concurrent relationships with each other – the triangle or quad (Benson, 2008). These relationships can begin when two couples come together, or three individuals decide to all be in relationship. Some polyamorous

individuals continue to add new partners, while others have a threshold and stop at a

certain number of individuals. In this model, there are two other considerations: closed

or open. In closed multi-primary families, the individuals only interact with one another,

and they do not have outside relationships. In the open option, those within the family

structure may have secondary relationships.

On the contrary, some participants resist hierarchy. The resistance to hierarchy is

also demonstrated in academic research, citing that a hierarchical structure is too

reminiscent of monogamous values (Benson, 2008). A non-hierarchical, or egalitarian,

approach manifests itself when one individual dates two (or more) others who have an

equal influence and amount of relational power – the polyamorous V, or W, or X, or Y

(Benson).

Finally, Bettinger (2008) posits the multi-secondary relationship model, in which

an individual only has secondary relationships, none of which are considered primary.

Each relationship does have an element of commitment, but the various partners have a

limited impact on significant decisions and life choices.

Although these models provide a foundational understanding of how some

polyamorous individuals and relationships work, they are not exhaustive. Emens (2004)

notes: "[B]ecause the number of people in poly relationships has no theoretical limit, the

models of poly relationships are also theoretically limitless" (p. 306). As a result, there is

no fully agreed upon definition of how to engage in polyamory, and the relationships are

typically dynamic.

A final consideration with regard to polyamory is the family structure and the

presence of children. Many individuals in polyamorous relationships intend to or do raise

children. Children serve to complicate the understanding of the polyamorous models, as well as challenge the understanding of family. As a result of the potential of a multi-parent structure, parenting practices for polyamorous families transcend biological family ties and are examples of the "chosen family" (Klesse, 2013). While there is much to be said about polyamorous parenting, the point here is simply to note that the multiplicity of polyamorous relationships is complicated by other relationships – that of the parents/children – and to show further variables of how polyamorous relationships are constructed and enacted.

Polyamory as discourse dependent. Due to the various ways in which polyamory can be enacted, these types of relationships are highly reliant on communication and are very dynamic (Ritchie & Barker, 2006). The dynamism of polyamorous relationships lends to a dialogic research approach. Heritaworn, Lin, and Klesse (2006) note:

> Polyamory has thus risen from the confluence of a number of sexually emancipatory discourses. It tries to provide languages and ethical guidelines for alternative lifestyles and sexual and intimate relationships beyond the culture of 'compulsory monogamy.'" (p. 518)

The sexually emancipatory discourses that Heritaworn, Lin, and Klesse point to are those of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s where new forms of relationships and sexual explorations were leveraged by socialism, feminism, and gay culture (Weeks, 1991). For example, Engles (1972) recognizes a fundamental hypocrisy in monogamy as part of the marital contract: wives were expected to be monogamous because it ensured the paternity of children within the marriage, and wealth could then be passed down through the bloodline, whereas husbands did not have the same biological obligations of

31

ensuring their parentage (Gordon, 2002). As a result, men were allowed the freedom to have sexual relationships with prostitutes (for an overview of research regarding the politics of women's sexual rights, see Gordon, 2002). As these critiques circulated, they became the kindling for discussing new and different ways to engage in romantic relationships, deconstructing the institution of marriage in the process and igniting a discourse of non-monogamy.

Polyamory is discourse dependent, meaning that these types of relationships rely on communication for creation and transmission. Additionally, since there is not one way to be polyamorous, communication is required to make sense of how relationships are structured. Communication shapes self and relational identities (Burr, 1995) and the understanding of identity is reliant on the language that is available—"Discursive possibilities thus construct and constrain meaning" (Ritchie & Barker, 2006). While polyamorous individuals and communities have had to create their own words in order to describe their experiences with identities, relationships, and feelings (Ritchie & Barker), they also have to rely on the circulating discourses in popular culture to make sense of their relationships. The creation of new language is one way in which the discourses of polyamorous relationships are developed, but this study is interested in other ways in which communication functions to destabilize the discourse of monogamy and advance discourses of polyamorous personal and relational identities.

It has been my goal to develop an understanding of the complexities of polyamory. In outlining the multifaceted nature of polyamorous relationships, I have established polyamorous communication as expansive: there is no consensus as to the definition of polyamory or of how to enact polyamorous relationships. Thus, those who

engage in these types of relationships must draw from alternative personal and relational identity discourses to pay homage to romantic relationships that are not widely accepted in United States culture. Monogamy is pervasive in relational constructs such as marriage, commitment, and romantic love, but these same relational constructs can be drawn from to understand the discourses of polyamorous personal and relational identities in a monogamous world. It is the goal of this study to understand the ways in which discourses are invoked to make sense of polyamorous relational and personal identities and to show how they trouble the powerful normative perceptions of monogamy.

Thus far, I have worked to make sense of how monogamy is both implicitly and explicitly powerful in United States culture and how that power impacts societal and personal perceptions of romantic relationships. Specifically, monogamy has been normalized, marking other relational types as deviant. This normalization is mono-normativity, which was adapted from queer theory's establishment of heteronormativity. In this study, I am supplementing relational dialectics theory 2.0 with queer theory to advance polyamorous politics and encourage the intersection of Interpersonal and Critical Communication.

Theoretical Framework(s): RDT 2.0 and Queer Theory

Relational dialectics theory 2.0 (RDT 2.0) conceives of language as a constantly moving, never complete form of communication that is influenced equally by previously voiced and potential future utterances, as well as by relational and cultural communication (Baxter, 2011). RDT 2.0 seeks to understand how utterances – or turns of talk – voice cultural discourses, and how the discourses interplay – or compete – to

33

make meaning of the world (Baxter). Discourses are systems of meaning, or worldviews, that often compete for discursive power. As a theory of discursive meaning making, pairing RDT 2.0 with queer theory provides an additional lens by which power can be examined.

Warner (1993) notes that queer theory is broadly about the ways in which literature, mass culture, and/or language shape perceptions of human sexuality (Gamson, 2003). Gamson is careful to acknowledge that these texts "do not simply appear and shape sexuality;" instead, they are both produced and consumed by the general population. Queer theory, then, challenges the systems that inform the production and consumption of these messages. One way in which queer theory accomplishes this task is to resist the idea that there is a static self. Instead, the self is understood as mutable, never finished, and always in conversation with relational and societal discourses.

Additionally, supplementing RDT 2.0 with queer theory to examine discourses of polyamorous personal and relational identity allows for this study to explore the politics of polyamory's queerness. Queer theory opens the opportunity to "draw on Gamson's (2000) conceptualization of queer as a perspective that opposes established social and academic norms, critiques assimilationist and binary views of sexualities and identities, and questions identity politics" (Jones & Calafell, 2012, p. 961). Said another way, queer theory provides me with the agency to make claims regarding the political impacts of power on polyamorous personal and relational identity.

Situating the Dialogic Self

Queer theory and relational dialectics theory both address the nature of the dialogic self, but queer theory emphasizes the need for self-reflexivity in critical

34

scholarship. I will begin by making sense of the dialogic self, continue to describe how queer theory will bolster relational dialects theory with the addition of self-reflexivity, and conclude this section with my own dialogic self-reflexivity as an individual who identifies as polyamorous.

Monadic self. There are two ways in which to view the self: monadic or dialogic (Baxter, 2011). In the monad, the self is a distinctive, independent agent who operates autonomously from the social world (Baxter). Perceiving the world through this monadic perspective has implications that extend beyond the self (a dialogic irony exists within the monad). First, by focusing on the individual, the discourse of individualism is centered on and can be characterized by self-interest instead of interest in the community (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 2008). Individualism constructs the self as privately owned, and the self controls concepts such as thought, personality, and motivations (Baxter, 2011). Second, the monadic self views identity as calcified, meaning that communication is an expression of the inner self (Baxter). The static monadic self is exemplified in work regarding uncertainty reduction, which assumes that one party can limit feelings of uncertainty because another party can be learned through self disclosure and other information gathering techniques (Baxter).

Rejecting the monadic self. Both dialogism and queer theory reject the monadic self: "such a conception of the self is a cultural fantasy, because the other is essential in constructing the meaning of self" (Baxter, 2011, p. 100). In rejecting the monad, the dialogic self is favored, where the self is reliant on the other for existence and creation (Baxter). The dialogic self insists that the self is a co-construction: a product of both relational and cultural communication. The inner self is not viewed as static, but is

35

instead constructed where discourses interplay, and they cannot be finalized (Baxter). The dialogic self is a product of discourses in communication. Discourses, then, cannot be separated from the self; they cannot be seen as existing independent from communication. Selves and discourses function as a part of dialogue.

Queer Poly-tics

In applying the idea of the dialogic self, queer theory advocates for self-reflexivity within academic work, both in application to the scholar and the audience, meaning that the scholar is challenged to produce reflexive work, and the reader is encouraged to be cognizant of their own stance with regard to the work (Pillow, 2003). The dialogic self is not just a theoretical musing; it is personified in the written work of scholars who seek to imbue their work with a critical approach to communication research. Pillow (2003) discusses how reflexivity informs academic texts that influence societal discourses: "To be reflexive, then, not only contributes to producing knowledge that aids in understanding and gaining insight into the workings of our social world but also provides insight on how this knowledge is produced" (p. 178). One way in which to address the call for reflexivity is to be intentional about discussing how the physical body is implicated in communication research. In RDT 2.0, the physical body is seemingly missing due to the focus on verbal communication and texts. In this study, I was not in the presence of my participants, so I was not able meaningfully to address the body (my participants did not call attention to their bodies verbally either). Therefore, my approach to addressing the physical body in this work is through my own self-reflexivity. Intentional self-reflexivity is one way in which the personal is political – in discussing my own positionality, I call attention to my goals as a critical scholar.

My Queer Poly-tics. As a White, middle-class, able-bodied, pansexual woman who identifies as polyamorous, my positionality informs my approach to this project and my analysis of the data. Formally, my positionality will inform my research in a number of ways. My participants will understand my investment in this study, as I included a paragraph about myself in the email contact that I sent them. It was important to me for them to know that they were working with a fellow polyamorous individual, as I wanted them to feel as though their conversations were going to be handled with empathy and a basic understanding of polyamorous culture. During the writing of this literature review, I have been careful to choose scholarship that is reflective of current polyamorous culture, as well as key academic contributors to queer theory and relational dialectics theory 2.0. Finally, as I continue to work as a polyamorous scholar, this study will inform my work in the future. The influence of this study on my own identity is imperative to the work I will produce in the future, and I have made time to journal and talk about the process. All of these formal academic tasks have worked to develop my self-reflexivity with regard to this work.

On a less formal note, as a scholar I have been interested in the ways in which polyamorous individuals communicate because I trained myself. For the last decade I have identified as polyamorous, and, when I first identified as such, there were not nearly the number of resources that there are now with regard to "how to be poly"—and even now there is not an overabundance. Additionally, the difficulty of finding resources was compounded by a culture that outwardly rejected my approach to life. My scholarly interrogations have worked to understand how polyamorous identity comes to be in such a mono-normative culture.

I am careful to think about my race as I do this work, because polyamory has not been known as a friendly culture for people of color (Sheff, 2008). I am critical about the ways in which discourses of hypersexuality for people of color influence identity politics (Crenshaw, 1997). I hoped to reach a more culturally diverse audience when recruiting for this study, but I did not. I will be amongst the white scholars who can only write about the racial disparity instead of engaging it in this work.

My identification as polyamorous led me to embrace my pansexual identity, and furthered my accountability toward critical scholarship, queer theory, and self-reflexivity. As my identity politics become compounded and more diverse, it is important for me as a scholar to continue to approach research with access and accountability in mind. To me, this means that I will not only write for peer-reviewed journals and academic audiences, but I will work to write for a broader public audience. As, "the dialogic self…is always under construction through interaction with others who are different from oneself" (Baxter, 2011, p. 11), my self-reflexivity is an ongoing, dialogic process, wherein I will continue to make sense of how my body and positionality impact my work.

Finally, as a scholar of polyamory and as an individual who identifies as polyamorous, I am working to make polyamory a visible viable option for romantic relationships. Monogamy is the norm for romantic relationships, and this norm provides monogamous relationships with protection and validation, and many individuals see monogamy as the moral standard by which to relate to their partners in emotional and sexual relationships. As such, polyamory is seen as a deviant sexual identity, and it is demonized: both the idealization of monogamy and the demonization of other relational structures are oppressive.

This study focuses on the ways in which polyamorous identities are constructed in a monogamous world. Regardless of the salience of monogamy, polyamory is thriving. To be clear, I am not advocating that polyamory is *better* than monogamy. My positionality is one where I am an advocate for education and options. Instead of a society where monogamy is the standard and relationships are constructed based on said standard, I wish to contribute to a worldview that teaches multiple options and an active, self-reflexive choice. I hope to "create new tools and ways of knowing" (Nakayama & Halualani, 2010, p. 596).

In the next section, I will outline RDT 2.0 and provide my rationale for the research questions that guide examination in order to create new ways of knowing.

Relational Dialectics Theory

From RDT 2.0's dialogic perspective, discourses are voiced through utterance chains (Baxter, 2011). A specific utterance is not an isolated communicative event; rather, it is a site on a chain where previously uttered discourses interact with anticipated utterances (Baxter). In this study, monogamy impacts the ways in which polyamorous individuals create and co-construct their personal and relational identities: previously uttered expectations of monogamy interact with the polyamorous identity which actively disassociates itself with monogamous practices, thus impacting future polyamorous identities. A process called unfolding establishes the location of an utterance on the utterance chain (Baxter). Baxter contends that when scholars ask questions such as, "What prior utterances might this utterance be a response to?" and "What responses is the utterance encouraging?" the answers to these questions identify the larger discourses and make clear the struggle in the discourses (p. 161). This tool is especially useful when

multiple discourses are not voiced in one utterance, but can be seen across multiple utterances (Baxter).

The utterance chain has four sites that can be understood through a flower-like metaphor, as the sites are positioned as petals that surround an utterance. These four sites are the distal not-yet-spoken, distal already-spoken, proximal not-yet-spoken, and proximal already-spoken. The already-spokens include utterances that have previously been uttered, and the not-yet-spokens are anticipated utterances (Baxter, 2011). In the distal, the listener is not an actual individual, but rather a cultural personification that evaluates the normative nature of the utterance. This cultural personification is referred to as the superaddressee (Baxter). The cultural personification in this piece can be conceived of as the traditional monogamist because that is the dominant discourse with which competing discourses must contend. The distal not-yet-spoken site on the utterance chain is where a speaker voices an utterance in anticipation of how a listener will perceive the meaning. Many polyamorists have a short speech prepared on what polyamory is because most of the U.S. population is not aware of polyamory, although that is changing (Sheff, 2013). This example demonstrates the distal not-yet spoken site. The listener is the superaddressee, and the utterance is a reflection of cultural norms and standards. The distal already-spoken is the site which evokes utterances that are already developed and circulating in a culture, allowing meaning to be made based on previous understandings of a discourse. For example, those who identify as polyamorous might pull from the discourse of love to render their relationship style understandable (Klesse, 2006).

Different from the distal, the proximal is where the relationship between the speaker and the listener is at the forefront. The proximal not-yet-spoken site on the utterance chain focuses on how a specific person, or listener, will react to an utterance. The relational identity is present in the proximal, as the utterances reflect how the listener will perceive meaning based on relational history, and also how the relationship will develop as a result of the utterance. The proximal already-spoken site on the utterance chain is where the meaning of the interactional history in a relationship interanimates the current interaction in order to produce a relationship identity in the present (Baxer, 2011). In short, previous experiences in a relationship impact how utterances are presented and work to build a new relational identity. While scholars have historically focused on the distal site in research (see Suter, Baxter, Seurer, & Thomas, 2014; Suter, Seurer, Webb, Grewe, & Koenig Kellas, 2015 as examples), it is important to note that these links cannot be separated in real life communication, as they are all fundamental to the utterance.

In examining how polyamorous relational identities impact monogamy, this study will work to illuminate the proximal already-spoken site on the utterance chain, although through a dialogic perspective, the other sites on the chain will still be present in the data. Here, the focus is on the proximal-already-spoken site on the utterance chain, but the other sites can be thought of as pivot feet that are also important in understanding phenomena of polyamorous communication. Currently, research on the proximal already-spoken site is limited because researchers rely too much on second-hand data (Baxter, 2011). For example, interview and survey data is often collected from one individual to represent perceptions of communication with a relational partner. Baxter

41

and Braithwaite (2008) acknowledge their reliance on second-hand data in their research programs, which is a trend in the larger body of relational dialectics theory research (Breshears & Braithwaite, 2014; Norwood, 2013). As Halliwell (2015) points out: "While these studies make important contributions to communication scholarship, their reliance on individual interviews leaves readers with interviewees' perceptions of their relational communication rather than actual talk between relationship parties" (p. 71).

From a dialogic perspective, Baxter (2011) argues that the focus on the proximal already-spoken site encourages scholars to focus on the production, not just the reproduction, of potential relational meanings in interpersonal communication: "parties continue to construct the meaning of their relationship and through their adaptations in meaning, they construct new relationship identities" (Baxter, p. 92). The production focuses on new meanings that emerge in discourse, rather than simply on the reproduction of already established meanings. In order to make this research turn toward the proximal, Baxter suggests focusing on significant transitions or turning points in a given relationship because these moments are signifiers of identity shifts. The literature on stepfamilies is a robust example of this turn. For example, in Afifi's (2003) study, she notes that members of stepfamilies have to reorient themselves to a new family dynamic, creating a new family identity in the process. Arguably, individuals who identify as polyamorous have the potential constantly to experience this productive process because there is always a potential for new partners, which is analogous to creating a new family identity in stepfamilies (Anapol, 2010). New partners require productive communication to orient themselves to the existing relational framework, while existing partners need

both production and reproduction to establish new relational identities. Communication is a key tool for those in polyamorous relationships to construct their relational identities.

In order to understand the production of new discourses of polyamorous identity, the first research question is posed:

RQ1: What new personal and relational identity discourses do polyamorous individuals construct from those inherited from the past?

Discursive interplay. In focusing on the proximal site on the utterance chain, this study will identify the ways in which polyamorous identity unfolds between relational partners. In order then to examine how polyamorous identity challenges the dominant monogamous discourse, I will conduct an interplay analysis. In interplay, discourses come into contact with each other and the meaning of the respective discourses is impacted (Baxter, 2011). Here, discourses interact and compete for dominance. Discursive struggles between discourses can be examined in what Bakhtin calls centripetal/centrifugal interplay (Baxter). Centripetal discourses are systems of meaning that are centered and legitimized; centrifugal discourses are marginalized, and de-centered (Baxter). For example, monogamy is a centered, centripetal discourse (Anderson, 2012; McLean, 2004; Pieper & Bauer, 2005) while polyamory is a marginalized, centrifugal discourse (Klesse, 2013; Robinson, 2013). When discourses interplay, they are competing for the centered, powerful, centripetal location. RDT 2.0 makes the assumption that all interactions incur a centripetal/centrifugal struggle; therefore, power can be seen and analyzed through utterances (Baxter). This struggle for dominance is in conversation between relational parties as it reflects power dynamics both in the relational context as well as in culture at large.

43

Discourses interplay in the following three ways: diachronic separation, synchronic interplay, and transformation (Baxter, 2011). Diachronic separation is when a discourse is centered or marginalized over time (Baxter). This type of interplay needs longevity in order to be identified. By asking questions where polyamorous individuals are asked to reflect on past scenarios, it is possible that diachronic separation will be seen in this data set. The two types of diachronic separation are spiraling inversion and segmentation. First, spiraling inversion occurs when discourses alternate dominance over time for a specific topic or activity. For example, at a young age, a polyamorous individual might privilege sexual relationships with many different people, but over time that individual would center quality over quantity. Second, segmentation occurs when the domain is responsible for the centering of a specific discourse. Here, time is still implicated: multiple domains cannot hold power at the same time, so as one domain gains power, the discourses within that domain gain power as well. One example of segmentation in polyamorous communities is privileging the family within a shared residence, while centering the individual when a partner goes out on a date (Sheff, 2013).

Synchronic processes include the co-occurrences of multiple discourses at the same time, and synchronic interplay shifts attention to the four sites on the utterance chain. In this study, the shift specifically examines polemic-transformative synchronic interplay, in which discourses are competing for the centered position and ultimately profound new meanings can be made (Baxter, 2015). Polemic interplay is when a kind of discursive balance is achieved through compromise, where neither discourse is fully embraced, but both have some affirmed qualities. Synchronic interplay occurs when an utterance encompasses multiple discourses; in other words, when two discourses are

simultaneously voiced. Three synchronic processes that capture the polemic nature of the

centripetal-centrifugal struggle are negating, countering, and entertaining (Baxter, 2011).

Negating is when one discourse is delegitimized, while another discourse is granted

power. When a speaker calls forth the discourse, and then proceeds to discredit that

discourse, negating is accomplished. For example, an utterance might center the

discourse of polyamory and multiple committed romantic relationships, but then state that

polyamorous relationships defile the traditional family structure and subsequent health of

children (Jamieson, 2004). Ultimately, the discourse of polyamory is negated and the

traditional family discourse is allotted power.

An utterance that counters is an utterance that establishes a discursive preference,

yet allows the competing discourse to have some valid qualities (Baxter, 2011). An

example of countering is stating that polyamory may work for some, but being

polyamorous would not work for everyone. This example typifies countering because the

preference for monogamy is clearly established while also implying there is a place for

those who choose other types of relationships. The preference for a discourse is clear,

but the other discourse is not negated.

Finally, entertaining, "functions to indicate that a given discursive position is but

one possibility among alternative positions" (Baxter, 2011, p. 168). An example of

entertaining would be an individual who validates both monogamy and polyamory, as

long as no one is being lied to or hurt. Entertaining is achieved when each discourse is

acknowledged as one of many alternatives: the utterance presents multiple discourses as

viable options.

Diachronic separation and synchronic interplay both reflect the ways in which discourses compete for power. While diachronic separation provides a lens through which to view discourses as they struggle for dominance with regard to time, synchronic interplay is used to identify the ways in which polemic discourses are positioned in relation to one another through negating, countering, and entertaining. Additionally, the discursive struggle can be suspended as they engage in transformation. In other words, transformation can function to alter the state of power in a discursive enterprise. Power is redefined in transformative interplay, and discourses alter their original meaning in order to establish a new meaning.

Transformation is especially important to consider in this study because polyamorous individuals have the potential to amend popular meanings of monogamy, creating new meanings for romantic relationships. The two types of discursive transformation are hybridization and aesthetic moments (Baxter, 2011). Hybrids are formed when two discourses come together to create an entirely new meaning; when this occurs, the discourses are no longer struggling for power. Baxter and Braithwaite (2008) explain hybridization as salad dressing: when shaken, oil and vinegar create an entirely new substance; yet, the distinctive parts—oil and vinegar—separate if left standing. Rather than conjecture hybrids that can potentially be found in polyamorous relationships, I offer an example recently published regarding the transgender community. Norwood's (2013) article provides a practical application of hybridization in the grief family members feel when a child makes a gender transition: one hybrid occurred when a participant noted that he gained a daughter yet did not lose a son. The hybrid created a new meaning where the child could co-exist in both male and female

gendered spaces, and the parent did not feel loss. The discourses of grief and gain remain, but the utterance of the parent-child relationship encompasses a new understanding.

Different from hybrids, aesthetic moments are transformative in that new meaning is made in discourse. Aesthetic moments are likened to chemical reactions, such as when oxygen and hydrogen come together to create water—discourses are no longer bifurcated in aesthetic moments because they have been transformed into something completely different (Baxter and Braithwaite, 2008). These aesthetic moments tend to be fleeting and difficult to discern, but can be identified through markers such as affect (Suter, Seurer, Webb, Grewe, Koenig Kellas, 2015). Continuing the example provided in the hybrid section, Norwood (2013) noted an aesthetic moment when a participant separated gender from personhood in order to make sense of her parent's gender transition. By removing the discourses of sex and gender as they relate to personhood, the participant created an entirely new meaning when considering her family.

The interplay of discourses is significant in understanding how the discourses of personal and relational identity in polyamory trouble the discourse of monogamy and work to build new meanings of relational identities at large. Specifically, new meanings have the potential to be made in polyamorous relationships given the propensity for the creation of terms to describe situations unique to polyamory. These new meanings would significantly disrupt the discourse of monogamy and the relational constructs that it impacts, such as marriage, commitment, and romantic love.

Queering relational dialectics theory. As a theory of interpersonal communication, relational dialectics theory 2.0 (RDT 2.0) works to bridge the gap

between interpersonal and critical scholarship (Baxter, 2011). As it stands now, RDT 2.0 turns a critical eye towards power in discourse, but the majority of the work has been conducted through a distal-already-spoken perspective (Baxter). The move towards the proximal site on the utterance chain offers the opportunity to link queer theory and politics to RDT 2.0, effectively advancing both approaches to research. To this point, I have focused on the ways in which queer theory enriches RDT 2.0; for example, through self-reflexivity and politicizing the oppressive ways in which the discursive power of monogamy impacts those who identify as polyamorous. RDT 2.0 also has the potential to advance queer theory, as it provides a theoretical framework and methodological approach to examining power. Per Chávez, identities are not given, "and they cannot be understood in isolation from other dimensions of identity and power" (Chávez, 2013, p. 85). RDT 2.0 is a lens by which to identify both relational and societal discourses that provide additional dimensions of identity and power. Through RDT 2.0 we can explore the proximal and distal discourses, or the language that persists to assert and reassert power and oppression.

Furthermore, Cohen (2005) suggests that the process of change in queer theory "be rooted not in our shared history or identity, but in our shared marginal relationships to dominant power which normalizes, legitimizes, and privileges" (Cohen, 2005, p. 457). While Cohen's argument is meant to set forth a trajectory for change, an RDT 2.0 approach to queer politics allows for a shared history and future, as well as shared "marginal relationships" and "dominant power" to occur concurrently. The utterance chain encompasses both the proximal and distal sites, and these sites work in concert in communicative practices to reject, reify, or create new meanings. Studies that employ

48

RDT 2.0 can choose to focus on one axis of the utterance chain to illuminate how power is positioned and how discourses interplay, but (as demonstrated in this study) all of the sites on the utterance chain are always working together (Baxter). Communication from an RDT 2.0 perspective engages the personal and the public to examine discourses of power.

The influence of queer theory on relational dialectics theory is apparent in Cohen's (2005) observation:

> The radical potential of those of us on the outside of heteronormativity rests in our understandings that we need not base our politics in the dissolution of all categories and communities, but we need instead to work toward the destabilization and remaking of our identities. (p. 461)

As utterances voice resistance to centripetal discourses, centered discourses are destabilized. A queer RDT 2.0 approach to this study embraces the idea that those who are on the outside of mono-normativity communicate in ways that destabilize the normative expectation of monogamy, thus engaging in queer politics. The destabilization is not meant to dissolve monogamy, but rather to address and examine how its hegemonic power influences day-to-day life and sociopolitical understandings of the world at large.

Here, at the intersection of queer theory and RDT 2.0, is the potential for communication to be a "space where transformational political work can begin" (Cohen, 2005, p. 438). RDT 2.0 illuminates communicative power and the potential for new meanings to be made in the interplay of discourses. Queer theory calls for an active approach to "making an unquestioned and taken-for-granted idea or social relation into an unfamiliar or strange one to unpack its underlying power relations and to offer possibilities of resistance and other ways of thinking, doing, living, and loving"

(Jakobsen, 1998; Yep, 2013, p. 119). The apex of these theories is where the tool creates a conversation that validates and encourages critical communication. Klesse (2014) notes that polyamory has the potential to undo binaries because it deconstructs monogamous relational constructs and practices. This study uses relational dialectics theory informed by queer theory to explore the ways in which polyamory communicatively disrupts mono-normativity, and asks the second research question:

RQ2: How do polyamorous personal and relational identity discourses interplay to make new meanings of romantic relationships?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

I employed qualitative methods to interrogate the discursive meaning-making process voiced in the conversations of polyamorous individuals. In order to effectively uncover the power dynamics within these conversations, the data analysis was framed by a critical-qualitative approach. Specifically, contrapuntal analysis, which is Baxter's (2011) methodological practice for analyzing RDT 2.0 research, was chosen as the data analysis procedure. Contrapuntal analysis allows a researcher to concentrate on the "interplay of contrasting discourses" (p. 152), and lends a critical perspective through the examination of power to the qualitative discourse analysis approach.

Because the research sought to investigate the relational discourses voiced by polyamorous participants, the study focused on the proximal already-spoken site on the utterance chain. The proximal already-spoken site is where discourses circulate on a relational level, specifically pertaining to the history of the relationship (Baxter, 2011). As mentioned in Chapter Two, although the proximal already-spoken was the focus, through a dialogic perspective, the other sites on the chain were present in the data as well. It is important to note that the entire utterance chain is implicated in relational conversations because speakers draw on cultural discourses, as well as relational discourses, to inform their communication.

51

Historically, research on the proximal already-spoken site is limited because researchers have relied on traditional qualitative interview techniques and second-hand data (Baxter, 2011; Brashears & Braithwaite, 2014; Halliwell, 2015; Norwood, 2013). In this study, solicited audio diaries (Monrouxe, 2009) – or "self-recorded conversations" for the remainder of this write up – were collected, as this method diverges from traditional interview techniques and captures conversational data, which is rich in relational content. In self-recorded conversations, participants record a discussion based on an outline of questions that I provided. The resulting data set is a guided conversation that is not influenced by the presence of the researcher. Although it is not longitudinal data, this type of data collection allows for the examination of the proximal already-spoken site, as participants recall their relational history and discuss how it has changed over time (Baxter, 2011).

Chapter Three will present an overview the critical qualitative methodological approach taken in this study to examine the conversations of polyamorous participants. First, the recruitment procedures are explained, including participant demographics and additional information gathered in the study regarding the population. Then, the data collection and analysis procedures are discussed.

Pilot Study

Before formally recruiting for participants, I conducted two pilot self-recorded conversations with participants who are a part of my polyamorous network. Two participants and their partners completed the conversations. Both of the self-recorded conversations were completed shortly after receiving IRB approval. All of the individuals were adults over 18 years of age, three identified as polyamorous, one

identified as "engaging in open relationships," but did not identify specifically as polyamorous.

The two pilot self-recorded conversations allowed for three insights within the recruitment and participation process. First, I needed to understand what type of information should be included in the initial email in order to help the primary participant recruit their partner(s). Second, the participants all used the instructions I provided to record and upload their conversations, and this helped me to hone the information I provided in the instructions. Finally, the pilot participants offered valuable feedback on guiding questions and the order in which the questions were asked.

Immediately after I received the pilot self-recorded conversations, I adjusted the initial email that would be sent to participants upon contact. In my initial approach, I sent a series of emails that provided all of the pertinent information to complete the conversations. Each email was thorough and very descriptive, including an introduction, guiding questions, and directions, but the pilot participants reported that it would be easier to have all of the information in one email to forward to their partner(s), as well as to refer back to themselves at a later date. As a result of their feedback, I streamlined multiple emails into one, included the participant number, and attached all of the additional information that they needed to the one email. Within the attachments, I included instructions on how to record and upload the conversations, since I would not be present to complete this task. My participants said the instructions were effective and easy to follow; therefore, I did not make changes to this documentation.

Finally, with regard to the content and flow of the guiding questions, the pilot participants suggested that I truncate the number of questions and adjust the order of

53

them slightly so that conversations flowed easier. Based on the feedback, the guiding

questions changed from 12 questions to 10, and they were honed to guide an estimated

hour-long conversation, depending on the number of partners involved. After I made the

adjustments, I returned to one of the pilot participants to ensure that the questions were

still effective and the flow made sense. With the edits complete, I proceeded to

recruitment. Participants were recruited through an online podcast called *PolyWeekly* and

Facebook.

Participant Recruitment

Polyweekly

Polyweekly is a "podcast devoted to tales from the front of responsible non-

monogamy from a pansexual[2], kink-friendly point of view" (Cunning Minx, 2014).

Cunning Minx, a sex and relationship educator, created the podcast and focuses on topics

such as communication, sex, dating, family, and time management. It is a free resource

that started in 2005 with over 400 episodes in production and episode descriptions

available on the website www.polyweekly.com (Cunning Minx). Listeners of this

podcast are international, but primarily located in the United States. Cunning Minx does

not provide additional demographic information on her listeners, or additional

biographical information on her credentials.

As an active member of the polyamorous community, I established a professional

relationship with Cunning Minx at a conference called CatalystCon, which is a national

sexual education conference held annually. I contacted her directly to request her

assistance with recruitment and received her approval.

---

[2] The term "pansexual" is a sexual orientation that includes relational and/or sexual interest in others regardless of gender identification (Callis, 2014).

Recruitment for *PolyWeekly* occurred in three distinct social media locations: Facebook, Twitter, and on *PolyWeekly*. First, I wrote a 100-character call for participants that Minx posted on the *PolyWeekly* Facebook and Twitter social media accounts. The same text was used for both posts on Facebook and Twitter (see Appendix A). Second, I recorded a 50 second audio "commercial" that was a reading of the initial 100-character call. I recorded it on my iPhone and emailed it to Minx. This recording was aired on a *PolyWeekly* episode. As noted in Appendix A, which includes the verbiage for these calls, potential participants were instructed to email me at skaywebbresearch@gmail.com for further information.

Facebook

Concurrently with the *PolyWeekly* recruitment efforts, I posted a call (see Appendix B) on my personal Facebook page, targeting specific friends who are a part of the polyamorous community in order to snowball sample (Tracy, 2013). Per Tracy, traditional snowball sampling occurs when researchers identify individuals who fit the criteria of the study and then ask these people to suggest people in their network to participate. Virtual snowball sampling through Facebook was included, as it has been found to be equally, if not more effective, than traditional snowball sampling (Balter & Brunet, 2012). I reached out to two specific friends who are sex educators and have friends who identify as polyamorous. They both consented to repost the call and direct their friends to the study. Potential participants were once again provided my information for more details.

Both the *PolyWeekly* (via Facebook and Twitter) and my personal Facebook recruitment strategies encouraged participants to email me for additional information.

Once they contacted me, I sent an email overview of the study that included their

participant number, instructions on how to participate, a link to the informed consent

document (see Appendix C), and demographics survey (see Appendix D). Attached to

the email were directions for recording and uploading from a mobile device (see

Appendix E), an introduction to the guiding questions for the conversation and the full set

of questions (see Appendix F), and a document that included resources for the

polyamorous population (Appendix G). The attachment of resources was created in

compliance with IRB's protection of human subjects mandate and to mitigate any

potential discomfort of the participants.

The email provided information the participants would need to understand the

study and explain it to one or more of their partners who would also participate in the

recorded conversation. In order to move forward in the study, all participants needed to

sign the informed consent waiver provided in a link in the email (see Appendix C). The

informed consent document was housed on Qualtrics.com, a password protected and

encrypted website and research tool. When the participants completed the informed

consent document, they were redirected to a link that included the demographics survey,

also housed in Qualtrics.com. The participants were intentionally redirected as to insure

their confidentiality: the informed consent had their names, whereas the demographics

information did not include any identifying information.

The demographics survey included 12 questions (see Appendix D). All of the

questions were open-ended in order to be inclusive of each individual's identity

preferences, except for household income, which was in the form of a selection of five

income options. Individuals could choose to skip the demographic survey questions if

they felt uncomfortable with answering specific questions, but they could not move forward without informed consent.

Upon completion, the participants could begin the self-recorded conversations. In order to capture the proximal already-spoken site on the utterance chain, I sought to capture a conversation between relational partners, which occurred through guided conversations. In the field of psychology, "solicited diaries" are "an account produced specifically at the researcher's request, by an informant or informants. Solicited diaries…are written with the full knowledge that they are for external consumption" (Bell, 1998, p. 72). The solicited diary is a data-gathering tool that is based on specific questions that the researcher asks the participant to address (Mackrill, 2008). The "audio" component of the solicited audio diary is a method that has also been used in psychology (Williamson, Lyttle, Johnson, & Leeming, 2008) and sociology (Moran-Ellis and Venn, 2007). Hislop, Arber, Meadows, and Venn (2005) argue that audio diaries can capture "conversational narratives," where two or more people interact in the recording (Ochs & Capps, 2001). In one study, Monrouxe (2009) noted, "the discursive think-aloud process is an untended, yet profound insight into an individuals' sense-making activity" (p. 100). I chose to combine these practices using the phrase "self recorded conversation" to describe the process of data collection.

Self-recorded conversations are the best means by which to record data in polyamorous relationships for three primary reasons: (1) they captured conversational narratives; (2) they allowed for insights into polyamory; (3) they were convenient for the research population. First, the goal of self-recorded conversations was to have participants record conversations based on the outlined protocol that they received, which

prompted their discussion. By recording these narratives, I successfully captured conversations between relational partners, which led to an analysis of the proximal already-spoken site (Baxter, 2011).

Second, per Monrouxe's (2009) discussion, self-recorded conversations allowed for insights into polyamory, which was the goal of this study. Discourses of polyamory will be understood in the proximal plane, with participants interacting candidly in their relationships. My presence did not interfere with their communication. Finally, due to the complex nature of the research population, the self-recorded conversations allowed participants to record a conversation on their own time. Due to the additional challenge of multiple partners taking part in the conversation, consideration of time and convenience was imperative to collecting data for this study.

Ten self-recorded conversations were collected, with 21 participants total. Of the ten interviews, two included three participants, and eight included two participants. One individual overlapped in two conversations, meaning that she took part in two separate conversations. The number of conversations was chosen to be in congruence with other studies taking a qualitative approach to polyamorous research. Specifically, the number is based on a study by Sheff (2005), where she conducted interviews with 40 polyamorous individuals over a seven-year period. Secondarily, previous relational dialectics theory work found theoretical saturation with 20 to 37 participants (Breshears, 2011; Norwood, 2010). Also, noted below, theoretical saturation was reached before the final self-recorded conversation.

Participant Information

Recent research on the polyamorous community has noted that those who identify as polyamorous are primarily White, middle- to upper-class, well-educated, and have a high socioeconomic status (Sheff & Hammers, 2011). While this study had a similar racial demographic – participants were primarily White – the other demographics were not upheld.

Per the requirements of the study, all participants defined themselves as polyamorous, noting that they are currently engaged in a relationship with at least one partner. Participants had varying descriptions of their marital status, as some were married ($n = 8$), partnered ($n = 2$), divorced ($n = 3$), single ($n = 7$), chose not to disclose ($n = 1$). Ages ranged from 21 to 52 years old, with the average age being 33 years old ($M = 33.38$; $SD = 8.17$). There was almost an even split of cisgender men ($n = 11$) and cisgender women ($n = 10$). Participants were heterosexual ($n = 11$), bisexual ($n = 6$), pansexual ($n = 2$), and chose not to disclose ($n = 1$). As previously noted, they were primarily White ($n = 18$), with one individual being "half Guatemalan and half American Jew" ($n = 1$), and another identifying as "mixed" ($n = 1$).

The level of education varied from high school to graduate degree in this participant group, speficially: high school diploma ($n = 2$), some college ($n = 5$), bachelor's degree ($n = 7$), master's degree ($n = 6$), and chose not to disclose ($n = 1$). Similar to the variation in education, participants recorded wide-ranging household incomes: under \$25,000 ($n = 5$), between \$25,000 and \$50,000 ($n = 10$), between \$50,000 and \$75,000 ($n = 4$), and over \$75,000 ($n = 2$). The majority of participants did not have a religious affiliation ($n = 12$), while others described themselves as agnostic ($n = 3$),

atheist ($n = 1$), Lutheran ($n = 1$), pagan ($n = 1$), spiritual ($n = 1$), and chose not to disclose ($n = 2$).

With regard to partners, there was a wide range of qualitative answers in the survey. For example, the numbers of partners each individual had at the time of the survey varied from 1 to 5, with the average number of partners being 2 ($M = 2.05$; $SD = 1.28$). The amount of time in relationship with each partner varied from 1 month to 15 years ($M = 3.5$ years; $SD = 3.79$). Participants were asked to describe their relationships with each partner. Participants primarily noted that they had one romantic relationship (often, but not always described as "primary"), with periphery partners (sometimes described as "secondaries") ($n = 11$). Many described their relationships as "V's," where an individual had two partners, and the partners do not romantically interact. The "V" is different from a triad ($n = 5$), where all three people are romantically involved. "Polycule" was also recorded to describe relationships ($n = 2$), which can be understood as a network of varying and complicated relationships. Finally, one participant described one of their romantic relationships as a "quad," meaning all four members are romantically involved ($n = 1$).

Within these romantic relationship types, many participants had no children ($n = 12$), whereas others noted at least one partner has children ($n = 9$). Finally, the majority of participants shared a home with one partner ($n = 12$), and others lived independently from their romantic partners ($n = 9$), or lived with one partner ($n = 12$). Many discussed planned overnight stays on a weekly basis, but not formal living arrangements.

Data Collection

Participants were provided with one identification number for their partners to ensure confidentiality (Merrigan & Huston, 2009). The participant numbers were used in the informed consent process, as well as in the recordings. First, all participants were required to input their identification number before they completed the informed consent form as a means by which to sign. They also were required to state their identification number before they started recording, so I could keep track of participants self-recorded conversations.

Participants were provided with directions and expectations in the email attachments, as well as the questions to guide the conversation, which took one to two hours to complete (see Appendices E and F). The first question asked for a historical narrative description of how they entered into polyamory to elicit joint story telling (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Joint story telling is meant to encourage reflection on the past in order to make meaning of current personal and relational discourses. Large-scale questions that elicit stories are productive because participants have the opportunity to freely answer the questions and fall into conversation with one another, and they also work well as starting points in data collection (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The other guiding questions contributed to answering the first research question, but also worked to address the second: "How do polyamorous personal and relational discourses interplay to make new meanings of romantic relationships?" To specifically address the second research question, the guiding questions evoked stories of challenges to the polyamorous relational and personal discourses. By asking questions that challenge discourses, I intended to elicit interplay between discourses in the answers.

Once the conversations were recorded, participants uploaded the files to Dropbox. Dropbox is a password protected and encrypted website, so this provided additional security for participants. Once I downloaded the audio files, they were deleted on Dropbox. Finally, the audio files were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document and stored on a password protected computer hard drive. I changed both the names and identifying information of participants during transcription. There were 231 single-spaces pages of transcription. At that point, I moved on to analysis.

Data Analysis: Contrapuntal Analysis

Baxter (2011) argues that contrapuntal analysis is the most effective means by which to conduct an analysis for RDT 2.0 studies because it is sensitive to identifying power-laden discourses and their interplay. Per Baxter's approach, the data was analyzed using contrapuntal analysis. A contrapuntal analysis is guided by the following analytical question: "What are the competing discourses in the text and how is meaning constructed through their interplay?" (Baxter, p. 152).

In order to answer this question, I first had to select a text. As a researcher committed to contrapuntal analysis, I specifically chose transcripts from the self-recorded conversations as my text because they allowed for an analysis of polyamorous identity on the proximal site of the utterance chain. This specific site is important to analyze participants' identity work because it "focuses analytic attention on how it is that parties anticipate one another's responses when they speak and thus navigate the dance of their similarities and differences" (Baxter, 2011, p. 156). Baxter contends that conversations are the best means by which to examine the proximal site. Next I had to identify my

sematic object, or the primary topic of study. Polyamorous identity was my semantic

object. With polyamorous identity in mind, I worked to identify discourses in the text.

Identifying Discourses

Discourses can be both sociocultural and interpersonal systems of meaning

(Baxter, 2011). As my primary focus is identity on the proximal site of the utterance

chain, I sought to identify interpersonal discourses, which are "systems of meaning that

are crafted jointly between relationship parties that reflect their unique history together"

(Baxter, p. 157). Baxter also notes that both relational and individual identity are

implicated in discourses, as discourses can answer questions such as "Who are 'we'?"

and "Who am I?" in this relationship, respectively.

In working to examine the semantic object of polyamorous (individual and

relational) identity via contrapuntal analysis, I first conducted an interpretive thematic

analysis, which Braun & Clarke (2006) identified as a six-part process: (1) becoming

familiar with the data set, (2) generate initial coding categories, (3) generating themes

(discourses), (4) reviewing themes (discourses), (5) defining and naming themes

(discourses), (6) and locating exemplars (Baxter, 2011). Following Braun and Clarke, I

accomplished a thematic analysis by first familiarizing myself with the data. To

familiarize myself with the data, I listened to the self-recorded conversation, transcribed

the audio files, read, and re-read the texts. I then looked for patterns in the text in the

form of initial coding categories, which I wrote in the margins of the transcriptions. To

identify the initial codes, I engaged in a process called *unfolding* (Baxter), where the data

is perceived as a part of a larger utterance chain. Data was situated as a part of the larger

utterance chain using analytic questions such as, "What does a listener need to know in

order to render this textual segment intelligible?" and "What socio-cultural and interpersonal discourses need to be invoked to understand what this textual segment means?" (Baxter, p. 159). As I answered these questions, I worked toward establishing my initial codes and subsequent themes.

I identified both *manifest* and *latent* themes through the initial coding categories. Manifest themes are explicit in the talk, making them easily recognizable as they are stated clearly and in detail. For example, Eric voices a manifest theme: "Monogamous commitment is, all right, cool. One partner and that's it. I'm committed to you because I'm not seeing anyone else" (2: 761-762). In this exemplar, Eric describes the discourse of mono-normativity, specifically the understanding of commitment to only one person. Latent themes, on the other hand, are implied, or not plainly expressed in the text (Baxter, 2011). For instance, Alice voices the discourse of poly-production, or the intentional development of a lifestyle that deviates from monogamy: "We live in such a way where we do have lifelong goals, but we are open to the human experience and we have no expectations of what that's going to look like" (1: 1228-1232).

I advanced my thematic analysis by making a list of all of the themes I saw in the data and pulling quotations that were aligned with the themes. I worked to refine the themes by collapsing ideas that were similar, all while keeping track of the quotations that rendered the themes visible in the text. Finally, I wrote all of the potential themes down on sticky notes, including a citation of the quotation connected to the theme, and posted them on large pieces of paper. I used this visual representation of the data to name the discourses, as well as define them. I was able to define the discourses by grouping the sticky notes together. The groups worked to establish tenets of the discourses.

When I finally transferred the information to a Microsoft Word document, I pulled the data exemplars from the citations I previously made. My final step was going back through the texts to ensure that I had selected the best data exemplars for the discourses. My analysis rendered two discourses: (1) the discourse of mono-destruction and (2) the discourse of poly-production. After naming the discourses, I documented each with a memo containing a detailed explanation of each discourse, as well as the existing exemplars from the text.

Identifying Interplay

After the discourses were identified, I then worked to understand how the discourses interacted within the text. Baxter (2011) contends that discourses interplay via diachronic separation and synchronic interplay. Diachronic separation occurs either across time or topically, in spiraling inversion and segmentation. When a discourse has power at a given time but not at another point in time, spiraling inversion occurs. Segmentation occurs when a discourse is centered in a specific communicative context but is decentered in another. While spiraling inversion and segmentation can be difficult to discern in some data sets, the text for this particular research made identification easier because participants often referenced time specifically. Making reference to the past, participants called upon spiraling inversion. For example, many individuals noted that they once centered the discourse of mono-normativity when they engaged in monogamous relationships. Then, as time passed and they discovered polyamory, the discourse of mono-normativity was decentered. Segmentation was not noted in this data. To identify moments of diachronic separation, I read the data with an eye toward time

65

and context, when talk circulated about polyamorous identity. When I did note moments of spiraling inversion, I pulled the exemplars from the text.

Once I finished with diachronic separation, I moved to synchronic interplay, which occurs when multiple discourses are apparent in communication at a given point in time. Baxter (2011) discusses four features of synchronic interplay: antagonistic-nonantagonistic struggle, direct-indirect struggle, serious-playful struggle, and polemical-transformative struggle. First, an antagonistic struggle occurs when one person voices a discourse, and another person voices a different, competing discourse within an utterance. A nonantagonistic struggle is when one person voices two differing discourses within one utterance (Baxter). Both antagonistic and nonantagonistic struggles were noted in the data, as individuals often used multiple discourses in their own stories, but multiple discourses were also stated between conversational partners.

In examining antagonistic-nonantagonistic struggles, Baxter (2011) calls attention to negating, countering, and entertaining, as discourse markers researchers can use to identify synchronic interplay. Each of these markers represents different ways in which discourses can be communicatively positioned against one another in an utterance. Negating is calling forth a discourse in order to refute it (Baxter, 2011). For example, a participant might say, "Some people think that there is only one person for everyone. I do not agree." The individual takes the time to call forth an understanding of monogamy in romantic love in order to reject it by stating disagreement. In this data set, negating was primarily found when participants called upon a discourse that held true in their past, but was no longer applicable. Additionally, negating was demonstrated when participants noted a discourse that others believed to be true, but that they do not see as true.

66

Similar to negating, countering occurs when a discourse is called upon in order to be marginalized. However, in countering, the discourse still maintains some validity (Baxter, 2011). For instance, a participant might state the following: "Monogamy might work for some people, but is isn't for me." In this instance, the participant offers legitimacy to the discourse of mono-normativity for others, while being sure to note that it is not always the best option. Researchers can see countering when utterances have lexical cues such as "but," "although," and "however." I worked to illuminate negating by highlighting moments where these lexical cues where present in the data.

Finally, entertaining is different from negating and countering because it does not position one discourse as more powerful than another. Instead, it offers equity for discourses. An example of entertaining is present when a participant says, "I think my partner is the perfect person for me. I also want to be with other people though." In this example, both monogamy and polyamory are given credence: there can be one "perfect person," but the utterance also leaves space for being with other people.

To locate instances of negating, countering, and entertaining in the text, I specifically focused on instances where monogamy was mentioned in the context of understanding polyamorous identity. Said a different way, because the participants identified as polyamorous and their conversation was about developing polyamorous identity, when they mentioned monogamy, I paid extra attention. Additionally, I noted lexical cues as Baxter suggested, which denoted instances of synchronic interplay.

In addition to the antagonistic-nonantagonistic struggle in synchronic interplay, a direct-indirect struggle exists. Whereas direct utterances are open and clear with regard to meaning, indirect struggles present a dissenting view because discourses are not made

67

clear (Baxter, 2011). In direct-indirect struggles, ambiguity is used to avoid direct

interplay between discourses (Baxter). Ambiguity can present itself in the form of

disqualification, which allows for "multiple interpretations to exist among people who

contend that they are attending to the same message" (Baxter, p. 134). Ambiguity can be

used to reaffirm different interpretations of a discourse, because there is not clarity with

regard to meaning. For example, a participant could state, "We agreed not to cheat on

each other," but without noting the definition of "cheating," ambiguity exists. Cheating

can be perceived of as either emotional or sexual connections with others outside of the

dyad; or, in the context of polyamory, breaking an agreement. In addition, ambiguous

communication can work to discredit the authority of a dominant discourse (Baxter).

Language such as "sometimes" or "a little bit" undermines the solid foundation of

centered discourses. There were not instances of ambiguous communication in the form

of direct-indirect struggles within this data set arguably because polyamorous individuals

work to define their identities and clearly communicate them to others; a script is not

already in place that would allow for ambiguous understandings.

The serious-playful struggle focuses on the tone of the utterance and the role of

playfulness in communication (Bakhtin, 1981; 1984). Through playfulness, competing

discourses can be challenged (Baxter, 2011). Audio recordings were especially useful

here, because I listened to the recordings and noted any instances of sarcasm or

intentional humor in the conversations. One instance of the serious-playful struggle is

outlined in the results, where humor serves to emphasize a discourse.

Antagonistic-nonantagonistic, direct-indirect, and serious-playful struggles are all

representations of discourses in opposition. The polemical-transformative struggle is

68

where discourses can make new meaning, meaning that is not always in opposition. Baxter (2011) lists two types of interplay: hybridization and aesthetic moments. Hybrids occur when two or more distinct discourses are combined to create new meaning. As noted in the literature review, the distinct discourses can still be seen—like oil and water—yet they can combine to create salad dressing (Baxter). Aesthetic moments, however, occur when discourses are "profoundly reconstructed" (p. 139); such as when hydrogen and oxygen come together to create water. The discourses can no longer separate into different meanings; rather a new meaning is made. In addition to hybrids and aesthetic moments, I posit a new form of transformation: metaphoric transformation. This is when a metaphor is used to describe a meaning that has not already been expressed.

In order to find moments of transformation, I had to have a clear understanding of the discourses that were in the data set. I referred to my analytic memo that outlined detailed descriptions and then returned to the data. I listed instances where utterances did not voice discourses clearly. I wrote these instances on the same large pieces of paper that I used to define the initial codes and discourses. After referring to my analytic memo and Baxter's (2011) definitions of transformation, I was able to establish where new meanings were being made. Finally, in writing up the findings and the moments of transformation, I was able to hone my understanding by explaining the discourses and their transformation in writing.

Verification Procedures

Previous studies have explicated effective ways in which to verify a contrapuntal analysis (Norwood & Baxter, 2012; Norwood, 2010; Suter, Baxter, Seurer, & Thomas,

2014). With these studies in mind, I employed three verification procedures: referential adequacy, audit trails, and data exemplars.

First, referential adequacy is when half of the data set is fully analyzed in order to develop the discourses and interplay. The second half of the data set is then analyzed to ensure the accuracy of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In following Lincoln and Guba's description, I used referential adequacy during both the initial thematic analysis and the subsequent interplay analysis. I chose five transcripts randomly to begin, and the second half served both to affirm the findings of the first and to assure that additional themes did not exist in the data.

Second, an audit trail served to verify my procedures. Per Lincoln and Guba (1985), an audit trail is when the researcher maintains detailed records of the research process. Following the outline of Baxter, Suter, Thomas, and Seurer (2013), I created analytic memos during each step of the analysis, including my initial themes, my discourses, my interplay analysis, and my final detailed descriptions. The audit trail allowed me to account for each step of my contrapuntal analysis, return to this document with any questions, and provided a space for highlighting ideas that I could revisit for my results and discussion.

Finally, I included data exemplars in my discourse and interplay analyses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data exemplars function to demonstrate the findings, where multiple exemplars show consistency of the results (Suter, 2010). Additionally, exemplars illustrate the utterances that are indicative of the discourses and interplay. Exemplars allow for readers to see and understand how the data aligns with the findings (Baxter et al., 2013).

70

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE RESULTS

Chapter Four will give an overview of the findings of the meaning making

process of polyamorous identities through the lens of relational dialectics theory. While

this study focuses on the proximal already-spoken site on the utterance chain – where the

interactional history of the relationship influences the current conversation – the other

sites, including the distal already-spoken, distal not-yet-spoken, and the proximal not-yet-

spoken will also be present. By focusing on the proximal already-spoken site on the

utterance chain, I was able to fully engage in a contrapuntal analysis, including both a

discourse and interplay analysis. According to Suter (in press), the proximal and distal

sites are always co-occurring and "mutually informing" the utterance and subsequent

discourses; however, researchers cannot address the co-occurrence in one analysis.

Therefore, I have chosen to analyze the proximal already-spoken, and the other sites will

work as context (Suter). The meaning of polyamorous identity can be made in the dance

between the societal and relational discourses, including the history and future of the

relationship. This meaning is done through a contrapuntal analysis of the proximal

already-spoken site.

Taking the aforementioned communicative interrelationship into consideration, I

will organize the results as a linear progression through the identity-making process, but

it is very important to note that in practical application, this process is not linear. The

sites on the utterance chain transpire simultaneously, dialogically. In the first section, I

will begin by revisiting the discourse of mono-normativity, which was described in detail

in the literature review (Webb, 2015). The discourse of mono-normativity is a pre-

existing discourse, which was used by participants to make meaning of their introduction

and entrance into polyamory. It is important to have an understanding of this discourse,

as it contextualizes the new discourses that were found in this study, and it is also

referenced in the interplay analysis, as it is used to make new meanings in polyamorous

identity. Next, I will describe the discourses that were found in this examination: the

discourse of mono-deconstruction and the discourse of poly-production. Finally, I will

describe the ways in which all of the discourses interplay both to define the new personal

and relational polyamorous identity discourses and illuminate the spaces of dialogic

transformation in the data.

Defining Relational Discourses

In previous RDT 2.0 scholarship, discourses are often defined in relation to each

other (Norwood, 2013; Suter, Baxter, Seurer, & Thomas, 2014; Suter, Seurer, Webb,

Grewe, & Koenig Kellas, 2015). In a contrapuntal analysis, when utterances are

expansive, discourses are often identified by their opposition. Suter, Seurer, Webb,

Grewe, and Koenig Kellas (2015) describe the discourse of essential motherhood and the

discourse of queer motherhood. These discourses are defined in relation to each other

because the discourse of queer motherhood often opposes the tenets of the discourse of

essential motherhood. For example, the discourse of essential motherhood stresses a

biological connection between mother and child, whereas the discourse of queer

motherhood does not privilege biology in motherhood (Suter et al.).

In order to answer research question one, "What new personal and relational

identity discourses do polyamorous individuals construct from those inherited from the

past?", I will deviate from strictly explicating the new discourses in relation to one

another as were found in this study. Instead, I will begin by revisiting the discourse of

mono-normativity, which was described in detail in the literature review. Due to the fact

that this study focused on the proximal already-spoken site on the utterance chain, this

previously identified discourse occurred often in participants' speech. In short,

polyamorous individuals called upon the discourse of mono-normativity as both societal

and relational history that rendered their current utterance relevant. Then, I will move

forward to describe the two new discourses found in this research: the discourse of mono-

deconstruction and the discourse of poly-production. Although at times they are seen in

relation to one another, these discourses are often used linearly to advance polyamorous

identity. While I will make the move to outlining the interplay of the discourses in the

next section, it is first important to explicate the individual discourses.

Discourse of Mono-Normativity

Mono-normativity, a term coined by Pieper and Bauer (2005), was elucidated in a

study by Webb (2015): "Mono-normativity is the Western privileging of the couple, of

sexual exclusivity, and of rules and assumptions that are taken-for-granted in romantic

relationships" (Webb, p. 16). In other words, mono-normativity is the cultural perception

that monogamy is the only way to engage in romantic relationships. As a result, United

States culture privileges monogamy formally (Ritchie & Barker, 2006) – through

institutions like marriage – as well as morally – monogamy is understood as a moral approach to relationships (Kean, 2015). Mono-normativity situates monogamy as powerful, as individuals in United States culture typically do not question the two partner status quo (Grindstaff, 2003). The discourse of mono-normativity is the distal already-spoken, culturally dominant perception that monogamy is normal, assuming that all romantic relationships are monogamous (Anderson, 2012). Harkening back to the literature review, understanding a discourse as "normal" means that monogamy is assumed as the correct way to engage in romantic relationships, and this correctness is typically associated with moral implications: monogamy is not only assumed, it is also right (Yep, 2003).

The discourse of mono-normativity is reified by four tenets: (1) monogamy equals commitment (defined as sexual and emotional exclusivity), (2) "one true love" will meet all needs and desires, (3) monogamous relationships are moral, and (4) jealousy is normal in monogamous relationships (Webb, 2015). First, the tenet of "monogamy equals commitment" highlights the idea that romantic relationships are committed, which is defined by sexual and emotional exclusivity (Webb). In U.S. culture, romantic relationships that are not sexually and emotionally exclusive are not perceived as committed relationships. A violation of sexual and emotional fidelity is grounds for ending a relationship, because if these expectations are not upheld, then commitment in the relationship does not exist (Webb).

The second tenet of the discourse of mono-normativity is that "one true love" will meet all needs and desires. There are two implications in this tenet: first, that each person has "one true love," and second, that that one true love will fulfill everything that their

74

partner needs and wants. If the "one true love" does not fulfill all needs and desires, then it calls into question the validity of the "one true love" status (Webb, 2015).

In addition to the previous tenets, the idea that "monogamous relationships are moral" explains the discourse of mono-normativity specifically through the lens of religion. Romantic relationships are an extension of a relationship with religion, and religion dictates that monogamy is moral and right (Webb, 2015). The final tenet of the discourse of mono-normativity, "jealousy is normal in monogamous relationships" was not discussed much by participants. Although they did note the experience of jealousy, they did not claim the significance of jealousy in the context of monogamy.

It is important to understand the discourse of mono-normativity in the context of this study because participants often call upon it to make sense of their polyamorous identity. Examples of this will be provided throughout the duration of this section, but it becomes particularly important in understanding the interplay analysis. The two new discourses found in this study were the discourse of mono-deconstruction, which – as titularly implied – works to deconstruct the discourse of mono-normativity, and the discourse of poly-production, which is the creation of individual and relational polyamorous identity.

Discourse of Mono-Deconstruction

While the discourse of mono-normativity was inherited from the past and presented in previous research, the discourse of mono-deconstruction is one of two new discourses found in this study. The discourse of mono-deconstruction is reliant on the discourse of mono-normativity: it exists as a result of the sociocultural understanding of monogamy. Participants had to deconstruct the discourse of mono-normativity in order

to construct new personal and relational polyamorous identities. The discourse of mono-deconstruction effectively works to restructure expectations of romantic relationships by deconstructing the understanding of monogamy.

Each tenet of the discourse of mono-deconstruction has its foundation in an understanding of the discourse of mono-normativity. Essentially, in order to understand the tenets of the discourse of mono-deconstruction, participants had to have an understanding of the discourse of mono-normativity. Here, the discourse of mono-deconstruction is representative of the utterance, and the discourse of mono-normativity is representative of both the distal and proximal already spoken. Keeping these representations in mind, the discourse of mono-deconstruction has four tenets: (1) monogamy is not the only option; (2) love should not come with expectations; (3) marriage is just one type of relational contract; and (4) commitment is relationship-specific. As I work to explain each tenet, I will point to the places in the utterances where one must understand prior utterance to make meaning of the current utterance.

Monogamy is not the only option. Participants consistently noted that they had a realization that the monogamous relationship structure that was expected of them was not, in fact, the only choice for romantic engagement. In order to understand the tenet, "monogamy is not the only option," the prior utterance of the discourse of mono-normativity is required. Said another way, Baxter (2011) notes that in making sense of the proximal already-spoken, a scholar must ask "What prior utterances is this utterance a response to?" Participants did not always state that monogamy is framed as the only option, but they do note that there was a moment when they discovered polyamory:

It wasn't until maybe a month later, the beginning of February, we actually

discovered that polyamory was a thing. I found it online and we started reading

about it. It had always kind of made sense to me, polyamory, in an intellectual

kind of way, but Kristen had made it make a lot more sense emotionally. I got

how different people bring different things to you and can open new doors for

you. It became something I wanted to do. When we read about it, it was like,

okay, we're going to try this. (5: 157-164)

To "discover polyamory" there must have been an existing relational structure in place

before polyamory. This tenet exemplifies the idea that monogamy is an invisible power

structure, as outlined in the literature review (Klesse, 2011). When no other relational

choices are presented except monogamy, individuals need to deconstruct monogamy

before they con engage in relationships differently. One step in this deconstruction is the

realization – or the discovery – that monogamy is not the only option. Mearle echoed the

idea that polyamory was once an unknown to be discovered:

Having said that, I actually didn't know the terminology of polyamorous yet, and I

didn't know that there were subcultures for swingers, and all kinds of variants of

the lifestyle where you could be in a committed partnership, but then it was open

and inclusive to other partners as well. (10: 131-136)

For Mearle, the discourse of mono-deconstruction led him to discover the term for

polyamory, as well as realize that many subcultures deviated from the sexual and

emotional exclusivity dictated by the discourse of mono-normativity. Similarly, in order

to understand this utterance, understanding the prior utterances of monogamy that inform

the utterance is essential. Being "open and inclusive to other partners" departs from the

expectation of closed romantic relationships. In addition to discovering that monogamy is not the only option, participants also voiced the next tenet: marriage is just one type of relational contract.

Marriage is just one type of relational contract. When participants discussed marriage, they often stripped it of cultural significance and described it as a contract. In order to strip it of its meaning, marriage has to be perceived as societally meaningful.

Carly and Scott voice the complexity of the cultural meaning:

Carly: I'm always kind of looking a little bit askance at it [marriage]. Maybe that's the wrong word.

Scott: At marriage?

Carly: Yeah, I think it's a weird institution in a lot of ways with a lot of nasty patriarchal history and a lot of societal assumptions and stuff and I get confused about what it means sometimes. (7: 530-538)

Although Carly does not clearly articulate the "nasty patriarchal history" and the "societal assumptions," she makes it clear that the meaning of marriage can be interpreted through various historical lenses. Carly's point is important because it points toward marriage as a potentially complex institution.

Alice works to remove cultural significance from marriage by stating that it is a contractual agreement, free from additional values:

I would honor somebody by giving them a government-signed document because I view it very similar as I view a mortgage contract, a car lease. It's a contract, and I'm happy to adhere to a contract under a certain agreement, but I do not think that there are values in marriage. (1: 885-889)

Alice is willing to engage in marriage, but does not perceive meaning in the institution outside of the contractual agreement. She articulates that marriage can be understood as a value-laden institution in her concluding statement, "I do not think that there are values in marriage." By stating that marriage is essentially a car lease, Alice does not ascribe meaning to marriage outside of a legal document.

One final consideration of this tenet is the political ramifications of marriage. Some participants voiced this by stating that they would marry multiple people, even though multiple marriages are not recognized. Sasha clearly articulated the idea that marriage fosters inequality:

> If other people want it, that's great, but if I were to engage in the institution, I'd want it to have the power to recognize any and all relationships in their significance. Right now, law dictates that we can't do that. Therefore, I will not be a part of it until that happens. (2: 486-489)

In essence, Sasha is protesting marriage because it is not an equal right: some have access to it and its legal benefits, while other relationship types do not. As such, Sasha's voice joins the other participants' voices stating that marriage is just another contractual agreement. By curbing the sociocultural understanding of marriage as value-laden, this tenet asserts that marriage does not have to be a part of significant romantic relationships.

Love should not come with expectations. The third tenet of the discourse of mono-deconstruction removes the expectations that come with saying, "I love you." This tenet implies that love often does come with expectations, as Jared and Samantha describe in their conversation:

Jared: To me, the phrase, "I love you," should always have a period at the end.
To me, that period is the unconditional part. I love you, period.

Samantha: Instead of I love you means now having to do this.

Jared: Yeah, I love you when, I love you because, I love you and.

Samantha: I love you. Therefore, you need to do this, and this, and this, and this.

(1: 1081-1090)

Both Jared and Samantha refer to the idea that "I love you" often comes with a qualifier—the qualifier might not be spoken, but it is implicated. The implication is important because Samantha says, "I love you means now having to do this." For Samantha and Jared, the phrase "I love you" should not have any expectations beyond an expression of an emotion.

Finally, Lindsay assures that when she says, "I love you," the target of her expression needs to know what she means:

For me, love is the reason for choosing polyamory because how meaningful is a relationship without it? Why not want to connect in such a deep and real way with another human to know them, care for them, and to exist with them in life authentically, really and truly with emotion? I feel like love is that emotion. Each relationship varies in depth or in love but is in no way less meaningful to me. One relationship doesn't mean the same thing as any other relationship. They have similar components, but each human is unique, so each way I say the way I love you, that word love is unique to that person. There are a lot of similar components, but once a relationship becomes close, I already love them, whether

I say the word love or not. I'll use the term love in various ways and make sure

people understand my definition. (6: 743-755)

Lindsay echoes the idea that love should not have expectations attached. Her

interpretation of love is that it is felt keenly and differently in each relationship. As such,

the implied monogamous expectations that come with love, such an expectation for

relational longevity, are not necessarily linked to the feeling of love itself. Instead,

Lindsay "use(es) the term love in various ways and to make sure people understand my

definition." Love can be meaningful, but since the definition of love has the potential to

change, expectations cannot be aligned with the emotion itself. However, the concept of

love does need to be expressed as a definition in each relationship, as it has the potential

to convey different meanings, yet still without expectation.

Commitment is defined by the people in the relationship. The final tenet of

the discourse of mono-deconstruction is that the people in the relationships define

commitment. In the discourse of mono-normativity, commitment is defined by sexual

and emotional exclusivity. As the participants in this study are polyamorous and do not

ascribe to sexual and emotional exclusivity, they worked to deconstruct the mono-

normative expectation by removing the uniform definition of commitment. Instead,

commitment looks different to every person, which results in commitment differences for

every relationship. Mearle discusses his previous expectations and his evolution to his

present understanding of commitment:

I think that one of the ways in which I was committed to my previous

relationship, I was committed to its perpetuation. I was committed to what I

thought success was, but I was committed to its sustainability. I wanted it to

81

sustain, and I thought that there was inherent value in that. I'm not so sure that I

believe that anymore. The way I would define commitment now is – and this is

completely informed by that relationship and what I felt was lacking in the ways

in which I wish it possessed certain attributes, and really, it didn't towards the

end. I would say showing up, being willing to check whatever it is that you

believe that your personal needs or wants are in the moment, to be able to give of

yourself for the other for something that they might need in the moment. (10:

1263-1276)

Mearle notes that his previous understanding of commitment meant perpetuating the

relationship. The meaning shifted when he realized that the length of a relationship does

not have inherent value. Instead, commitment now is a moment-based experience, where

he gives of himself to someone else.

David specifically redefines commitment for each partner:

I wouldn't have that same commitment with a younger woman with kids just

because I don't want that anymore. There's different levels of commitment with

different people, but I would certainly help out and take the kids for an afternoon

as long as I can give them back. (8: 413-418)

David situates his understanding of commitment with regard to children: he notes earlier

in the transcript that he does not want more children of his own. Instead, if he has a

partner with children, he is willing to accommodate those children. His commitment to

the potential "younger woman" he references is defined by the specifics of that

relationship as it includes kids. He would not live with more children, as he specifies that

he wants to "give them back." David articulates clearly that commitment

looks different for each relationship, which allows him to perceive of his relationships as meeting different needs over time.

Finally, Trisha outlines different types of commitment:

There are all these different types of commitment. I guess I'm getting at that – there's an emotional commitment, there's fidelity commitment that doesn't really apply in poly, there's time commitment, there's physical in person commitment, and maybe communication commitment especially if you're long distance. Every relationship looks a little bit different, but as long as you all agree on what that commitment looks like, then it's okay I guess. (5: 968-975)

She notes that there are many different kinds of commitment, as there are different relationship types. The important part for Trisha is that the individuals within the relationship need to agree on what commitment means. In the discourse of deconstruction, commitment does not have a stable definition. Instead, it can have different meanings for different people and relationships.

The discourse of mono-deconstruction works to dismantle the discourse of mono-normativity. The discourse of mono-normativity is the prevalent, privileged discourse for romantic relationships. Those who identify as polyamorous acknowledge the discourse of mono-normativity, and then they deconstruct the various meanings that are attributed to the tenets of mono-normativity. Next, the discourse of poly-production is described.

Discourse of Poly-Production

In the discourse of poly-production identification as polyamorous is an ongoing construction. As a result, polyamorous consistently individuals have to be working to

produce and reproduce their polyamorous identities in order to maintain their relationships in a mono-normative society. The conceptualization of the discourse of poly-production can be understood through the lens of the dialogic self, where the self is not seen as an individual, calcified self. Instead, the discourse of polyamorous production situates relationships as ever evolving, changing, and highlights the point that the other is required for the production of self. The discourse of poly-production, then, can be seen theoretically as contributing to dialogism because polyamory is an example of the dialogic relationship, whereas monogamy is an example of the monad, as voiced through the discourse of mono-normativity. Said a different way, the discourse of poly-production voices relationships as a continuously developing site: the individuals are continuously evolving, and also additional relational partners are continuously invited into relationships ultimately expanding opportunities for dialogism.

The discourse of poly-production is active discourse, and four tenets describe it: (1) Developing the authentic self; (2) Encouraging a philosophy of openness; (3) Ongoing communication; and (4) Redefining relationship boundaries.

Developing the authentic self. The discourse of poly-production encourages the development of the authentic self. Where there was a scripted, limited self (monogamy requires relationships to be performed according to a template of expectations), there is now a dialogic self; a self that grows and changes each moment, with each unanticipated experience. The authentic self is described as an action: "to be myself" and transcends the romantic relationship into other relationships as well. Often, participants would note that being polyamorous allowed them to discard the parts of themselves that they felt they were falsely performing for their family or society and embrace the parts that felt truly

84

authentic to their character. In the development of the authentic self, the development of relationships occurs as well.

Becky describes the development of her authentic self:

I think the biggest change for me is that I feel with poly, I can be more of myself with everybody, not just with people I'm in relationships with. I don't feel like I need to repress myself so that I don't accidentally fall into some kind of emotional relationship with somebody that wouldn't be allowed with monogamy. I can honestly be honest with people about how I'm feeling about everyone in my life.

There can be more community surrounding the people in my life. (9: 84-91)

Becky notes that due to polyamory, she can be herself with her romantic partners as well as with the community that surrounds her. She begins by noting that she can be more of herself, and extends this idea to being honest with herself and to those around her. She implicates monogamy in stating that, as a result of being polyamorous, she does not need to repress herself in order to maintain an expectation of emotional exclusivity. Because she has the freedom to explore her emotions and tell her partners about her experiences, she is more able to be herself and develop her authentic self through her relationships.

Marge extends this idea toward an active engagement with the development of the authentic self:

I was seeking partners. I was seeking – I mean, this could also just be a function of young, horny 27-year-old girl, and I was definitely a horny 27-year-old girl. Speaking of human nature, I very much was like, "Mearle, this is my nature, why am I going – what virtue is there in fighting my nature? Why not cultivate a

paradigm in which this nature could be even celebrated, in which this nature could be understood or be okay. If I can make a narrative where these desires are okay, why not?" That's what I tried to do. (10: 168-178)

Marge uses direct reported speech – she directly refers to previous communication by recalling a quotation that impacted her (Baxter, 2014) – to question why she is fighting her polyamorous nature. Furthermore, she wants to create a space where her desires are okay, even celebrated. Marge takes action toward the development of her authentic self because she has the knowledge of mono-normativity and she has done the work of the discourse of mono-deconstruction. She has moved into the discourse of production to create a place where her authentic polyamorous self can exist.

> Carly voices how the discourse of poly-production influenced her sexuality:
> It's also made me identify more as queer because I always was, but there's something different about actually having female sweeties compared to just being a hetero married woman who says, 'Oh yeah, by the way, I'm bi,' or whatever. I like that it's easier to be out as queer, and that's been very moving. In times, in my past, when I had relationships with women, I wasn't very out as queer. Sometimes my family knew, or sometimes they didn't, but just in general it was closet-y quality to it. It's been really moving to be able to experience having a same-sex relationship visibly within a supportive community, or more than one as the case may be. (7: 263-272)

Carly is married to a man, and presented as heterosexual as a result. Polyamory offered her the opportunity to explore her bisexuality by dating other women. She states that she identifies more as queer because she can have female partners. As a result, she has had to

86

come out to more of her community; thus, her authentic self is not only engaged, but also recognized by others.

The ability for polyamory to accommodate bisexuality is not uncommon (Barker, 2005). Carly's utterances regarding the impact polyamory had on her sexuality is just one demonstration of the discourse of poly-production. The second tenet of the discourse of poly-production is described next.

Encouraging a philosophy of openness. The discourse of poly-production encourages a philosophy of openness. Where there was certainty (monogamy and a societal script for the trajectory of romantic relationships), there is now uncertainty and a willingness to explore the human experience without restraints. Ongoing questions are asked, the self remains a work in progress, and relationships rely on the decision to maintain them daily. Voiced as "openness," to be open means both relationally and psychologically. Relationally open is the understanding that no sexual and emotional limitations exist in relationships (although there are sometimes practical exceptions to this rule, such as sexual safety practices). To be open psychologically is to be willing to question everything, to be self-reflexive, to be a critical thinker about everything. Based in the understanding that monogamy was presented as the only way to be in relationship, many participants noted that they "discovered" polyamory because it was not offered as an option. This "discovery" has led to a general questioning of all taken-for-granted societal structures.

Marge describes her philosophy of openness as a relationship:

I might call myself open, because I believe in possibilities. I believe that we can

find other people that would enrich our lives and we can learn to love and

integrate into our life. I believe that we could find other couples or another

person – another thing to mention for example is Carter, who I mentioned before.

My ex Chuck and I don't talk anymore. Carter is still – the other man who I dated

for four years while I was with Chuck, is still an integral part of my humanity. I

cannot imagine my life without that man. I still make out with him every time I

see him. We still sleep naked together. We don't have sex. We are not romantic,

but the relationship I have with him in most monogamous paradigms just would

not be permitted. What polyamory has become for me and the way it looks in my

relationship now is more of the openness and the possibilities that are out there.

I'm no longer coming from a place of seeking to complete it. I'm coming from a

place of really deep fulfillment and openness to the possibilities that exist in the

world. (10: 185-202)

Marge frames her openness as a belief in possibilities, and the possibilities work to fulfill

her. Her relationship with Carter represents her philosophy of openness because it

transcends the relationship types that are allowed in the mono-normative structure. Their

relationship is not one of sexual romance, but rather an ex-romantic friendship that still

includes some physical and emotional intimacy. The ability to include physical and

emotional intimacy that is not dictated by the expectations of romantic relationships is an

enactment of openness, of the possibilities of being in relationship.

Sasha also describes her philosophy of openness:

Polyamory is just a part of who I am now, but I also think about the ways in

which it's shaped my philosophies, my views of the world. As a result of picking

apart a relationship style like monogamy, I also now pick apart everything else.

Why am I doing the things that I'm doing? Why am I feeling the way that I'm

feeling? It's also given me tools outside of my relationships to understand my

emotional capacity or view the world differently, I guess. (2: 147-154)

Sasha's commitment to questioning is a shift from relational openness to psychological

openness. Polyamory shifted her view of the world, and she persists the shift by

continuing to open herself by asking questions and seeking answers. The desire to

explore and remain curious – if not skeptical – about the world typifies the tenet of

encouraging a philosophy of openness.

Ongoing communication. The third tenet of the discourse of poly-production is

ongoing communication. Whereas developing the authentic self and encouraging a

philosophy of openness can be seen as individuals' acts of identity production, the tenet

of ongoing communication implicates communicative partners. This implication requires

an understanding that the self is dialogic – that the self is never static, and constantly

changing – therefore ongoing communication is required to maintain relationships.

Polyamorous relationships require a high level of communication because there

are more individuals involved than the couple. The discourse of poly-production

highlights the idea that communication needs to be ongoing because people because

relationships change with new experiences. Eric considers this:

We have some guidelines and some considerations in place, but I like that

everything is – or you're encouraging everything to be open for conversation.

Hey, even if this is how we agreed on something, at least talk to me about it so we

can figure it out, or sort it out, or create a case for it. (2: 335-339)

In the context of this quotation, Eric is discussing how decisions can change with time or experiences. Instead of making the assumption that one communicative act finalizes an experience, ongoing, open communication allows a topic to be revisited. Eric's partner, Sahsa, continues:

> Even if it's shit that's happened in the past and we've reacted a certain way, over time all of that grows and changes. Situationally, it grows and changes. Different people make the situation different, and so it's all a big hot mess, basically. That's why communication is so key is because nothing ever looks the same. We don't have those kinds of pre-constructed communicative things that we're supposed to talk about. You know? (2: 345-354)

In addition to time impacting a situation, Sasha emphasizes the idea that different people make for different communicative patterns as well. What might have historically been uncomfortable to consider becomes possible with ongoing communication.

Parker calls attention to the fact that polyamorous relationships do not rely on cultural scripts: "When you don't have a template for how relationships are supposed to go you have to communicate. It goes completely different from the template that's been given to you. Puts you in situations that are novel" (5: 406-409). Parker makes it clear that he understands that there is no template; in fact, situations are completely different from the template. The difference creates novel environments that require ongoing communication. The discourse of poly-production is produced through ongoing communication. Polyamory requires both production and reproduction communicatively

(Baxter, 2011), and then a commitment to revisit topics in an ongoing communicative fashion.

Redefining relationship boundaries. The final tenet of the discourse of poly-production is redefining relationship boundaries. Where once relationships had defined borders (monogamy employs strict definitions of family, friends, and lovers), there is now an exploration of relationships beyond those bounds. "Friendship" is defined as a broader term, where there can be emotional and physical interactions. Intimacy is validated in every type of relationship. Because words for the various types of relationships do not exist, often "friend" is qualified with some other word that enhances its meaning. Trisha exemplifies this tenet: "We hang out a lot, we cuddle, we sleep together in the same bed, we might kiss occasionally, we make breakfast together sometimes, and they're still just a friend to me, but it's definitely more than a regular friend" (5: 285-289). The boundaries of monogamous relationships no longer govern the boundaries of other relationships; therefore, the edges can be blurred. Trisha is very careful to state that the relationship she is describing is a friendship, although "regular friends" do not typically kiss and share a bed. The expansion of intimacy redefines the relationship boundary of friendship.

Additionally, emotions that are typically reserved for romantic relationships are included in the redefining process: "I feel like I can love friends as strongly as I love a romantic partner. Therefore, love in a romantic relationship is just an extension of a feeling that goes across all the boundaries" (9: 420-423). In this statement, Everett makes a claim that love is a feeling that crosses all relational boundaries. In saying that friend love is comparable to romantic love, Everett redefines relationship boundaries through

91

the discourse of poly-production. He produces emotions that enrich all relationship types, not just romantic relationships.

Redefining relational boundaries also occurs as an extension of romantic relationships into the potential for a future family within the relationships. This occurs in a conversation of a polyamorous V (when one person is in a relationship with two individuals who are not romantically involved with each other), where Robert was talking about his future potential of having children:

> Robert: If I ever choose to have children at all, and that would obviously have to be a big talking point for all of us if I do decide to adopt a child, if I even want to at some point in my life –
>
> Paula: Can I be the step-mother?
>
> Robert: Yes, and Anderson can be the uncle.
>
> Anderson: No, I don't want to be the uncle, be that creepy uncle.
>
> Paula: No, you'll be –
>
> Anderson: He's the one with the dildo collection.
>
> Paula: Oh, my God! (796-810, VR4)

Paula, who is the apex of the V, cuts into the conversation to ask if she could be the "step-mother" of Robert's potential future children. Without missing a beat, Robert affirms her request, and states that his metamour, Anderson, could be the uncle. Anderson declines and mentioned that he would be creepy because of his sex toy collection. First, the idea of family is redefined. Paula does not want to be the mother of her partner's children; instead, she wants to take on the role of step-mother. Robert's partner's partner is dictated the role of uncle by Robert, and Anderson declines. The

roles of step-mother and uncle are arbitrarily assigned to each person, but they are marked as familial. When Anderson declines, it is because he does not want to be seen as the creepy uncle with the dildo collection.   Paula, Robert, and Anderson redefine relationship boundaries by changing the meanings of family assigned names such as "step mother" and "uncle." They create a new idea of how adults can connect with children, thus using the discourse of poly-production.

Similarly, David voices the discourse of poly-production and the tenet of redefining relationship boundaries that involves familial roles:

> I like the fact that I have extended, very close friends, more than friends, now. I mean, I do consider Brian – I don't know. In one sense I kind of consider him as a new brother, and I've never had a brother. It's kind of weird, new to me that he's in a relationship with you and not actually a brother. I kind of view him as kind of quasi-brother-type figure, because we're roughly the same age. We're not going to go there anymore. (8: 94-100)

David's affect in this utterance is one of appreciation and discomfort. He says, "I don't know," "It's kind of weird," and "We're not going to go there anymore," as sentiments that show his uncertainty with his statements. David is redefining his understanding of brotherhood with his metamour. David is claiming that he perceives his partner's partner as a brother. Brian has the potential to be a family member instead of a secondary character in David's relational life. By changing the idea of what family can look like, David redefines relationship boundaries. .

In addition to blurring boundaries with intimacy, love, and family, the discourse of poly-production, and the tenet of redefining relationship boundaries specifically, addresses community:

> We were talking about how I want to build community. Honestly, one of the biggest things that I love about poly and things that attracted me to it was that I never really felt like I could be myself with my actual blood family. When I realized it was part of a community of people who are poly and who I loved and other friends loved them and we just could all hang out and be just totally comfortable with each other, be ourselves with each other. I realized that what I wanted from poly was in part of another family, a family that actually cared, supported and we all love each other for who we are. We can have these deep discussions and freedom, just all these things that I wanted from my blood family that I really couldn't get, still can't get even when I ask for it. In that respect it's been one of my bigger core values of poly is that I don't ever choose partners who don't want to know the people I'm with and don't want to hang out with them. I want to form a network of people who all care about each other. (5: 419-434)

Community is comprised of a polyamorous network of partners and friends who become chosen family. In redefining relationship boundaries, all relationships are reconsidered as valuable, loving, and committed. These relationships become a part of the discourse of poly-production because they extend the idea of polyamory from being many romantic loves to many relational loves.

Summary of Discourses

In order to identify polyamorous personal and relational identity discourses, it was first imperative to understand the discourse that is inherited from the past that informs polyamorous identity. The discourse of mono-normativity was prevalent in the entire data set. It is the normalization of the expectation of monogamy, including the following tenets: (1) monogamy equals commitment (defined as sexual and emotional exclusivity), (2) "one true love" will meet all needs and desires, (3) monogamous relationships are moral, and (4) jealousy is normal in monogamous relationships. From the discourse of mono-normativity, the discourse of mono-deconstruction was born. The discourse of mono-deconstruction dismantles the mono-normative expectations for romantic relationships via four tenets: (1) monogamy is not the only option; (2) love should not come with expectations; (3) marriage is just one type of relational contract; and (4) commitment is relationship-specific. With the deconstruction of mono-normativity as a foundation, the discourse of poly-production outlines the new ways in which polyamorous personal and relational identities are constructed, which are described in the following tenets: (1) developing the authentic self; (2) encouraging a philosophy of openness; (3) ongoing communication; and (4) redefining relationship boundaries.

While these discourses were presented as a linear process for the sake of explanation, the discourses were not present in a clear, linear form in the data. Instead they interplayed to make meaning. In the next chapter, I will answer the second research question, which addressed the interplay of the discourses.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO RESULTS

The second research question asked: How do polyamorous personal and relational identity discourses interplay to make new meanings of romantic relationships? The discourses of mono-normativity, mono-deconstruction, and poly-production had a high amount of discursive competition throughout the data set. Both diachronic separation, in the form of spiraling inversion, and synchronic interplay, in the form of negating, countering, and entertaining, were present in the results.

Diachronic Separation

Diachronic separation is "characterized by a shift in which discourse is centered and which discourse is marginalized" over time (Baxter, 2011, p. 127). While diachronic separation occurs as both spiraling inversion and segmentation, only spiraling inversion was found in this data set. Spiraling inversion is characterized by the privileging of a discourse in a back and forth pattern over time (Baxter). It occurred in the data set where participants reflected on points in their personal and relational history. Jared and Samantha demonstrate spiraling inversion:

Jared: We started out monogamous. There were signs of it right from the get-go. Remember when we were on our honeymoon, you were pregnant. We were playing the what-if game as we drove through Texas, which went on forever. I

asked you what would be the kinkiest thing you'd ever want to try, which actually looking back is a really funny question now.

Samantha: The kinkiest thing. Keep going.

Jared: You said well, I'd like to try swinging. I went oh, okay, and that was the end of that, and we moved on from that. We filed that away. Fast-forward about a year and a half. You had your first experience where you wanted to go outside the marriage, and you were all in tears. You went on a military thing for about six weeks?

Samantha: Four.

Jared: Four weeks?

Samantha: I almost cheated on him. I was flirting with this one guy a lot, and then we had exchanged phone numbers. I was in my barracks, and he asked if I wanted to meet him outside and maybe fool around. I went oh, um, sure, and then I sat there for about five minutes and then I went, actually, I'm really tired and I'm going to go to bed. Then I shut off my phone and was freaking out because I had actually agreed to mess around with someone else. At the time, I was very monogamous.

Jared: She called me up. She was in tears, all apologizing and sorry. As I remember it – correct me if I'm wrong – I didn't react angry at all. My very first reaction was oh, well, we did talk about swinging. Maybe when you get back, we should talk about opening our marriage. That was pretty much how we started. We started out as swingers. (1: 119-156)

Through reflection and reported speech, Jared and Samantha make meaning of their trajectory into polyamory by exploring two different stories of their relationship. First, Jared notes the honeymoon, where they speak about swinging. In an otherwise monogamous relationship that privileged the discourse of mono-normativity through marriage, the interest in swinging is mentioned. Swinging is a form of non-monogamy where partners engage in sexual activity by introducing others (either couples or singles) into the dyad (Gould, 1999). Before the instance where they were driving, Jared and Samantha were married and invested in the discourse of mono-normativity. In the car, the discourse of mono-normativity was disrupted by the discourse of mono-deconstruction. In stating that she wanted to try swinging, Samantha privileged a relational structure aside from monogamy. Shortly after the car ride, the discourse of mono-normativity resumed its centered place. Then, when Samantha was away for military purposes and she almost cheated, the discourse of mono-deconstruction resurfaced. Ultimately, this instance of privileging the discourse of mono-deconstruction would change the trajectory of spiraling inversion. Whereas before the discourse of mono-normativity was the default that would be returned to after moments of favoring the discourse of mono-deconstruction, when the couple decided to try swinging, they would come to favor the discourse of mono-deconstruction. Then, the discourse of poly-production started to be voiced:

> Yeah, we started out as swinging as a couple, but we very quickly – six weeks, two months into it figured out we wanted more than just the sex. We wanted the relationship, too. I remember the first time I heard the word poly was on a website, Adult Friend Finder. I was in a chatroom talking with people. There

was this one lady I was talking to. I was like, we're frustrated. We're swingers,

but I want to love other people. I fall in love with people. She goes, "Oh, honey,

you're not a swinger; you're poly." I go, "I'm a what?" That's where we first got

introduced to the term, and we figured it out ever since. (1: 161-170)

In addition to breaking down the discourse of mono-normativity by deviating from sexual

exclusivity, Jared and Samantha grew to want emotional connections with others as well.

This is where the discourse of poly-production is voiced, especially the development of

the authentic self.

Although the spiraling inversion that was found in this data set was reported

speech, it demonstrates how discourses are privileged and marginalized over time. In the

example provided, the relationship bounces back and forth between the discourse of

mono-normativity and the discourse of mono-deconstruction in order to develop an

understanding of what deviating from the traditional expectations of monogamy meant to

the couple. As they progressed into swinging and then polyamory, the overarching

centered discourse changed to one of production.

Synchronic Interplay

Synchronic interplay was the dominant form of interplay. As a reminder,

synchronic interplay is when multiple discourses are voiced at the same time. Three

types of synchronic interplay have been identified: negating, countering, and entertaining

(Baxter, 2011). In synchronic interplay, the discourse of mono-normativity was negated

and countered with the discourse of deconstruction.

Negating. Negating is when a discourse is voiced for the purpose of being

rejected (Baxter, 2011). This form of synchronic interplay occurs when an individual

voices a specific discourse, only to state that the discourse is not valid. In doing so, negating is a discursive refutation of a discourse. It was highly used by participants who would call forth the discourse of mono-normativity to reject it. The discourse of mono-deconstruction titularly deconstructs mono-normativity. As a discourse, its primary function is critically examining mono-normativity. When a polyamorous individual evokes the discourse of mono-deconstruction, it is typically as a means to negate the discourse of mono-normativity.

Trisha negates the discourse of mono-normativity:

> I mean the ideas of monogamy are so deeply ingrained in us from everything in our lives. It's hard to unwind and say, "Oh well, that's actually not necessarily true." That's what people and religion and society tells me should be the case but it's not. It's not necessarily it. If I just come from the standpoint of throwing everything out the window and figuring out what is really best for me or what I really want, it might look a lot different. (5: 332-338)

Trisha uses the tenet of the authentic self in the discourse of poly-production to negate mono-normativity. She accomplishes negating when she states "It's not necessarily it." The first "it" is monogamy—Trisha notes that monogamy is ingrained in individuals living in United States society and that the idea of monogamy is difficult to challenge because society and religion both support it. Instead, she encourages "throwing everything out the window," meaning that the presupposed definitions provided by society and religion should be discarded in order to come to the truth of the authentic self.

Trisha rejects the overarching discourse of mono-normativity, the idea that monogamy is unquestioned and normal, by stating that "people and religion and society"

have been telling her that monogamy is the only way to engage in romantic relationships, but that idea is not true. By qualifying her statement with "necessarily," Trisha is using ambiguous speech "indirectly to temper the authoritativeness of a dominant discourse," in this case, the discourse of mono-normativity (Baxter, 2011, p. 136). She then calls upon the discourse of poly-production, specifically the tenet of developing the authentic self, and to figure out what works for her. She validates the authentic self by providing a space for mono-normativity to be decentered; she wants it to be conceptually thrown out the window in order for her to make sense of relationships on her own. In positioning her authentic self over the societal and religious expectations for monogamy, Trisha effectively negates the discourse of mono-normativity.

Parker also demonstrates negating when he challenges the institution of marriage. He calls upon the discourse of mono-normativity, specifically the tenet of "one true love" when he refers to infidelity as a cause for break ups in monogamous romantic relationships:

> I started saying, in the summer or six months ago, that I didn't believe in marriage anymore, as an institution. I think it's fundamentally flawed. I think the proof is in the pudding. Half of them don't work. More than half of them, there is infidelity, anyway. I just feel like the whole system is broken, and there are so many examples of people who are in their marriages, but they're like feeling stuck and they're unhappy. (5: 834-840)

Parker negates the mono-normative tenet that there is "one true love" when he notes that in more than half of monogamous romantic relationships, there is infidelity. He uses this loose statistic on infidelity to indicate that he no longer believes in marriage as an

institution—marriage is a function of monogamy, and if monogamy does not actually provide sexual and emotional fidelity, then, by extension, marriage is invalidated. Negating is accomplished when Parker states "I just feel like the whole system is broken." To Parker, the "system" is the monogamous institution of marriage. In voicing that the system is broken, he called upon the discourse of mono-normativity for the sole purpose of claiming that it does not exist where there is infidelity.

As previously noted, the discourse of mono-deconstruction directly targets the discretitization of the discourse of mono-normativity. In addition to negating, this discreditization was also accomplished through countering.

Countering. Countering is a less polemic way to question a discourse than negating (Baxter, 2011). In countering, a discourse is voiced in order to show that it is a less-worthy option than another discourse. For example, an individual might call forth the discourse of mono-normativity and the tenet of "one true love," but then state that they would prefer to have multiple true loves. Situating one discourse as less worthy than another discourse is a discursive move to decenter what is deemed as less than. There was not a significant amount of countering in this data set; however, there was one meaningful example. Scott demonstrates countering:

> I also remember at some point fairly early on in our relationship thinking, you
> know what I actually want is to have one partner and be in a monogamous
> relationship. We did that for a while, but I think there was always something in
> traditional monogamy, in the traditional expectations around how people in long-
> term monogamous relationships think, and feel, and relate to other people outside
> of that relationship that never quite worked for me. (7: 74-81)

102

Scott calls forth the discourse of mono-normativity by stating that at one point he did

enact a monogamous relationship. He counters by using the lexical cue "but," noting that

the thought process behind monogamy did not work for him. He states that he was in a

monogamous relationship for awhile, but then he grew to understand that the traditional

expectations for monogamous relationships did not work for him. The discourse of

mono-deconstruction is used to articulate that the traditional expectations of

monogamous relationships did not resonate with him. Specifically, he notes that there

are "traditional expectations around how people in long-term monogamous relationships

think, and feel, and relate to other people outside of that relationship." These

expectations did not work for Scott; therefore, he decided to diverge from monogamous

practices as he currently identifies as polyamorous.

Entertaining. Entertaining neutralizes power in discourse by "indicat[ing] that a

given discursive position is but one possibility among alternative discursive positions"

(Baxter, 2011, p. 168). In entertaining, an individual calls forth discourses without

positioning one as more dominant. In this data set, entertaining was accomplished twice.

The first example is as follows:

> I absolutely love Mearle more than I've ever loved anyone, anything in this
>
> world. I don't want to attach to him such that he is the only thing in this world.
>
> That is another expression of our paradox. I am 100% believing that he is the
>
> perfect human and most glorious man for me, and at the same time, should he
>
> leave, I will still be okay. That is one of the paradoxes that I explore, not just
>
> being polyamorous, but being a human. (10: 514-520)

In this example, Marge calls forth the discourse of mono-normativity and the tenet that "one true love" will meet all needs and desires when she says that Mearle is the "perfect human" and is the "most glorious man for me." Simultaneously, she is holding the discourse of poly-production, specifically the tenet of developing the authentic self, when she states that if he leaves, she will be okay. She claims that this moment of entertaining encompasses not only her polyamorous identity, but her identity as a human. She describes entertaining as a paradox: she knows that she is holding two distinct ideas at the same time, while not allocating more power to one or the other.

A second example of entertaining explores the interplay between the discourse of mono-deconstruction and the discourse of poly-production:

> I've thought about hand-fastening ceremonies, and I don't think they're for me just because I'm not Pagan. That's really a Pagan religion. I feel like a lot of polyamorous people do that, and that's fine, but I'm not really Pagan, so I don't really see a hand-fastening ceremony being anything other than a hand-fastening ceremony, and that doesn't seem very meaningful to me. Too early, but not off the table. (4: 552-558)

Paula calls forth the discourse of mono-deconstruction as she examines the Pagan ritual of the hand-fastening ceremony, which is distinct from traditional marriage. She particularly focuses on the tenet that marriage is just one type of relational contract, when she states that a lot of polyamorous individuals use hand-fastening ceremonies to celebrate their relationships. While she notes that this is a valid practice, she also states that she is not Pagan; therefore, the ceremony would not be meaningful to her. However, the final sentence of her utterance is where she entertains the discourse of poly-

production, and the tenet of engaging in a philosophy of openness. She says, "Too early, but not off the table." While Paula is not Pagan and does not see meaning in a hand-fastening ceremony, she leaves herself space potentially to find it meaningful in the future. She entertains both the discourse of mono-deconstruction and the discourse of poly-production simultaneously, rendering neither discourse more powerful than the other. Instead, the discourses serve as a means by which Paula can explore her polyamorous identity and leave space for it to grow.

Transformative Interplay

Transformative interplay also characterizes the discourses of mono-normativity, mono-deconstruction, and poly-production. Specifically, the discourses combined to create new meaning through discursive hybridity. Additionally, I contend that participants created another form of interplay through the use of metaphor.

Hybrid. When discourses fuse to create new meanings, a hybrid is born. Hybrid utterances are non-polemic and are a both/and semantic understanding of the discourses. Hybridity can be seen in the following exemplar:

> To me, the collar is just as equivalent as the ring. It is a sign of ultimate
> commitment, lifelong interactions, intertwining of lives, and should be treated
> with the respect that "marriage" is. To me, that would be the
> commitment/marriage line. In that case, it wouldn't be a legal document, but it'd
> be along the lines of the committed thing. You can't legally marry more than one
> person. I don't think the government should be involved in marriage at all. (1:
> 987-995)

The use of a collar to denote commitment is a space for hybrid meaning between the discourses of mono-normativity and poly-production. A collar is a symbol in the BDSM community. It is a physical adornment that represents a relationship between a submissive and a dominant (Taormino, 2012). In this quotation, Jared creates a hybrid meaning between the discourse of mono-normativity and the discourse of poly-production. First, he states that marital commitment should be respected, which is aligned with the discourse of mono-normativity. Then he moves forward to say that a BDSM collar should garner the same respect as a marriage ring, claiming that both the marriage ring and the collar can exist as different symbols of commitment for different partners. Jared uses the discourse of poly-production, specifically the tenet of redefining relational boundaries by situating the collar of the BDSM relationship as an indication of commitment commensurate to the marital ring. The new meanings are two-fold: first, Jared merges a traditional symbol of monogamous marriage (the ring) with a symbol of commitment in the BDSM community (the collar). The discourse of mono-normativity is present with the monogamous understanding of the significance of marriage, and the discourse of poly-production is called upon because he is redefining relationship boundaries. Second, the new meaning of the collar as a symbol is advanced by the idea that the ring and the collar can exist in concert, recognizing two very different types of commitment, rendered meaningful only in each specific relationship.

Metaphoric Interplay. Metaphoric interplay is a potential new kind of interplay demonstrated in this data set. Owen (1985) conceptualizes the use of metaphor in language as a tool that helps construct worldviews. Lackoff and Johnson (1980) extend

the definition that metaphors create meaning often unconsciously to impact the way we think, what we experience, and what we do.

As a discursively transformative phenomenon, metaphor is a tool used to make meaning of a concept not already understood. I contend that metaphor can be used as a linguistic tool to aid in understanding where there are no words for a concept. Anderson provides a basic example:

> Food helps out when somebody else is thinking about the inside. People are like, how do you deal with polyamory? It sounds like it's so difficult. You're just like, well, you're pizza and he's hamburgers. Just because I'm eating hamburgers doesn't mean I'm never going to want pizza. If there's enough left tomorrow morning, I'm probably going to want some pizza. You can't compare yourself, because you're pizza. You're not a hamburger. (4: 940-946, VR4)

Anderson uses the metaphor of food to make meaning of his perception of polyamory. By claiming that one partner has the attributes of pizza, while the other partner has the attributes of hamburgers, he can explain to the listener that relationships can fulfill hunger, but each person brings different qualities to the table. Additionally, pizza and hamburgers cannot compare to each other because they have no basis of similarity for comparison. At once, Anderson is working to explain the premise that each partner has different qualities, and that the difference should not be compared.

Anderson's use of metaphor differs from Jared's. Jared uses the metaphor of diamond facets to explain his perception of fulfillment in polyamorous relationships:

> Jared: I grew from that into a place where I now – if I have a facet – I look at every person like a diamond, and the diamond has multiple facets. If you put two

107

diamonds next to each other, the diamonds cannot line up covering all the facets

at the same time. No two diamonds can ever fully engulf or match with another

diamond. There will always be some facet that is not met. To me, that's what

poly is now. I meet my other facets with my other people, and it's more fulfilling

to me than just plain friendships. Friendships are wonderful and great. With

poly, I can be best friends with people that I am in love with and people I can

share the physical with. That, to me, is a different level of friendship and union.

(1: 260-275)

The metaphor of the diamond is transformative for a number of reasons. First, it works to

highlight the idea that one person cannot meet all of the needs of another person, but it

emphasizes that the needs do not need to be met. Instead of claiming that all individuals

are entitled to meet all of their needs, this metaphor asserts that all needs do not, in fact,

need to be met. Second, the diamonds are metaphors for both romantic relationships as

well as friendships, as all relationships have the potential to fulfill different facets.

Finally, relationships no longer have distinct lines that dictate their definitions. The

discourse of poly-production is visible but it is enhanced by the metaphor of the diamond.

Finally, Mearle and Marge voice a metaphoric transformation:

Mearle: There's a lot of devices that we employ. Some of them are philosophical.

Some of them are almost therapeutic, but there's all these – actually, a lot of them

are really cute, but there are – they really factor deeply into our value sets, our

value systems, in a shared way of – yeah, shared values, I guess. Certainly,

they're deep expressions of our poly identities. One of them, for example, is,

"There will be more cookies."

108

Marge: Oh, yes!

Mearle: Yeah. It's this thing about when there's a very young child, a two-year-old, a one-year-old, and they've only had a couple of cookies in their life. If they're denied a cookie or they see a cookie in a case and the parents say, "No," for all they know, that might be the last cookie they ever see, and so it's imperative that they get it. As you get older, you know that life is filled with cookies. In fact, at a certain point, you could just have a cookie every day if you wanted to. Marge and I, we play that game where we don't live in a state of lack. We live in a perpetual state of abundance because we know that we can always create more cookies. There will be more cookies.

Marge: Yeah. The cookie changes as you get older. You know what I mean?

Mearle: Yeah. (10: 470-497)

Through the use of a story, Mearle explains, "There will be more cookies" is a metaphor for a perception of abundance. Instead of a starvation mentality that can be seen through the eyes of a child who might never have another cookie, growth and maturation allow the child to see that life is actually filled with cookies. The cookie metaphor is valuable as a parable that teaches the listener about perception and abundance. Mearle and Marge both use this discursive transformation as a tool to change their understanding if they perceive a lack.

This story is especially important in polyamorous relationships because, in the discourse of mono-normativity, we come to believe that there is a limited amount of love (Webb, 2014). Instead of believing that there is a limited amount of love, the metaphor

109

of the cookie transforms the starvation economy into one of cookie abundance. If there is

an unlimited amount of love, then there is enough love for everyone.

The discursive and transformative interplay of the discourses of mono-

normativity, mono-deconstruction, and poly-production define polyamorous identity, but

they also work to make new meanings through transformation. It is in these

transformative processes where we can distinguish power variables of discourse, where

utterances are manifestations of dominance. In the next section, I will discuss the

ramifications of this study, and develop thoughts on the critical nature of the discourses

outlined in the last two chapters.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

The data set provided insight into how those who identify as polyamorous construct their personal and relational identities. Using relational dialectics theory 2.0 and its methodological companion, contrapuntal analysis, results demonstrate an ongoing struggle between the centripetal discourse of mono-normativity and the centrifugal discourses of deconstruction and production.

In this final chapter, I begin by overviewing the results. I then discuss the findings as they make meaning of larger power structures discussed in the literature review including mono-normativity, monogamism, and monocentricism. Additionally, the findings will be related to marriage, commitment, and romantic love, as these relational constructs are linked to monogamy and ultimately to polyamory. I then examine the ways in which this study is representative of the emerging field of Critical Interpersonal and Family Communication. Specifically, I return to queer theory and discuss the theoretical implications of this work on relational dialectics theory 2.0. Finally, I explore future directions of this study and the opportunities for further research of polyamory and polyamorous identities.

Overview of Results

The results satisfied the purpose of the study, effectively interrogating making meanings of polyamorous personal and relational identities. Meanings of personal and relational identity were constructed through the interplay of an existing discourse, mono-normativity, and the identification of two new discourses: the discourse of mono-deconstruction and the discourse of poly-production. The centripetal-centrifugal struggle was outlined in a linear process, where participants destabilized the prevailing discourse of mono-normativity with the discourse of mono-deconstruction and then worked to create new meanings with the discourse of poly-production. Although this process was summarized as a linear progression, it was not linear. Instead, the process was established and re-established cyclically as participants spoke with their partners, using utterances voiced both the proximal and distal already-spoken links of the utterance chain to make meaning of the present.

First, the discourse of mono-normativity (Webb, 2015) is the privileging of monogamy through the normalization of the dyadic couple, and the societal scripts that are taken-for-granted as the preferred ways of conducting romantic relationships in the United States (Piper & Bauer, 2005). Additionally, the discourse of mono-normativity allows for the belief that all relationships are monogamous, and other relationship types are seen as less loving or less committed. The discourse of mono-normativity has four tenets: (1) monogamy equals commitment (defined as sexual and emotional exclusivity), (2) "one true love" will meet all needs and desires, (3) monogamous relationships are moral, and (4) jealousy is normal in monogamous relationships (Webb).

Troubling the discourse of mono-normativity is the discourse of mono-deconstruction. The discourse of mono-deconstruction functions to negate the discourse of mono-normativity by mirroring the tenets. The tenets of the discourse of mono-deconstruction are as follows: (1) monogamy is not the only option; (2) love should not come with expectations; (3) marriage is just one type of relational contract; and (4) commitment is relationship-specific. Each tenet challenges the discourse of mono-normativity, decentering monogamy and creating space for another discourse to take center stage. The discourse of mono-deconstruction accomplished this decentering primarily through negating, or calling forth the discourse of mono-normativity only to discredit it. With this discourse, there was a minimal amount of countering and entertaining. Negating works to invalidate a specific discourse, whereas both countering and entertaining leave open the opportunity to validate some or all of a specific discourse in relation to a juxtaposed discourse. Here, where the discourse of mono-deconstruction was not used to counter or entertain, it could be argued that the participants of this study did not want to provide the discourse of mono-normativity with any credence. An additional interpretation of this finding is that the discourse of mono-deconstruction was created by those who identify as polyamorous in order to challenge the discourse of mono-normativity; therefore, the characteristics of this discourse make it inherently negating.

As exemplified in the results section, Trisha uses the discourse of mono-deconstruction to negate the discourse of mono-normativity in the following sentiment:

I mean the ideas of monogamy are so deeply ingrained in us from everything in our lives. It's hard to unwind and say oh well, that's actually not necessarily true.

113

That's what people and religion and society tells me should be the case but it's not. It's not necessarily it. If I just come from the standpoint of throwing everything out the window and figuring out what is really best for me or what I really want, it might look a lot different. (5: 332-338)

Trisha describes monogamy as a hegemonic cultural discourse that is "ingrained." She does not offer any space for this discourse to be validated because she needed to do the work of critiquing monogamy. Trisha demonstrates the significance of monogamy as a societal construct that governs romantic relationships and the import of doing the work to deconstruct that construct.

The discourse of poly-production voices the development process of polyamorous personal and relational identities. It seems to be the result of first noting the discourse of mono-normativity and then challenging that discourse with the discourse of mono-deconstruction. Once deconstruction has occurred, the discourse of poly-production takes place. This production is not a one-time event, but rather an ongoing process that allows the polyamorous identity to be dialogic. Four tenets were found in the discourse of poly-production: (1) developing the authentic self; (2) encouraging a philosophy of openness; (3) ongoing communication, and (4) redefining relationship boundaries. Primarily this discourse functioned as a transformative indicator within polyamorous identity, specifically with regard to a hybrid of the discourse of mono-normativity and a metaphoric transformation with both the discourses of mono-normativity and mono-deconstruction.

While the proximal site on the utterance chain was the focus in order to understand the ways in which personal and relational polyamorous identities were

114

created, this research also served to make sense of how the distal already-spoken discourse (the discourse of mono-normativity) impacts the ways in which the proximal already-spoken and not-yet-spoken are voiced. I will discuss the implications of proximal already-spoken site on the utterance chain in the next section, as well as in the theoretical portion of the discussion.

Meanings of Polyamorous Identity

The interplay and transformation present in the data establish a number of important findings in how polyamorous personal and relational identities are created and maintained. In addition, the findings transcend polyamorous relational structures and inform larger culture. First, I address the way in which the findings are meaningful, beginning with the discourses themselves, and then I focus on the interplay and transformation. Then, I examine the ways in which the findings make meaning of existing understandings of romantic relationships, including the implications for mono-normativity (as it is described in the literature review), monogamism, and monocentricism. Finally, I refer back to the sociocultural conflation of monogamy with marriage, commitment, and romantic love, discussing each with the lens of polyamorous identity.

Discourse of Mono-Normativity

In finding the discourse of mono-normativity (Webb, 2015) in the results of this study, two primary points of interest need to be elucidated. First, it was not surprising to find the discourse of mono-normativity in the results. As the predominant discourse of romantic relationships in the United States, polyamorous individuals root their understanding of polyamory in what monogamy is not. Discursively, polyamorous

115

individuals make sense of their identity by using monogamy as the base understanding of

relationships, and then they work to contrast their relational understandings to

monogamy. In calling forth the discourse of mono-normativity and naming monogamous

practices that actively inform romantic relationships, the discourse of mono-normativity

is illuminated. This illumination functions as a tool because monogamy is then

destabilized via the discourse of mono-deconstruction. The process of acknowledging

the presence and influence of monogamy, and then working to discredit it for the purpose

of developing polyamorous identity, was very much apparent in the data set.

The second significant point regarding the finding of mono-normativity in the

results is related to the acknowledgement and deconstruction of monogamy as well.

Interestingly, the participants did not discredit monogamy as a relational option; instead,

they challenged the discourse of mono-normativity for themselves. While this is a small

lexical move, it is important because it means that polyamorous identity is inclusive of

monogamous relationships. The discourse of mono-normativity is not inclusive. Due to

the hegemonic significance of monogamy, the sexually and emotionally exclusive pair

bond is understood as the only way to engage in romantic relationships. Polyamory is not

seen as a legitimate choice for romantic relationships. In polyamorous personal and

relational identity, however, participants stressed "choice." In stressing "choice," the

discourse of mono-normativity is validated for those who understand other relationship

types and actively make the decision to be monogamous, instead of simply following

sociocultural expectations for romantic relationships.

Discourse of Mono-Deconstruction

Through the discourse of mono-deconstruction, polyamorous personal and relational identity functions to also challenge monogamism (Anderson, 2012) and monocentricism (Sheff, 2011). Monogamism is the phenomenon where monogamy maintains such a privileged position in United States culture that it is safe from questioning or critique of any kind. In the results of this study, monogamism does not exist. The polyamorous participants constructed their identity by questioning and critiquing monogamy. The questions served as a starting place from which participants created a different relational script; a script that both served to decenter mono-normativity on a societal level, as well as on a relational, proximal level. Similarly, polyamorous personal and relational identity works also to resist monocentricism, which is the presumption that all romantic relationships consist of dyadic couples (Sheff). The participants who completed the self-recorded conversation with three total partners provided an exceptional demonstration of rendering polyamory visible simply by having all three individuals participate. By shifting away from the monocentric understanding of relationships, participants contribute to a research agenda that does not presuppose monogamy and monogamous expectations. Instead, polyamorous identity is constructed to challenge the assumption that to be in a relationship, the relationship must be a couple.

In discussing the overarching interplay of the discourse of mono-normativity and the discourse of mono-deconstruction, it is important to also explain the specific topics by which the discourse of mono-normativity is decentered and how the discourse of poly-production is at play. As previously noted, the discourse of mono-deconstruction works to destabilize the discourse of mono-normativity, particularly in marriage, commitment,

117

and romantic love. Marriage, commitment, and romantic love are relational constructs typically conflated with monogamy, meaning that monogamy is assumed as a precursor to the connotation of these three concepts. The discourse of mono-deconstruction worked to remove this conflation, and the discourse of poly-production worked to generate ideas of what marriage, commitment, and romantic love look like.

For example, the participants in this study voiced the notion that marriage is just another relational contract that does not have to be monogamous. Instead, multiple partners can marry, although this type of marital relationship will not be governmentally recognized. Marriage is seen as a ceremony that is not required in relationships to justify the significance. As a result, the findings of this study also deconstruct commitment. Polyamorous commitment is an all-encompassing obligation in all types of relationships, not just romantic relationships, and is paralleled by romantic love, which also extends love beyond romance. Commitment and love become a part of a deconstruction of the boundaries of relationships. For instance, committed friendships were often described as breaching an intimacy barrier expected of friendships in the discourse of mono-normativity. Participants described these extended friendships with physical and emotional intimacy, but still took the time to note that the relationship is, in fact, a friendship. Here, the discourse of poly-production occurs when there are no accurate words for the type of relationship that is occurring. The intimacy-enhanced friendship and extended community relationships voiced in the findings of this research denote a limited vocabulary for what is occurring in relationships. As communication of the discourse of poly-production continues, it is possible that new terms for these types of extended friendships will be created.

Discourse of Poly-Production

The discourse of poly-production voices the opportunity for new meanings to be made of marriage, commitment, and romantic love. This phenomenon of construction is paralleled in Watter's (2003) work, *Urban Tribes*. In his book, Watters posits that the he and his friends are a part of an urban tribe, or an intricately connected community of people who are changing the landscapes of major cities and career opportunities by living and working together in non-traditional combinations, creating new rituals, and providing support similar to that of an extended family. The connection between the development of polyamorous personal and relational identity and urban tribes is important because polyamory is not a prerequisite for the changing understanding of relationships. While polyamory seems to be one place where this is occurring, it is also likely that this is also a generational circumstance guided by, as Watters contends, the decision to delay marriage. Excitingly, both polyamory and the delay of marriage are elements of the changing landscape of romantic relationships. The result of the changing perception of relationships, as boundaries are breached and redefined, have the potential to influence not only marriage, commitment, and romantic love, but also career trajectories, perceptions of freedom, and even architecture as homes built to accommodate polyamorous families and urban tribes develop.

As noted in the ideas presented in this meaning making section, the implications of the discourses presented in the results extend beyond the scope of this project. In the next section, I will work through the ways in which the findings of polyamorous personal and relational identities influence relational dialectics theory 2.0 and queer theory, forging a connection between the two theories.

119

Theoretical Implications: Queering RDT 2.0

Relational dialectics theory 2.0 was strategically chosen to frame this study, and its methodological counterpart, contrapuntal analysis, was helpful in ascertaining the nuances of meaning that are critical to the theory's moorings. In this section, I will first examine the ways in which RDT 2.0 is crucial to this research. I will then make meaning of the intersection of RDT and queer theory with regard to this study and its findings.

Relational dialectics theory

Relational dialectics theory effectively highlighted key findings in the data in this study; herein, I will provide an overview of three significant points of discussion. First, both diachronic and synchronic interplay were demonstrated in the ongoing competition of discursively constructing the meaning of polyamorous personal and relational identity. The example of diachronic separation in the form of spiraling inversion showed that individuals made sense of their polyamorous identity over time by alternating back and forth between the discourses of mono-normativity and poly-production. The pervasiveness of synchronic interplay provided evidence that the sense making process was often one of contention, where they had to defend their decisions to be polyamorous by calling forth the discourse of mono-normativity in order to negate it. Utterances were frequently used to build upon discursive understandings of monogamy and polyamory to make meaning in the present.

Hybridity. Relational dialectics theory revealed instances of transformation in the talk of polyamorous individuals. Specifically, instances of hybridity surfaced, as well as transformation through the use of metaphor. The example of hybridity that occurred in the data set merged the discourse of mono-normativity and the discourse of poly-

production. The new meaning made with the hybridity of these discourses altered the understanding of a symbol of commitment. By claiming that the BDSM collar was just as significant as the marriage ring, both discourses can be seen, but a new understanding is achieved with regard to romantic relationships. Polyamorous commitments can take existing qualities from the mono-normative scripts and alter them in order to satisfy the needs of multiple relationships. In this example, Jared could have a wedding ring for one partner and a collar for another partner and understand the significance of commitment to each as equal.

Metaphoric interplay. The findings of this research included a new form of transformation: metaphoric interplay. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) operationalize metaphors as structures we use in language. Specifically, the authors argue that metaphors are used, often unconsciously, to impact the way we think, what we experience, and what we do. Metaphors provide discursive tools that constructs worldviews (Owen, 1985), particularly worldviews that are not easily communicated through language. Simple food metaphors often worked to describe difficult polyamorous concepts. For example, Anderson used the metaphor of people as pizza and hamburgers:

> Food helps out when somebody else is thinking about the inside. People are like, how do you deal with polyamory? It sounds like it's so difficult. You're just like, well, you're pizza and he's hamburgers. Just because I'm eating hamburgers doesn't mean I'm never going to want pizza. If there's enough left tomorrow morning, I'm probably going to want some pizza. You can't compare yourself, because you're pizza. You're not a hamburger. (4: 940-946, VR4)

Anderson noted that he has been asked how he deals with polyamory. In employing a food metaphor, the complexity of appreciating each person for their own unique characteristics and contributions to a relationship is made clear, even if it is slightly ridiculous. Rhetorically, the oversimplification of describing people as food and craving different foods at different times to make meaning of the significance of polyamorous relationships lightens metaphoric transformation. The lightness works not only to establish an understanding of "how to deal with polyamory," but also to make a concrete connection to something (food) that most people can understand and even have feelings of empathy toward. Because the discourse of mono-normativity is so pervasive, language accommodates monogamous relationships, meaning that language is developed and used with monogamy in mind as the standard by which people engage in romantic relationships. Metaphors are a means by which to explain ideas that cannot be described by linguistic limitations. Each time a metaphor is evoked, a new meaning is made to make sense of polyamorous relational structures.

Sites on the utterance chain. Finally, there is import in understanding the nature of the proximal site on the utterance chain. As a reminder, the proximal site is where the relationship between the speaker and the listener is foregrounded. The not-yet-spoken site is where the speaker or listener anticipates a response to an utterance, whereas the already-spoken is how the history of communication impacts the current understanding of the relationship (Baxter, 2011). Here, the focus was on the proximal already-spoken site on the utterance chain because "parties continue to construct the meaning of their relationship and through their adaptations in meaning, they construct new relationship identities" (Baxter, p. 92). The focus was achieved through the methodological choice to

have polyamorous relational partners or groups self-record a guided conversation. By using this technique to gather data, the results departed from the distal site of traditional interviews, which have historically characterized RDT research. The self-recorded interviews allowed for an understanding of relational conversation, and the questions were focused on the already-spoken.

Although the proximal already-spoken was the focus, all sites on the utterance chain – including the distal already-spoken and the distal not-yet-spoken – were still apparent (Baxter, 2011). In fact, the focus on the proximal already-spoken rendered the discourse of mono-normativity visible, which is a distal site. In short, the relational conversations captured in this data set illuminated how polyamorous personal and relational identities were created through an understanding of both the impact of the sociocultural, distal influences, as well as the interpersonal, proximal effects. Instead of only making sense of the distal site, this study elucidated how the distal comes into play in relational talk. Often, this was viewed in examples of interplay where the distal discourse of mono-normativity would inform how the individuals in a relationship deconstructed meanings of monogamy and built new understandings of polyamory.

In addition to the interplay, transformation, and proximal/distal understandings that have come as a result of this study, it is also important to note RDT 2.0's focus on power. This critical turn in interpersonal theory is developed in the next section, where relational dialectics theory meets queer theory.

RDT 2.0 and Queer Theory In This Study

Relational dialectics theory 2.0 and contrapuntal analysis were developed by Baxter (2011) communicatively to make meaning of power in both cultural and relational

discourses. In this work, I posit that RDT 2.0 can be supplemented by queer theory. In RDT 2.0, power is examined through discursive investigation. Power is seen as the centripetal-centrifugal struggle in discourse, where centripetal discourses retain power, and marginalized, centrifugal discourses work to destabilize that power (Baxter). Similarly, queer theory is a lens by which privileged discourses are deconstructed, as well as a framework within which to study how certain discourses come into power and why (Giffney, 2004). As a theory with foundations in feminist studies and queer studies, queer theory's focus has been the deconstruction of societal representations of gender and sexuality (Jagose, 1996). Queer theory is a "powerful theoretical and political tool for examining the production and constitution of modes of differences…in our communicative and rhetorical practices, mediated representations, and cultural discourses" (Yep, 2013, p. 119). Due to the focus on power, and also a consideration of the significance of discourse in structures of power, RDT 2.0 and queer theory are advantageous when paired. Additionally, Queer theory echoes RDT 2.0's commitment to a dialogic self, meaning that the self is not seen as stagnant or individualized; instead, the self is always becoming in relationship to others (Giffney).

While the contribution of queer theory is not always applicable to studies that use RDT 2.0, there are a number of ways in which queer theory can advance RDT 2.0. First, RDT 2.0's commitment to the power in discourse can allow researchers to step away from understanding the potential violence of power. In essence, they can identify discourses and their interplay, but because discourse is the focus, there is a disassociation between the actual people stating the utterances and the meanings of the utterances. Discussing the centripetal-centrifugal struggle does not often include a critical analysis of

the ways in which the centripetal discourses are *violent* to communities that do not align with the discourses of power. In other words, a queer approach to RDT 2.0 heeds the idea that power resides in discourse, but also acknowledges that power has real life implications for the individuals who voice those discourses.

One example from this study works towards making meaning of queering RDT 2.0: the discourse of mono-normativity is centered, and it is violent. It is violent to those who do not align themselves with it – such as the polyamorous population that is the focus of this study – but it is also violent to those who do not deviate from it. First, it is violent to those who do not follow monogamous scripts because it invalidates relationships, it is a cause for stigma and judgment, and it does not allow for legal sanctification of relationships that are not monogamous. It is less clear why the discourse of mono-normativity is destructive to those who do not work to destabilize it. One way in which it is destructive is that the discourse of mono-normativity normalizes cheating (Anderson, 2012). When monogamy is expected and there are no other relational options, many people choose to cheat in order to meet their needs and still maintain the guise of monogamy (Anderson). It is well documented that cheating is harmful, as it impacts the wellbeing of relationships, and it can also impact bystanders such as children (Duncombe, Harrison, Allen, Marsden, 2004). Instead of challenging the discourse of mono-normativity, hegemonic monogamy situates cheaters as emotionally violent. By de-centering monogamy and turning a critical eye toward the expectations for monogamous behavior, we can examine the ways in which monogamy creates a culture of individuals who cheat and take an active approach to defining relationship boundaries that have the potential to set relationships up for success.

125

RDT 2.0 and Queer Potentialities

Baxter (2011) posits that the dialogic approach to power is different from the pervading mainstream, interpersonal communication approach because "the mainstream approach locates power as a characteristic of individuals, not discourses" (p. 14). In other words, individuals do not have power; discourses have power and those discourses animate communication. Queer theory, however, emphasizes the fact that, "the body is a site of knowledge" (Calafell & Moreman, 2010, p. 414). As such, the body can be understood as a text that is demonstrative of power, and power can be identified through the following:

> Textual signifiers of the body (i.e., meanings associated with gender, sexuality, race, age, clothing), nonverbal communication (i.e., meanings associated with intentional and unintentional bodily actions and expressions), verbal communication (i.e., meanings associated with spoken words), primary context (i.e., meanings associated with an immediate environment and geographic location), historical context (i.e., meanings associated with regional, national, and cultural history), and metaphysical communication (i.e., meanings associated with words or artifacts that may not exist between cultures; ideological and political meanings). (Yep, 2013, p. 120)

In queer theory, where the body is considered a text, RDT 2.0 can adapt to include the body as a text to research. In *Voicing Relationships: A Dialogic Perspective*, Baxter (2011) outlines the ways in which scholars should go about choosing texts, taking into consideration the dialogically expansive and contractive nature of specific texts relating to relational goals. Here, queer theory would make a contribution where the body can be considered one such texts that is implicated in the utterance chain. Research that pairs RDT 2.0 and queer theory could more easily look at embodied experiences of race or gender, for example, and use contrapuntal analysis to make meaning of discourses and their interplay.

126

Critical Interpersonal and Family Communication

As research that is situated within the emergent field of Critical Interpersonal and Family Communication (CIFC), this study exemplifies four key shifts outlined by Suter (in press) that are indicative of the critical re-orientation of interpersonal scholarship. The key shifts are as follows: (1) attention to power; (2) collapse of the public-private binary; (3) resistance, critique, and transformation of the status quo; and (4) author reflexivity. Historically, interpersonal and family scholars dedicated to interpretive work have not attended to power in research. The critical re-orientation of CIFC does not approach the analysis of power as an option; instead, "attention to power is no longer optional" (Suter, in press, p. 6). In examining polyamorous personal and relational identity, monogamy is understood as a hegemonic construct that is normalized and thus is powerful. It is especially powerful in contrast to relationship styles that are not monogamous, as nonmonogamies are virtually invisible in U.S. culture. As such, in the study of polyamory, attendance to power is required to understand the significance of the development of polyamorous personal and relational identities.

Per the collapse of the public-private binary, "relational and family systems and larger social institutions/discourses have a bidirectional relationship, mutually structuring and restructuring one another" (Suter, in press, p. 10). Per Suter's operationalization of the collapse of the public-private binary, this research is indicative of the second key shift because the discourse of mono-deconstruction works to critique the discourse of mono-normativity. The discourse of mono-deconstruction, then, deconstructs the relational and family institution that presupposes monogamy as the cultural ideal for romantic relationships. Said another way, the discourse of mono-deconstruction offers a tool with

which individuals can criticize the institution of monogamy, and which also impacts the cultural integrity of the discourse of mono-normativity at large. Polyamorous personal and relational identities are both private, as they are representative of personal romantic relationships, and public, in that they engage the sociocultural discourse of mono-normativity.

Next, CIFC is committed to encouraging the resistance, critique, and transformation of the status quo. As I noted in the section on my queer poly-tics, I am not pushing a polyamorous agenda with this research. Instead, I am encouraging education on different relationship types. When I teach this subject, I am asked, "What made you decide to be polyamorous?" My reply is, "What made you decide to be monogamous?" My students look at me a bit stunned, and often answer by stating that it was the only option they knew. My agenda as a scholar is to destigmatize nonmonogamous identities in order to make them a viable option for individuals. This work is indicative of my commitment as a scholar to develop a research agenda that humanizes polyamorous practices and makes them accessible.

Finally, CIFC centers author self-reflexivity (Suter, in press). In the review of the literature I explained my positionality, not as a disclaimer for my work, but as a way of being transparent to the reader and holding myself accountable for my academic commitments. I am a polyamorous woman. I do face stigmatization for my identity as polyamorous. I may never be able legally to recognize my partners through marriage; I face job discrimination and can be fired for my relationships; I have lost friends who think that my stance is immoral and selfish. And yet I persist.

In addition to Suter's (2016) four key components of CIFC research, Moore (2016b) calls for researchers to put different theories in conversation with each other in order to approach interpersonal research more critically. As I employed relational dialectics theory 2.0 and queer theory, I hoped to "enrich the scholarly conversation by offering new ways of theorizing and empirically analyzing power beyond individual-level social influence" (Moore, in 2016a, p. 5).

This research on polyamorous personal and relational identities works towards developing the Critical Interpersonal and Family Communication agenda. Now, I turn toward future research opportunities.

Future Directions

While this study was a starting point for the communicative study of polyamorous identity through the lens of relational dialectics theory, it also worked to integrate queer theory into the discussion of how and why polyamory is important, and finally to challenge the intersection of interpersonal and critical communication. In this section, I will describe the limitations and potential future directions of this research before I move on to practical applications.

Limitations

First, this research was not without limitations. The limitations are practical and theoretical. Practically, the limitations of this study include the methods and my personal identification as poly. The methodological practice of self-recorded conversations was limiting because not all people are willing to self-record, nor do all people have access to recording devices and Dropbox (the tool used to upload the recordings). By requiring that participants have access to these tools, I realize that individuals could have self-

selected out of this research. One option to make this type of study more accessible is for the researcher to meet the participants, provide them with the resources, and then leave the participants to self-record.

My identification as a polyamorous woman could also have contributed to limiting this research. First, although I argued that being forthcoming as polyamorous would encourage participation from other polyamorous individuals, it also had the potential to be unfavorable. Many scholars, including Sheff, Willey, and Barker, studying polyamory are White females. As such, my work could be perceived as perpetuating previous research with a White female perspective, ultimately being non-inclusive of intersecting identities, particularly racial identities. People of color were not represented in this study, and cis-gender individuals made up the population, which was consistent with previous research (Sheff, 2008). In order to access more people of color who identify as polyamorous, I suggest approaching social media groups formed as a part of this nexus of identities. Recently, I was informed that there is a Facebook group for polyamorous people of color, in addition to a group called "Transgender and Poly." There are also a number of Tumblr blogs dedicated to these intersections of identity (Tumblr is a social media website that is an amalgamation of personal and organizational blogs). Previous research on the polyamorous population noted that polyamorous individuals tend to be highly educated and wealthy (Sheff); this study represented a variance in education levels (from high school to graduate school), as well as a deviance from high socioeconomic status.

In addition, as an individual who identifies as polyamorous, I have noted that I am invested in advancing visibility of polyamorous identities through my research. As a

result of my research agenda, my results are limited by my perspective that polyamory is, in fact, a valuable way to approach romantic relationships. In acknowledging that my perspective has the potential to be a limitation, I am specifically interested in returning to the idea that my intersecting identities can be limiting. As a White woman of middle class status who has had access to higher education and identifies as pansexual and polyamorous, my worldview is one that centers polyamory and polyamorous practices. Although I will address this a bit more in the conclusion, where I revisit my self-reflexivity, it is important here to note that my worldview does not rest in monogamy. I have spent the last decade engaging in the discourse of mono-deconstruction. I have written both personally and professionally about the ways in which monogamy is limiting. Therefore, this work is an extension of my identities and worldview. Although potentially a limitation, I also believe that my limitation, my perspective, is valuable.

Theoretically, this study uses relational dialectics theory 2.0 as the foundation of analysis. As such, I focused on the proximal already-spoken site on the utterance chain, while also acknowledging that the other sites on the utterance chain will be present in the data. In focusing on the proximal, I examined the communicative relationships of polyamorous individuals. The proximal is deeply relational, and the communication habits of relational partners are nuanced based on their specific relationship. In analyzing the transcripts of my participants, I could have missed these nuances. Said another way, as a researcher I am not privy to the distinct ways in which the history of the relationships has informed current utterances. There are two ways in which future research could address this proximal limitation. First, autoethnography, where a researcher examines his/her/their own communicative relationships would effectively speak to communicative

nuances. Second, a researcher could observe relational conversations in order to pick up on nonverbal cues that point to advanced, additional meaning.

The participants in this study had a wide range of relationship length: the amount of time in relationship with each partner varied from 1 month to 15 years ($M = 3.5$ years; $SD = 3.79$). Longer relationships have more proximal history, while shorter relationships have less. Awareness of the impact of relationship length on proximal utterances has the potential to impact results. For example, in this study, those who have been in polyamorous relationships for longer periods of time would likely have faced more challenges to their relationship, both internal and external. Internal relational issues of longevity include experiencing many different partners over the years, individual growth and change personally and professionally, and many other challenges that face long-term relationships. Externally, those who have been together for longer periods of time have the potential to experience challenges from family and society and have more time to practice communicatively managing challenges. Longitudinal research would be a valuable way in which to address both internal and external polyamorous relational challenges, where conversations are collected over a period of time for analysis.

Future Research

The future research potential of studying polyamorous identity is vast and exciting. Here, I outline a number of ways to extend the research of this study. In the limitations section above, I noted that longitudinal research is one way in which to access a deep understanding of proximal relational identity. Analyzing relational communication over time can illuminate both relational dynamics, as well as societal dynamics. A focus on the proximal in longitudinal research could show the ways in

which polyamorous individuals grow over time. For example, in initial stages of polyamorous relationships, each individual must be clear about the wants, needs, and expectations for the relationship. Over time, as these wants, needs, and expectations change, the polyamorous relational dynamic could show how growth and uncertainty are discussed and managed. Approaching longitudinal research from a distal lens would provide an interesting view of how individuals alter their communication as their polyamorous identity continues over time, but it could also show the potential for polyamorous acceptance. As polyamory gains more visibility, the challenges might not lie in deconstructing monogamy through the mono-deconstructing discourse. Rather, new discourses of polyamory have the potential to flourish if the discourse of poly-production is centered, and polyamorous identity is rendered visible through societal acknowledgement.

Second, the study of polyamory and polyamorous identity has the potential to be expanded by the Bakhtinian (1984) concept of the carnivalesque. The carnivalesque is an experience where the normal social order is reversed or queered. It can be witnessed at specific events, but it can also happen as normal phenomenon; for example, the carnivalesque can be seen in parentification, where a child takes on the role of the parent. This could occur because the parent is somehow unable to assume the role, or as a result of a game. Bakhtin notes that the spaces of the carnivalesque are rich sites for dialogic exploration because they suspend normalized ways of being and create new and subversive understandings. Baxter (2011) specifies that the carnivalesque has been given little attention in the field of interpersonal communication. Research on the carnivalesque would be informative to Critical Interpersonal and Family scholarship

because it exemplifies the third key shift toward the critical where there is resistance, critique, and transformation of the status quo. The carnivalesque is a space where transformation has the potential to be seen. Research on polyamory is especially fitting for a carnivalesque approach because the normal societal structure of monogamy is upended consistently where relationships do not model sexual or emotional exclusivity. Specifically, polyamorous relationships that define themselves as a triad provide a starting place. Additionally, spaces where group sex or intimacy comes into play would be rife with carnivalesque meaning. Finally, pop culture that has started to recognize polyamorous relationships has the potential to demonstrate the significance of the carnivalesque. Ultimately, Bakhtin believed that examinations of the carnivalesque in personal relationships would be one way to make meaning of, and drive, social change (Baxter).

Centering a critical approach would be another way to engage power in social change. Specifically, as noted in the literature review, people of color do not tend to participate in research on polyamorous relationships. Interestingly, in recruiting for this study, I posted to a *People of Color in Polyamory* social media group. The fact that this group exists demonstrates that there is, in fact, a population of people of color who practice polyamory, but they are unwilling to participate in formal research. Taking into consideration the oppression and oversexualized stereotype of people of color, it is not surprising that they would not want to be associated with another stigmatized identity (Cohen, 2005). As such, instead of imagining polyamorous research with a demographic of people of color, White scholars could focus on the ways in which discourses of polyamory are not inclusive, reaffirm Whiteness, and are oppressive to people of color.

Here, I call for self-reflexive research that does not ask people of color to contribute to

the academic understanding of polyamory, but to turn a critical eye towards research

agendas that are inherently power-laden.

Finally, taking heed of Cohen's (2005) observation, research on polyamory needs

to be ongoing and evolving:

> The radical potential of those of us on the outside of heteronormativity rests in our
> understandings that we need not base our politics in the dissolution of all
> categories and communities, but we need instead to work toward the
> destabilization and remaking of our identities. (p. 461)

Advancing the understanding of the dialogic view of the self, scholars of polyamory need

to be aware of the changing expectations of monogamy, as voiced in the discourses of

mono-normativity and mono-realism (Webb, 2014), which show a shift in the cultural

understanding of monogamy. As powerful discourses evolve, centrifugal discourses need

to be understood as adaptive to the influences of power.

Scholarly and theoretical musings for future research are vast, and the potential

for this work is very exciting. It is now important to turn toward the practical applications

of this research before concluding the piece.

Practical Applications

While the findings and the theoretical implications of this work are exciting, here

I note the practical applications of the research. First the discourse of mono-

deconstruction and its interplay with the discourse of mono-normativity demonstrate a

need for more understanding about polyamorous relationships. Although polyamory is on

the rise, many people do not perceive that monogamy is actually a choice. Instead,

monogamy is seen as the only option for viable, committed romantic relationships

(Anderson, 2012). As many participants noted, they had to "discover" polyamory and then work to deconstruct the monogamous expectations that were culturally imposed on them. Media is introducing more individuals to polyamory through shows like *Polyamory: Married and Dating*. With visibility will come curiosity, and strong academic scholarship will allow for proper education on the various options for relational constructs.

A more robust education with regard to sexual education and consensual non-monogamies would prove not only to develop a more complex and enduring understanding of polyamory, but would also encourage those who choose to be monogamous to heed their decision. In effect, an education based on options has the potential to influence both polyamorous and monogamous romantic relationship structures. It has the potential to benefit polyamory because it can offer meaningful insight into relational questions and challenges. For example, jealousy can be a concern in polyamorous relationships, but there are many resources available for restructuring how jealousy is handled in relationships (Anapol, 2010). Benefits for monogamy include the understanding that sexual and emotional exclusivity is, in fact, a choice. Here, I assert my hopes: if individuals understand they have a choice, there is potential for incidences of monogamous relationship-ending infidelity to decline.

Next, the transformational finding of the use of metaphor is important to understand ideas that are limited by language. As United States culture is inundated with the expectation of monogamy, the language has developed to include only understandings of monogamy. As polyamorous identities are embraced and this relational structure grows, it will be more and more important to develop language that is representative of

136

the feelings and ideas of polyamory. Metaphors are one way in which this is currently accomplished, especially when explaining polyamorous philosophy to someone who is unfamiliar with the ideas. Metaphors are used to bolster understandings of difficult concepts and make ideas accessible. The metaphors used in this data set can contribute to the development of polyamorous meanings and language.

Finally, the discourse of poly-production presents as a discourse of inclusion. It does not posit that polyamory is better than monogamy. On the contrary, it dictates that self-awareness is the key to understanding needs and desires, and that meeting those needs and desires look different for everyone. Ultimately, relationship structures should not be positioned as better than or "natural," but rather as an inclusive choice to be considered by everyone.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this study was to understand how polyamorous personal

and relational identity is created and maintained in a world that expects monogamy in

romantic relationships. In order to achieve this goal, I conducted a review of the existing

literature on monogamy and polyamory, in addition to outlining the theoretical

framework and developing research questions based on this information. I systematically

approached my methodology and analysis, eliciting participants to self-record

conversations. I outlined my results from my contrapuntal analysis, framing two new

discourses as well as their interplay. Finally, I discussed the implications of this research,

including the limitations and future directions. In this conclusion, I will reinforce the

significance of this research now that it has been fully addressed. I revisit my rationale,

discuss the implications of my own self-reflexivity, and invite contributions to the future

of researching relationships that diverge from monogamy.

The Significance of Studying Polyamory

Conducting academic research is a daunting task, but even more daunting is

rationalizing why the research is important and what contributions it will make to the

world at large. As a researcher, I am committed to extending my work to the general

public in order to elicit critical thinking and self-reflexivity in romantic relationships. As

such, this work has academic value, particularly as a contribution to approaches to research on monogamy, the burgeoning examination of polyamorous relationships, the continued use of relational dialectics theory 2.0, and the emergent field of Critical Interpersonal and Family Communication.

Monogamy

Monogamy is much more than simply a way in which people organize their romantic relationships. It is understood as the "normal" way to be in relationship, meaning that societally monogamy is taken-for-granted as a measure of goodness, morality, and superiority, and other dominant cultural values (Yep, 2003). Normalization is powerful because it is a standard by which otherness is measured. As addressed in the literature review, the normalization of monogamy – or mono-normativity – is violent to those who do not practice monogamy. Violence is apparent in the stigmatization of polyamorous relationships, which are perceived of as illegitimate and immoral. The violence is also apparent in the legal system: identifying as polyamorous means jeopardizing workplace and parental rights (Heckert, 2010, p. 258; Murray, 1995; Norrgard, 1991; Rust, 1993). I posit mono-normativity as an extension of the work on heteronormativity, where heterosexuality is violent to those who are not heterosexual (Yep).

Monogamy retains power through mono-normativity, but also through monogamism and monocentrism. Monogamism is especially interesting through an academic lens, as it contends that monogamy is so powerful that it is not scrutinized (Anderson, 2012). Academically, we can see monogamism in research on romantic relationships where monogamy is presupposed as the primary relational construct. For

example, the study of infidelity rarely includes a critique on monogamy (Anderson). Monocentrism works subtly, where there is an assumption that romantic relationships include two people. Often, monocentrism is made apparent when the following question is asked, "Do you have a significant other?" The grammar of this question contends that there can be only one. Taking into consideration the power of monogamy, those who engage in polyamorous relationships are undermining the normalization of monogamy as they work to validate their relationships that are not monogamous.

Polyamory

Polyamory – engaging in multiple romantic relationships with the knowledge and consent of all involved – is one way in which individuals engage in romantic relationships that are not monogamous. While there are other relational structures that also defy monogamy (e.g. swingers, relational anarchists), this study focused on polyamory. By virtue of the inclusion of multiple partners, with the additional goal of validating simultaneous romantic relationships, polyamorous relational structures resist mono-normativity, monogamism, and monocentricsm. The resistance is demonstrated in the findings of this study, where the discourse of mono-deconstruction serves to question and critique monogamy through instances of discursive interplay. For example, participants defined marriage as a relational contract that does not have to include monogamy. Multiple partners have the potential to marry, although this type of marriage structure is not governmentally recognized. By altering the definition of marriage to include multiple relationships, polyamorous individuals validate relationships that are not monogamous.

Additionally, polyamory requires a high level of communication (Anapol, 1997, 2010). Interestingly, even though scholars have indicated the significance of communication in polyamorous relationships, communication scholars are not on the forefront of studying polyamory. Instead, the primary scholars are in the fields of psychology (Sheff) and sociology (Klesse). The need for communication research specifically is important because communication is a key foundation of polyamorous relationships. All of the participants in this study evoked the need for avid communication in their relationships. They spoke about communication topics including, but not limited to, time management, emotional support, and defining needs. A communicative approach to studying polyamory would illuminate how those who identify as polyamorous work through these topics, impacting both their relationships and the sociocultural understanding of polyamory.

RDT 2.0 and Queer theory

In order to study polyamorous personal and relational identity, I used relational dialectics theory 2.0 as my theoretical framework, supplemented with queer theory. I chose RDT 2.0 as my theoretical framework because it "is a theory of relational meaning making—that is how the meanings surrounding individual and relationship identities are constructed through language use" (Baxter, 2011, p. 2). In RDT 2.0, these systems of meaning are produced from discourses that are often contradictory and competing (Baxter). Power exists in these systems of meaning, not in individuals or social groups; rather, power is in discourse (Baxter).

I approached my examination of polyamorous personal and relational identity with the understanding of power in discourse. It was important to me to understand how

141

those who identify as polyamorous discursively construct their identity. As a result, I focused on the proximal site of the utterance chain, specifically the proximal already-spoken site, where the history of a relationship bumps up against the current utterance. Said another way, the relational history informs the present communication. Although the proximal was my focus, on the utterance chain, the distal informs the proximal and vice versa (Baxter, 2011). The decision to examine the proximal informed my data collection procedures, as I chose to elicit self-recorded conversations from my polyamorous participants. By capturing a conversation between partners, I successfully rendered data from the proximal already-spoken site. Here, I could see the systems of meaning that imbue relational conversations, which highlighted how powerful discourses (specifically mono-normativity) impact personal and relational identity. In studying the proximal site, the discourse of mono-deconstruction worked on the relational level to break down the systems of meaning that surround monogamy; whereas, the discourse of poly-production served to shift the focus away from monogamy and toward a philosophy of polyamory.

In conjunction with this process, I supplemented RDT 2.0 with queer theory for three primary reasons. First, as Schippers (2016) notes, polyamory is a queer sexuality. The queerness of polyamory is demonstrated in the divergence from traditional, normalized performances of romantic relationships that include sexual and emotional exclusivity between two people. Instead, relationships are allowed to freely evolve according to the needs of the parties involved. Second, queer theory provides a lens by which to situate the power of discourses as violent, ultimately allowing me to make sense of how the discourse of mono-normativity is oppressive. As a polyamorous woman, I am

an advocate for relationship styles that do not conform to monogamous standards, and these relationship styles deserve visibility. Queer theory empowers me to note the violence of monogamy, violence that silences and shames individuals who are polyamorous and that does not offer basic legal protection for those who have multiple loves. Finally, queer theory allows me to introduce my body and my politics. Functionally, RDT 2.0 removes the body and argues that power is in discourse. Queer theory positions the body as important, and validates embodied differences and how they inform power. By pairing RDT 2.0 and queer theory, the power is in the discourse, but the body is impacted by the power.

As an individual and a scholar, I hope to keep working with these two theories. I have found the framework of RDT 2.0 and queer theory, paired with the methodological companion of RDT 2.0 (contrapuntal analysis) to be helpful in making meaning of discourses, and ultimately, power in the personal and relational identities of those who identify as polyamorous. I extend that pairing RDT 2.0 and queer theory is one approach to the newly identified Critical Interpersonal and Family Communication field.

Critical Interpersonal and Family Communication

As an emerging Critical Interpersonal and Family Communication scholar, this work is situated firmly in Suter's (in press) conceptualization of the shifts of traditional Interpersonal and Family scholarship toward a critical approach. Suter outlines the shifts as follows: (1) attention to power; (2) collapse of the public-private binary; (3) resistance, critique, and transformation of the status quo; and (4) author reflexivity. In this work, attention to power was rooted in a contrapuntal analysis, by recognizing that power is in discourse, particularly where discourses interplay. Three discourses were apparent in this

data set: the discourse of mono-normativity, the discourse of mono-deconstruction, and the discourse of poly-production. The discourse of mono-normativity was not unique to this study, as it has been outlined before (Webb, 2015). As a powerful, centered discourse, the discourse of mono-normativity was decentered, and even refuted by the discourse of mono-deconstruction. Finally, the discourse of poly-production works to create a new way in which to approach polyamorous relational and personal identities.

Suter's (in press) second shift is the collapse of the public-private binary. Although this research focused on the proximal, relational communication of those who identify as polyamorous, this work demonstrates that the public and private cannot be bifurcated. The discourse of mono-normativity is a sociocultural discourse that emphasizes the normalcy of sexual and emotional exclusivity in romantic relationships. It is a societal expectation that ultimately informs the ways in which individuals relate relationally. As noted in this work, those who identify as polyamorous understand the discourse of mono-normativity, but then work to critique and adjust it to give credence to their romantic pursuits. The public cannot be separated from the private as these work together to inform identity.

This work critiques traditional expectations for monogamy as violent to both those who are monogamous and those who are polyamorous. In this critique, I want to emphasize that I do not believe that polyamory is in some way better than monogamy. I am an advocate for education regarding different relationship types as everyone should critically think about their decision before entering into long-term romantic relationships. This perspective resists the monogamous status quo; this work represents an alternative.

Finally, I have approached author reflexivity in this piece, but it is important for me to return to that concept now.

Self-reflexivity revisited

Suter (in press) makes a call for author reflexivity as a turn toward Critical Interpersonal and Family Communication. I am not a neutral party, and I am especially not a neutral party with regard to this work.

In examining polyamorous personal and relational identity, I examined my relationships and myself. As a polyamorous woman, I have encountered the violence of the discourse of mono-normativity on a regular basis. Specifically, I have been told that my relationships are devoid of love because I have them simultaneously. I have been addressed as immature, and told that I will someday want to "settle down" when this "phase" of my life is over. I have been deemed sexually and emotionally selfish. I have been told that I could not be consenting to this, as men are the only people who could possibly want polyamorous relationships. I have approached all of these challenges armed with both personal experience and academic research. I have also come to understand that polyamory is not simply a way in which to engage in romantic relationships. It has shifted my perspective and altered the way in which I view the world.

Just as monogamy assists in shaping the world around us (constructs of love, relationships, and architecture), polyamory has the same capacity for world building. I am asserting that polyamory is more than simply a way in which to engage in and organize romantic relationships. Rather, it is a worldview that impacts the perception of life at large. An exemplar of this is in the data: polyamory changes the way in which

145

community is constructed. Because romantic relationships no longer have the bounds of monogamy, other relationships can also have blurred lines. Family structures can adjust to include new and different roles, friendships can be either emotionally or sexually intimate, and romantic relationships can deviate from the expectations of monogamy. Living arrangements can be adjusted to accommodate multiple lovers or extended families. Emotions are acknowledged and regulated rather than used as a rationale for certain types of behavior. For me, polyamory offers me the opportunity to "make it up as I go" and to recognize that others can do that too. It is inclusive of relational choices, with some caveats (participants must be consenting adults, for example). It also pushes an agenda of self-awareness, meaning that monogamy cannot be positioned as the only option. As I continue to do this work, I will continue to be personally impacted. I hope to make polyamory more visible and accessible in the process.

Looking Forward

Polyamorous research is burgeoning, and scholars like Schippers (2016) are looking toward the next evolution of studies of non-monogamy. In *Beyond Monogamy: Polyamory and the Future of Polyqueer Sexualities*, Schippers discusses the intersections of polyamory and heteromasculinity, including considerations of race in relationship politics. Schippers is contributing to the scholarly conversation regarding polyamory noting, "Mono-normativity and polyamory matter not just in my life, but also and more importantly, they matter theoretically, sociologically, and politically" (p. 176). Her work is representative of the path forward for polyamorous researchers: it needs to be intersectional. Intersectionality in polyamorous research is paramount because the lack of diversity perpetuates the idea that polyamory is for White, upper class, and highly

146

educated people. Without an inclusive approach, as scholars work to validate polyamory, the validation will only be for those who are represented in the research. For polyamory to be truly inclusive, it needs to be intersectional.

REFERENCES

Abbott, E. (2011). *A history of marriage*. New York: Seven Stories Press.

Afifi, T. D. (2003). "Feeling caught" in stepfamilies: Managing boundary turbulence
through appropriate communication privacy rules. *Journal of Social and Personal
Relationships*, *20*(6), 729-755. doi:10.1177/0265407503206002

Anapol, D. M. (1997). *Polyamory: The new love without limits: Secrets of sustainable
intimate relationships*. IntiNet Resource Center.

Anapol, D. (2010). *Polyamory in the 21st century: Love and intimacy with multiple
partners*. Pennsylvania: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Anderson, E. (2012). *The monogamy gap*. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Bakhtin, M.M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. Austin, TX: University of
Texas Press.

Bakhtin, M.M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*. Minneapolis, MN: University
of Minnesota Press.

Balter, F., & Brunet, I. (2012). Social research 2.0: Virtual snowball sampling method
using Facebook. *Internet Research, 22*, 57-74. doi: 10.1108/10662241211199960

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), 75-88. doi:10.1037/e529412014-108

Baxter, L.A. (2011). *Voicing relationships: A dialogic perspective*. Thousand Oaks, CA:
Sage.

Baxter, L. A., & Asbury, B. (2015). Critical approaches to interpersonal communication:
Charting a future. In D. O. Braithwaite & P. Schrodt (Eds.), Engaging theories in

interpersonal communication (pp. 189-202). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Baxter, L.A., & Braithwaite, D.O. (2008). Relational dialectics theory: Crafting meaning from competing discourses. In L.A. Baxter & D.O. Braithwaite (Eds.), *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication,* (pp. 349-362). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Baxter, L.M., Suter, E.A., Seurer, L.M., & Thomas, L.J. (2014). Discursive constructions of the meaning of "family" in online narratives of foster adoptive parents. *Communication Monographs, 81,* 59-78. doi: 10.1080/03637751.2014.880791

Bell, L. (1998). Public and Private Meanings in Diaries: Researching Family and Childcare. *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research*, 72–86. doi:10.4135/9781849209137.n5

Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. M. (2008). *Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Bennett, J. (2009). Only You. And You. And You. Polyamory—relationships with multiple, mutually consenting partners—has a coming-out party. *Newsweek Web Exclusive*. Retrieved from www.newsweek.com/2009/07/28/only-you-and-you-and-you.htm

Benson, P.J. (2008). *The polyamory handbook*. Bloomington: Author House.

Bettinger, M. (2005). Polyamory and gay men. *Journal of GLBT Family Studies, 1*(1), 97-116. doi:10.1300/J461v01n01_07

Breshears, D. (2011). *"A dialectical analysis of discourse surrounding children's experiences of parental disclosure of homosexuality."* (Doctoral dissertation)

149

Retrieved from: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/dissertations/AAI3449888

Breshears, D., & Braithwaite, D. O. (2014). Discursive struggles animating individuals'
talk about their parents' coming out as lesbian or gay. *Journal of Family
Communication, 14*, 189-207. doi:10.1080/15267431.2014.908197

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative
Research in Psychology, 3*, 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Burman, E. (1994). *Deconstructing developmental psychology*. London: Routledge.

Burr, V. (1995). *An introduction to social constructionism*. London: Routledge.

Calafell, B. M., & Moreman, S. T. (2010). Iterative hesitancies and Latinidad: The
reverberances of raciality. In T.K. Nakayama & R.T. Halualani (Eds.), The
handbook of critical intercultural communication (pp. 400_416). Malden, MA:
Blackwell.

Callis, A. S. (2014). Bisexual, pansexual, queer: Non-binary identities and the sexual
borderlands. *Sexualities, 17*(1-2), 63–80. doi:10.1177/1363460713511094

Chávez, K. R. (2013) Pushing Boundaries: Queer Intercultural Communication. *Journal
of International and Intercultural Communication, 6*(2), 83-95. doi:
10.1080/17513057.2013.777506

Cohen, C. J. (2005). Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens. Black Queer Studies, 21–
51. doi:10.1215/9780822387220-003

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and
Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*(6), 1241.
doi:10.2307/1229039

Conquergood, D. (1998). Beyond the text: Toward a performative cultural poetics. In S.

J. Dailey (Ed.), *The future of performance studies: Visions and revisions* (pp. 25-36). Washington, DC: National Communication Association.

Conquergood, D. (2002). Performance studies: Interventions and radical research. *The Drama Review, 46*, 145-156.

Cunning Minx (Producer). (2014). Polyamory Weekly [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from www.polyweekly.com.

Duck, S. (2011). *Rethinking relationships*. Sage Publications.

Duncombe J., Harrison, K., Allan, G., & Marsden, D. (2004). *The state of affairs*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Easton, D., & Hardy, J. W. (2011). *The ethical slut: A practical guide to polyamory, open relationships, and other adventures*. Celestial Arts.

Emens, E. F. (2004). Monogamy's law: Compulsory monogamy and polyamorous existence. *New York University Review of Law and Social Change, 29*(2), 277-376. doi:10.2139/ssrn.506242

Engles, F. (1972). *The Origin of the family, private property, and the state*. New York: International Publishers.

Faulkner, S. L., & Ruby, P. D. (2015). Feminist identity in romantic relationships: A relational dialectics analysis of e-mail discourse as collaborative found poetry. *Women's Studies in Communication*, *38*(2), 206-226. doi:10.1080/07491409.2015.1025460

Fisher, H. (2016). *Anatomy of Love: A Natural History of Mating, Marriage, and Why We Stray*. WW Norton & Company.

Gamson, J. (2003). Reflections on Queer Theory and Communication. *Journal of*

Homosexuality, 45(2-4), 385–389. doi:10.1300/j082v45n02_27

Giffney, N. (2004). Denormatizing Queer Theory. *Feminist Theory, 5*(1), 73–78. doi:10.1177/1464700104040814

Goldfeder, M., & Sheff, E. (2013). Children of polyamorous families: A first empirical look. *JL & Soc. Deviance*, *5*, 150.

Gordon, L. (2002). *The moral property of women: A history of birth control politics in America*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Grindstaff, D. (2003). Queering Marriage. Journal of Homosexuality, 45(2-4), 257–275. doi:10.1300/j082v45n02_12

Halliwell, D. (2015). Extending Relational Dialectics Theory. *Communication Yearbook, 39*, 67.

Heckert, J. (2005). *Resisting orientation: On the complexities of desire and the limits of identity politics* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Edinburgh).

Heckert, J. (2010). Love without borders? Intimacy, identity and the state of compulsory monogamy. *Understanding non-monogamies*, 255-266.

Heritaworn, J., Lin, C. J., & Klesse, C. (2006). Poly/logue: A critical introduction to polyamory, *Sexualities*, *9*(5), 515. doi:10.1177/1363460706069963

Hertlein, K. M., Wetchler, J. L., & Piercy, F. P. (2005). Infidelity: An overview. *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy*, *4*(2-3), 5-16. doi:10.1300/J398v04n02_02

Hislop, J., Arber, S., Meadows, R. and Venn, S. (2005) Narratives of the night: The use of audio diaries in researching sleep. *Sociological Research Online, 10*(4): http://www.socresonline.org.uk/10/4/hislop.html. doi:10.5153/sro.1194

Jagose, A. (1996). *Queer theory: An introduction*. NYU Press.

Jakobsen, J.R. (1998). Queer is? Queer does? Normativity and the problem of resistance. *GLQ, 4*(4), 511_536.

Jamieson, L. (2004). Intimacy, negotiated non-monogamy and the limits of the couple. In J. Duncombe, K. Harrison, G. Allan, & D. Marsden (Eds.), *The state of affairs* (pp. 35-57). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Johnson, C. (2002). Heteronormative Citizenship and the Politics of Passing. *Sexualities, 5*(3), 317–336. doi:10.1177/1363460702005003004

Jones, R. G., & Calafell, B. M. (2012). Contesting Neoliberalism Through Critical Pedagogy, Intersectional Reflexivity, and Personal Narrative: Queer Tales of Academia. *Journal of Homosexuality, 59*(7), 957–981. doi:10.1080/00918369.2012.699835

Kean, J. (2015). A stunning plurality: Unravelling hetero-and mononormativities through HBO's Big Love. *Sexualities*, *18*(5-6), 698-713. doi:10.1177/1363460714561718

Klesse, C. (2006). Polyamory and its 'others': Contesting the terms of non-monogamy. *Sexualities*, *9*(5), 565-583. doi:10.1177/1363460706069986

Klesse, C. (2011). Notions of love in polyamory—Elements in a discourse on multiple loving. *Laboratorium*, (2), 4-25.

Klesse, C. (2013). Polyamory: Intimate practice, identity or sexual orientation? *Sexualities*, *17*(1-2), 81-99. doi:10.1177/1363460713511096

Klesse, C. (2014). Poly economics—capitalism, class, and polyamory. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, *27*(2), 203-220. doi:10.1007/s10767-013-9157-4

Knee, C. R. (1998). Implicit theories of relationships: Assessment and prediction of

romantic relationship initiation, coping, and longevity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *74*(2), 360. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.74.2.360

Labriola, K. (1999). Models of open relationships. *Journal of lesbian studies*, *3*(Vols. 1-2), 217-225. doi:10.1300/j155v03n01_25

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2008). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago press.

Lesher, E. C. (2013). Protecting Poly: Applying the Fourteenth Amendment to the Nonmonogamous. *Tul. JL & Sexuality*, *22*, 127.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2011). *Qualitative communication research methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Madison, D. S. (2012). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance*. Sage.

Mackrill, T. (2008). Solicited diary studies of psychotherapy in qualitative research–pros and cons. *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling, 10*(1), 5–18. doi:10.1080/13642530701869243

McAnulty, R. D., & Brineman, J. (2007). Infidelity in dating relationships. *Annual Review of Sex Research, 10*, 94-114. Retrieved from http://0-search.proquest.com.bianca.penlib.du.edu/docview/225229378?accountid=14608

McLean, K. (2004). Negotiating (non) monogamy: Bisexuality and intimate relationships. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *4*(1-2), 83-97. doi:10.1300/j159v04n01_07

McPheeters, M. (1999). Gays to Marry? Let's Not!. *Journal of lesbian studies*,*3*(1-2), 197-203. doi:10.1300/j155v03n01_22

Merrigan, G. & Houston, C.L. (2009). *Communication research methods*. New York:

Oxford University Press.

Monrouxe, L. V. (2009) Solicited audio diaries in longitudinal narrative research: a view from inside. *Qualitative Research,* 9(1): 81-103. doi:10.1177/1468794108098032

Moore, J. (2016a). Performative Face Theory: A Critical Perspective on Interpersonal Identity Work (Doctoral dissertation). University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT.

Moore, J. (2016b). Where Is the Critical Empirical Interpersonal Communication Research? A Roadmap for Future Inquiry into Discourse and Power. *Communication Theory, 27*(1), 1–20. doi:10.1111/comt.12107

Moran-Ellis, J. and Venn, S. (2007) The sleeping lives of children and teenagers: night-worlds and arenas of action. *Sociological Research Online,* 12(5). doi:10.5153/sro.1606

Munson, M., & Stelboum, J. P. (1999). Introduction: The lesbian polyamory reader: Open relationships, non-monogamy, and casual sex. *Journal of lesbian studies*, *3*(1-2), 1-7. doi:10.1300/j155v03n01_01

Murray, A. (1995). Forsaking all others: A bifeminist discussion of compulsory monogamy. *Bisexual politics: theories, queries & visions*, 293-304.

Nakayama, T. K., & Halualani, R. T. (Eds.). (2010). *The Handbook of Critical Intercultural Communication*. doi:10.1002/9781444390681

Norrgard, L. (1991). Can bisexuals be monogamous. *Bi any other name: Bisexual people speak out*, 281-284.

Norwood, K. M. (2010). *Here and gone: Competing discourses in the communication of families with a transgender member*. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://media.proquest.com/media/pq/classic/doc/2091742891/fmt/ai/rep/NPDF?_s

=ZLkfnYq3SrnixIzuxUD2nEwXDfY%3D

Norwood, K. (2013). Grieving gender: Trans-identities, transition, and ambiguous loss. *Communication Monographs*, *80*(1), 24-45. doi:10.1080/03637751.2012.739705

Norwood, K. M., & Baxter, L. A. (2011). Narrative coherence in online stories told by members of the adoption triad. *Journal of Family Communication, 12*, 265-283. doi: 10.1080/15267431.2012.686944

Ochs, E. and Capps, L. (2001) *Living Narrative: Creating Lives in Everyday Storytelling,* Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.

Overall, C. (1998). Monogamy, Nonmonogamy, and Identity. *Hypatia, 13*(4), 1–17. doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.1998.tb01382.x

Owen, W. F. (1985). Thematic metaphors in relational communication: A conceptual framework. *Western Journal of Speech Communication, 49*(1), 1–13. doi:10.1080/10570318509374177

Piper, M. & Bauer, R. (2005). Call for papers: International Conference on Polyamory and Mono-Normativity. Research Center for Feminist, Gender & Queer Studies, University of Hamburg, November 5-6, 2005. [Online.] Accessed 03/02/15 at: http://www.wiso.uni-hamburg.de/index.php?id=3495.

Pillow, W. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 16*(2), 175–196. doi:10.1080/0951839032000060635

Polyamory. (2015). *The Oxford English Dictionary Online. http://dictionary.oed.com/.* Accessed November 15, 2015.

Rambukkana, N. P. (2004). Uncomfortable bridges: The bisexual politics of outing

    polyamory. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *4*(3-4), 141-154. doi:10.1300/j159v04n03_11

Rich, A. C. (1983). Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence (1980). *Journal*

    of Women's History, 15(3), 11–48. doi:10.1353/jowh.2003.0079

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.

    doi:10.1177/1363460706069987

Robinson, M. (2013). Polyamory and monogamy as strategic identities. *Journal of*

    Bisexuality, *13*(1), 21-38. doi:10.1037/e656612011-001

Rosa, B. (1994). Anti-monogamy: A radical challenge to compulsory heterosexuality. In

    G. Griffin (Ed.), *Stirring It: Challenges for Feminism* (107-120). London: Taylor

    & Francis.

Rust, P. C. (1993). Monogamy and Polyamory: Relationship Issues for

    Bisexuals. *Psychological perspectives on lesbian, gay, and bisexual experiences*,

    475.

Schippers, M. (2016). *Beyond Monogamy: Polyamory and the Future of Polyqueer*

    Sexualities. NYU Press.

Sheff, E. (2005). Polyamorous women, sexual subjectivity and power. *Journal of*

    Contemporary Ethnography, *34*(3), 251-283. doi:10.1177/0891241604274263

Sheff, E. (2006). Poly-hegemonic masculinities. *Sexualities*, *9*(5), 621-642.

    doi:10.1177/1363460706070004

Sheff, E. (2008). The privilege of perversities: Race and socioeconomic status among

polyamorists and kinksters. *Sexualities*. doi: 10.1080/19419899.2010.537674

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. (2013). *The polyamorists next door: Inside multiple-partner relationships and*

families. Rowman & Littlefield.

Sheff, E., & Hammers, C. (2011). The privilege of perversities: race, class and education

among polyamorists and kinksters. *Psychology & Sexuality*,*2*(3), 198-223.

doi:10.1080/19419899.2010.537674

Stelboum, J. P. (1999). Patriarchal Monogamy. *Journal of Lesbian Studies, 3*(1-2), 39–

46. doi:10.1300/j155v03n01_05

Suter, E. A. (in press). Critical interpersonal and family communication studies: Concepts

and methods. *Communication Monographs*.

Suter, E. A. (2010). Validity in qualitative research on personal relationships. *Kentucky*

Journal of Communication special issue on *The Future of Relational*

Communication, *28*, 77-96. Retrieved:

http://comm.louisville.edu/~bill/KCA/jenniferpdf/Suter.pdf

Suter, E. A. (2016). Introduction: Critical Approaches to Family Communication

Research: Representation, Critique, and Praxis. Journal of Family

Communication, 16(1), 1–8. doi:10.1080/15267431.2015.1111219

Suter, E. A., Baxter, L. A., Seurer, L. M., & Thomas, L. J. (2014). Discursive

constructions of the meaning of "family" in online narratives of foster adoptive

parents. *Communication Monographs*, *81*(1), 59-78.

158

doi:10.1080/03637751.2014.880791

Suter, E. A., & Seurer, L. M. (in press). Relational dialectics theory: Realizing the

dialogic potential of family communication. To appear in D. O. Braithwaite, E.

A. Suter, & K. Floyd (Eds.), *Engaging theories in family communication* (2nd ed.).

Routledge.

Suter, E. A., Seurer, L. M., Webb, S., Grewe, B., & Koenig Kellas, J. (2015).

Motherhood as contested ideological terrain: Essentialist and queer discourses of

motherhood at play in female–female co-mothers' talk. Communication

Monographs, 82(4), 458-483. doi:10.1080/03637751.2015.1024702

Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis,*

communicating impact. New York, NY: Wiley.

Treas, J., & Giesen, D. (2000). Sexual infidelity among married and cohabitating

Americans. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 62, 48-60. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-

3737.2000.00048.x

Warner, M. (Ed.). (1993). *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory* (Vol.

6). University of Minnesota Press.

Watters, E. (2003). *Urban tribes: A generation redefines friendship, family and*

commitment. New York: Bloomsbury.

Webb, S. K. (2015). Dialogic Constructions of Monogamy: The Discursive Struggles of

Mono-Normativity and Mono-Realism (Master's Thesis). Available from

ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 15/95/1595209)

Webster, L., & Mertova, P. (2007). *Using narrative inquiry as a research method: An*

introduction to using critical event narrative analysis in research on learning and

teaching. London: Routledge.

Weeks, J. (1991) 'Pretended Family Relationships', in J. Weeks, *Against Nature.*

  Essays on History, Sexuality, and Identity, pp. 134–56. London: Rivers Oram

  Press.

Weitzman, G. D. (1999). What psychology professionals should know about polyamory:

  The lifestyles and mental health concerns of polyamorous individuals. Retrieved

  from http://polysavvy.com/columns/guest-shouldknow.

Willey, A. (2006). Christian nations, polygamic races, and women's rights: Toward a

  genealogy of non/monogamy and whiteness. *Sexualities*, *9*(5), 530–546.

  doi:10.1177/1363460706069964

Williamson, I., Lyttle, S., Johnson, S. and Leeming, D. (2008, April). The benefits and

  drawbacks of using audio-diaries to capture lived experience: participants' and

  researchers' views. Paper presented at the Qualitative Methods in Psychology

  Section Inaugural Conference, Leeds, England. Abstract retrieved from

  http://www.bps.org.uk/bpslegacy/conf_abstracts?&ResultsType=Abstracts&Resul

  tSet_ID=3084&FormDisplayMode=view&frmShowSelected=true&localAction=

  details

Wosick-Correa, K. (2010). Agreements, rules and agentic fidelity in polyamorous

  relationships. *Psychology & Sexuality*, *1*(1), 44-61.

  doi:10.1080/19419891003634471

Yep, G. A. (2003). The Violence of Heteronormativity in Communication Studies.

  Journal of Homosexuality, 45(2-4), 11–59. doi:10.1300/j082v45n02_02

Yep, G. A. (2013). Queering/Quaring/Kauering/Crippin'/Transing "Other Bodies" in

Intercultural Communication. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, 6*(2), 118-126. doi:10.1080/17513057.2013.777087

APPENDIX A

Media for PolyWeekly

Tweet (100-charater limit)

Participants needed for research on poly identities! Please contact Stephanie Webb at

skaywebb@gmail.com

Facebook (100-words or less)

Stephanie Webb, from the University of Denver, is conducting a research project on the

communication of polyamorous individuals, and she needs participants. If you are

interested, please contact Stephanie Webb at skaywebb@gmail.com.

Commercial audio (30-60 seconds)

Hi, my name is Stephanie Webb, and I am conducting a research project on polyamorous

identities through the University of Denver. As a PhD candidate and polyamorous

individual, I am interested in exploring how the polyamorous community develops

personal and relational identities through relational conversation. I am looking for adults

over 18 who are currently in a relationship with at least one partner to participate. Please

contact me at skaywebb@gmail.com to participate. Thank you!

APPENDIX B

Personal Facebook Post

Hi all! For my dissertation, I am conducting a research project on polyamory. I am looking for adults over 18 who are currently in a relationship with at least one partner to participate. If you fit the qualifications and are willing to participate, please send me a direct message.

If you don't fit the bill, but know someone who does, please pass this along. I would greatly appreciate it!

Informed Consent

Project Title: Research Power in the Polyamorous Community
Principal Investigator: Stephanie Webb
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Elizabeth Suter
DU IRB Protocol #: XXX

You are being asked to be in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to take part.

You are invited to participate in a research study about polyamorous personal and relational identities. This study is specifically interested in conversations between polyamorous relational partners.

You are being asked to be in this research study because you identify as polyamorous and are a part of the polyamorous community. You will be asked questions regarding your opinions and thoughts on polyamory at large.

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to complete a demographic survey online and a solicited audio diary. The survey will take about 10 minutes and the interviews are expected to last one to two hours.

The researchers have taken steps to minimize the risks of this study. Even so, you may still experience some risks related to your participation, even when the researchers are careful to avoid them. These risks may include the following: discomfort of topics related to the polyamorous identity. If you find yourself uncomfortable during the conversation, you can cease the conversation at any time. Additionally, although your confidentiality is the utmost importance and will be protected, there is a small risk of identification. You name and any identifying information will be changed in the transcriptions and the write up. You will be provided with an identification number to be used in the online survey. The primary researcher is the only individual who will have access to the information that will connect you with the identification number.

This study is designed for the researcher to learn more about how polyamorous identities impact the discourse of monogamy. If you agree to take part in this study, there will be no direct benefit to you. However, information gathered in this study may impact the ways in which individuals who identify as polyamorous communicate about their relationships to create a more inclusive community. You will not receive any payment for being in the study

You are not expected to incur any costs during this study, although you will need access to a recording device and the internet.

To keep your information safe, the researchers will remove any identifying information from the transcriptions. The original voice recordings will be kept on a password-protected computer. The primary researcher and a professional transcriptionist will have access to the voice recording. The results from the research may be shared at a meeting. The results from the research may be in published articles. Your individual identity will be kept private when information is presented or published.

Although we will do everything we can to keep your records a secret, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Both the records that identify you and the consent form signed by you may be looked at by others.

- Federal agencies that monitor human subject research
- Human Subject Research Committee

All of these people are required to keep your identity confidential. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records. Also, if you tell us something that makes us believe that you or others have been or may be physically harmed, we may report that information to the appropriate agencies.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. If you decide to withdraw early, the information or data you provided will be destroyed.

The researcher carrying out this study is Stephanie Webb, MA. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may email Stephanie at skaywebb@gmail.com.

If the researchers cannot be reached, or if you would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) about; (1) questions, concerns or complaints regarding this study, (2) research participant rights, (3) research-related injuries, or (4) other human subjects issues, you may contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4015 or by emailing IRBChair@du.edu, or you may contact the Office for Research Compliance by emailing IRBAdmin@du.edu, calling 303-871-4050 or in writing (University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121).

I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I understand the possible risks and benefits of this study. I know that being in this study is voluntary. I choose to be in this study: I will get a copy of this consent form.

Please check in the appropriate boxes:

☐ I agree to be audiotaped for research purposes.

☐ I DO NOT agree to be audiotaped for research purposes.

Signature:_____ Date:_____

Print Name:_____

APPENDIX D

Demographic Information

Forced Choice Questions

*Open ended

Identification number:

What is your age?

What is your gender?

What is your sexual orientation?

What is your race?

What is your highest level of education?

What is your religious affiliation?

What is your marital status?

Do you identify as polyamorous?
      Yes
      No

Are you currently in at least one active polyamorous relationship?
      Yes
      No

How long have you been with your current partner(s)?
      *This is a recurring question that will allow participants to add additional answers
      based on the number of partners

Finances?

Qualitative Questions

How would you describe your current polyamorous relational formation, and how long
has each relationship been in existence? For example, you might be in a V if you have
two romantic partners that do not interact with each other. Feel free to describe it, as you
feel comfortable. If you wish, you can draw a picture and include it in the email with
your recordings to the researcher at skaywebb@gmail.com.

What are your current living arrangements with your partner(s)?

How many children do you have in your family, and what are their relationships to you? Do they identify as polyamorous?

Do you engage with an organized polyamorous community in your geographic area or online?

Instructions for Recording and Posting Self-Guided Conversations
(Adapted from instructions created by Dr. Leah Seurer)

Thank you for your participation! Here are the directions for recording your conversation (both iPhone and Android). If you would like to use a different device to record, please do so.

Helpful Guidelines

1. Please find a quiet space. Phones and other devices pick up background noises easily.

2. Plug in your phone. You don't want to find that it has died halfway through the conversation.

3. You can talk normally with the device between you after you hit record. There is no reason to shout into the device.

4. Please check your phone periodically to ensure that it is still recording. Some functions can prompt the phone to stop recording.

5. Please make yourself comfortable for the conversation – grab a glass of water. One to two hours is a long time to talk. If you need to take a break, you can record in segments. Please remember to upload all of the segments to Dropbox.

6. Make sure your phone has enough storage for the conversation. A two-hour voice memo will require approximately 60 MB of space. Consider clearing your cookies, cache, etc before starting the interview.

7. Before you begin the conversation, do a sound check. Record a small segment of talk and then listen to it to make sure that you are audible.

Recording your interview with an iPhone:
1. Under the Utilities folder, tap the Voice Memos icon.

2. Press the red button at the bottom of your screen to start recording.

3. Once you are finished recording, push the red square at the bottom of your phone and push Done. A New Voice Memo prompt will appear that at the top of your screen. Label your recording with the names of the individuals who participated in the conversation.

5. Your interview is now saved in the voice memo application on your phone.

Uploading your interview from an iPhone:
1. Connect your iPhone to your computer and open your iTunes if it does not open

automatically

2. In iTunes, select iPhone. Select Music at the top of the screen, select Sync Music, select "include voice memos," and click Apply.

3. Voice memos will now be synced from your iPhone to your computer and appear in the music list in a playlist called "Voice Memos."

Recording your interview with an Android phone:
1. From the home screen, go to Applications and then Voice Recorder.

2. Once the app opens, touch Record.
3. Once your recording is complete, press menu to display the save options.

Additional options for Android devices.
1. If your phone does not have Voice Recorder, consider downloading one of the following applications for recording your interview. Each is available free of charge from the android app store.
      a. **Easy Voice Recorder**
      https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.coffeebeanventures.easyvoicerecorder&hl=en
      b. **Smart Voice Recorder**
      https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.andrwq.recorder&hl=en
      c. **Tape-A-Talk Voice Recorder**
      https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=name.markus.droesser.tapeatalk&hl=en

Uploading your interview from an Android:
1. Connect your phone to your computer

2. Open file browser and find your phone's storage folder. In some cases, your interview may be saved under "sounds" in your music folder but some androids will have a pre-labeled folder titled "SmartVoiceRecorder."

Sending your interview to the researchers (for both iPhone and Android):

Via Dropbox
1. Go to https://www.dropbox.com and create an account if you do not already have one.

2. Sign into your Dropbox account

3. Click "Upload"

4. Click "Choose Files"

5. Under "Media" on the bottom left of your file screen click on "Music"

6. One of your playlists should be titled "Voice Memos." Select the playlist to access your voice memo files. Click on the voice memo file you would like to upload and click "Choose." The file will then upload to your dropbox account.

7. Click the chain link on the far right side of the now uploaded document

8. Send to skaywebb@gmail.com

9. Email Stephanie Webb at skaywebb@gmail.com to let her know that you have uploaded your interview. In the meantime, enable your password protection options on your phone and computer to protect your interview in the case your devices were to be stolen. Once you receive email confirmation from Stephanie that she has downloaded your interview, delete your interview. Below are the instructions for doing so.

Deleting your interview from iTunes:
1. To delete a voice memo in iTunes, right click on the interview and click "Delete."

Deleting your interview from Voice Memos:
1. Open Voice Memo app
2. At the bottom of the voice memo app you should see your labeled interview.
3. Touch the memo you would like to delete and swipe left.
4. A red "delete" box will appear on the right side of the screen. Push delete.

This is a self-recorded conversation about your polyamorous relationship(s) and how they have impacted your personal and relational identity. As a researcher, I would like to hear about your polyamorous lives, including important past memories and ideal futures. I encourage you to tell stories, engage with one another in conversation, and think critically about how identifying as polyamorous has impacted your life. Everything you say is confidential. Take a deep breath, and begin your conversation.

Questions

1. How did your polyamorous relationships come to be?
-You can frame this as a timeline of important events or each tell a short life story that depicts your arrival into the situation. Consider specific events that have shaped who you are today and what you bring to your current romantic situation.
-If you wish, you can construct a hard copy of your relational timeline to help with addressing this question. If you choose to do this, please take a picture of it and send it to me.

2. How has polyamory influenced your personal identity?
-Think about how you perceived yourself in the past and how you perceive yourself now. "The past" might be when (or if) you ever identified as monogamous, or maybe just a younger version of you. How are you different now? What has changed? What do your partner(s) think?

3. What values are important to you that are reflected in your polyamorous identity?
-For example, you might value transparency or freedom. You might consider how polyamory differs from monogamy how your values have shaped how you approach polyamory.

4. How do you make decisions/communicate with your partner(s) with regard to new romantic pursuits?
-Do you work together or separately initially? Do you have a basic code of conduct that everyone works to live by? Or do you have specific rules or codes that are meaningful in your relationships? How do they vary? For example, some poly individuals only have unprotected sex with a specific partner(s) for certain reasons.

5. When a new partner is introduced, how do you and your existing partners actively work to incorporate this person?
-Do your communication practices increase or does it vary? Maybe there is not a process, but it occurs organically. This might be a different process for everyone. Be thorough and consider what your partner(s) think as well.

6. What does marriage mean in your relationship(s)?
-Does it have a place? How has marriage influenced your relationships?

7. How does commitment impact your relationships?

-How do you define commitment? Is commitment important in every relationship in which you engage? How do you think of commitment differently than others?

8. How is love meaningful to you?
        -What role does love play in your romantic relationships?

9. How do you see your lives in the future?
-If it helps, you can pick an arbitrary number (five years?) and imagine how your life will look then. What are your living arrangements? What is your ideal number of partners? Children?

10. What is a metaphor you would use to describe polyamory?
-The metaphor would best explain polyamory to someone who is not familiar with the term.

Stop the recording device.

APPENDIX G

Resource List

Thank you for your participation in this study on polyamorous identities. The following is a list of resources for your personal use, if you deem it necessary:

RYAN KENNEDY
Noeticus Counseling Center and Training Institutewww.noeticus.org

TARYN BOSTWICK
The Butterfly Within Counseling Center
720-304-5570
Taryn@thebutterflywithin.com
http://www.thebutterflywithin.com
I offer a wide range of counseling services (individual, couples, threesomes, moresomes, families, children, groups). I work with any and all forms of self expression including polyamory, kink, GLBTQ and so on.
Contact me for further information.

BETH FIRESTEIN, Ph.D.
Inner Source Psychotherapy
firewom@webaccess.net
www.bethfirestein.com
Loveland, Colorado Licensed Psychologist, 25 years experience. Compassionate, ethical, confidential Specializing in poly, GLBT, kink-friendly counseling Also depression, anxiety, bipolar, PTSD. Some insurance accepted.

INDIGO STRAY MA
Mile High Psychotherapy is an affordable clinic based in Denver catering to individuals and couples of all genders and sexual preferences, those exploring open polyamory, poly fidelity and single polyamorists. The clinicians at Mile High will not ask you to explain your lifestyle choices or challenge their validity. We provide a genuine and nourishing space that furthers your personal vision. Located off Colorado Blvd & I-25. Visit us atwww.milehighpsychotherapy.com

ROBYN TRASK
970-667-5683
Website: www.robyntrask.com, www.lovemore.com
Speaker, writer, counselor, workshop facilitator; specializing in polyamory centered relationship issues and Sacred Sexuality workshops and guidance

RHODA J. LIPSCOMB, M.S.C., D.A.A.C.S.
Psychotherapist, Certifed Sex Therapist, and Sex Coach
Board Certified Clinical Sexologist; President-elect, CLPCA (Colorado Licensed Professional Counselors Association)

720-530-6545
Sexcounseling@yahoo.com
www.talkaboutsextherapy.com