FOLLOWING A PATH OF HEART:

EXPLORING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL, RELATIONAL,

AND SOCIAL ISSUES OF POLYAMORISTS

A Final Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Diploma Program

and Master's Degree in Process Work

by

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June 2011

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The road to this project has been wavy and winding with numerous iterations before the path became clear. I am grateful to many people for their support both before and during the process of writing this paper.

I'd like to thank my study committee (a.k.a. "team Rami"): Dawn Menken, Jan Dworkin, and Ingrid Rose. Your spaciousness, support, and encouragement of me, my unconventional lifestyle, my family, and the importance of the work that I am engaged in have been affirming and respectful.

I'd also like to thank Julie Diamond, my therapist, friend, and mentor. What can I say? You have been my "go-to" girl from the first day I was introduced to Process Work 11 years ago. Your brilliant mind and boundless energy, as well as your love and belief in me have all allowed me to flourish in unexpected ways. So many thanks to you!

Deep gratitude to Salome Schwarz, my supervisor and sister in spirit and mind; there is no way that this could have been accomplished without you breathing life into the turtle slowly wending its way toward the river. How amazing you are, and how I appreciate your gentle, clear knowing.

Thanks also to Amy Mindell. My sessions with you brought out the dreaming background of my life and work and helped me stay close to my creative self even as my inner scientist worked to pull together this paper. It seemed impossible to be both creative and scientific at the same time, but with you I found that they could live and be expressed simultaneously.

Susan Kocen, my friend and transcription meister, there is no way I could have typed up all those interviews - thank you! What would I have done without you! Thanks also to Brooke Noli, dear coach, editor extraordinaire, cheerleader, and patient guide. To say that I appreciate you holding my hand step-by-step would be a gross understatement. I couldn't have done this without you.

Arny Mindell, thank you so much for bringing Process Oriented Psychology into existence. Thank you for bringing the ideas of deep democracy, worldwork, and marginalization to the world. It has made all the difference to me, my family, and all whom I work with. Through your love and support, I reclaimed my marginalized parts and brought them back to life with joy, exuberance, passion, and compassion for myself. I am deeply grateful.

I am so deeply indebted to the participants of the Chicago Polyamory Support Group. I have learned so much about what it is to live as a polyamorist from all of you. Thanks especially to those who were willing to be interviewed for this project, and to all who have been writing, researching, and exploring polyamory both in your personal lives and from a research perspective. Thank you!

For me, living an unconventional polyamorous life could not be possible without the devoted love and commitment of my partners, Tom and Cindy. Our life together is the source, the wellspring for this project. It has not always been easy, but it's always been worth it. For many years, we knew of no one else living as we were, and now I have found a world of others living similarly and working to create relationships with integrity and sincerity. My dear partners in life, thank you forever. And much appreciation to my darling children, J and K. You had to learn to live both inside and outside the box of cultural expectations by being born into our

amazing family. My unending gratitude goes out to you both for loving and supporting me, especially when it wasn't easy for you.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge my mother, Muriel Paseltiner, who passed in 2008. It took me almost 20 years to tell my mother about my unconventional relationship with Tom and Cindy fearing that she would reject me, or worse. But when I finally did reveal the truth, she was beyond accepting. She said, "If I had known people like you when I was young, maybe I would have chosen differently myself. I might have explored more. Good for you! How wonderful that you have so much love in your life!" Thank you mother for that blessing.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

We must let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the one that is waiting for us.

- Joseph Campbell

Dear Reader: What You Need to Know about this Paper

This paper is a hybrid of sorts. It is at once my personal relationship story, a scientific research study on polyamorous lifestyles, and a resource for process work therapists and other clinicians working with polyamorous clients. That sounds like a lot for one paper to carry, and it is! Even as I was writing the paper and pulling it together, I thought, "Perhaps, I should simplify. I could make a paper out of any one of these topics, no need to cover all three!" Indeed, at first glance, the three approaches appear strange bedfellows: there is the storyteller, the researcher, and the Process Worker all mixed up together, and although I was tempted to follow just one of these paths for the sake of ease and clarity, I quickly realized that my life has never really been about taking the clear and well-traveled road. Instead, my life has largely leaned towards exploring the more unknown and unpaved paths that challenge societal norms. So the pioneer in me said, "Why stop now? Just accept and believe in the path that this paper has taken and go for it!"

As you will see, much of this paper is about freedom and following a path of heart that chooses two or three primary relationships when choosing only one would have been the easier road. So, it is fitting that, in the end, I found the inner and outer freedom to let this paper express its diverse nature as well as my own. As you follow along, dear reader, you will notice the voices of the storyteller, the researcher, and the Process Worker zigzagging throughout. I hope you are able to embrace all of them to one degree or another, just as I have.

What is it Exactly? Defining Polyamory

After reading the title of this paper, you may be wondering, "What exactly is polyamory anyway?" It's a good question, which happens to have a wide range of answers. Much of the literature on polyamory is devoted to defining what it *is* and what it *is not*, but the etymology of the word can help shed some light on its most basic definition. *Poly* is a Greek word meaning *many*, and *amor* is a Latin word meaning *love*: thus, polyamory means *many loves.* The Oxford Dictionary offers this equally straightforward definition: polyamory is "the philosophy or state of being in love or romantically involved with more than one person at the same time" (oxforddictionaries.com).

Although the technical meaning of polyamory seems clear from these definitions, the contextual meaning and manifestations of having multiple loves continues to be formulated and seems to differ from person to person. Many writers have attempted to meticulously list the types of relationships that can be included in or should be excluded from the polyamory category, and almost all make a distinction between polyamory and non-monogamy. According to Kleese (2006), "polyamory emphasizes love whereas non-monogamy is based on a sex-oriented lifestyle or identity" (p. 573). In other words, the difference between polyamory and open relationships or "swinging" is that polyamory is based on having multiple emotionally committed partners, while swinging and open relationships tend to describe emotionally committed couples that are open to physical sex with others but avoid any emotional connections. Polyamory also differs from physical and emotional affairs in that it involves loving more than one person transparently, or as White (2004) puts it, polyamory means "living by the principle that it is possible to love more than one person at a time without deception or betrayal" (p. 17).

Polyamory is also frequently confused with polygamy, which has two distinct forms: polygyny (a marriage structure with one husband and two or more wives) and polyandry (a marriage structure with one wife and two or more husbands) (Anapol, 1997). These relationship formations are fundamentally structured and strictly defined, whereas polyamory is "a lovestyle which arises from the understanding that love cannot be forced to flow, or not flow, in any particular direction" (p. 179). In other words, there is an inherent freedom within polyamory that rejects predetermined constructs or mandates, which may be one reason why it has so many diverse definitions and constellations.

In her book, *Opening Up*, Taormino (2008) claims that most of the polyamory definitions out there do not really capture the lifestyle because they rarely address the complexities, the nuances, or the way in which polyamory expands one's ideas about what constitutes a relationship. In an attempt to honor this complexity, Taormino offers her own definition: "I would define polyamory as the desire for or the practice of maintaining multiple significant, intimate relationships simultaneously. These relationships may encompass many elements including love, friendship, commitment, flirting, romance, spiritual connection" (p. 71).

While non-monogamy has been around in most cultures throughout time, polyamory in its current form first emerged in the United States in the 1930's, when the feminist anarchist Emma Goldman helped to lead a movement for Responsible Non-monogamy (Anapol, 2010). Goldman and her fellow anarchists didn't believe in imposing any kind of structure or rules on the free flow of love and wrote, "I demand the independence of woman, her right to support herself; to live for herself; to love whomever she pleases, or as many as she pleases. I demand freedom for both sexes: freedom of action, freedom in love and freedom in motherhood" (as cited in Anapol, p.49).

The sexual revolution of the 1960's and 1970's carried Goldman's vision forward and evolved polyamory into another phase. Then, in the 1980's, and '90's books like *Open Marriage: New Life Style for Couples* (O'Neills, 1984) and *Polyamory The New Love Without Limits* (Anapol, 1997) came onto the scene and attracted new interest in the lifestyle, but the advent of AIDS and the Reagan era pushed many polyamorists back into mainstream monogamy. In the last two decades, polyamorists have significantly grown in numbers, largely due to Easton and Liszt's (1997) publication of their popular book, *The Ethical Slut*, which is still the most widely recognized literature on the subject of polyamory and open relationships. Two years after the publication of *The Ethical Slut*, Time magazine estimated the existence of approximately 250 organized polyamory support groups in America (Bergstrand, & Sinski, 2010), and in 2009, Newsweek estimated that over 500,000 polyamorous relationships existed in the United States (Newsweek, 2009).

Who's Who? My Experience of Living in the Margins

One afternoon when my son was six, he was playing with a friend in the front yard. It was a beautiful fall day and the boys were doing what many boys do on a beautiful fall day: collecting leaves into huge piles and jumping headlong into them. It's amazing how many piles kids can make and how many hours they can entertain themselves doing that!

My partner, Cindy, and I were a few feet away cleaning out the garage, when my son Josh and his friend, Matt, sauntered into the garage covered with leaves from head to toe. Josh said, "Matt wants to know who is the Mama? Who is she?" he said pointing at Cindy. I replied, "Well, just tell him that I'm your mom." Josh turned to Matt, "That's my mom", he said,

pointing to me. A moment later he returned, “Mom, Matt wants to know who Cindy is.” “Just tell her she is part of our family,” I said. “She’s part of our family,” he said to Matt as they ran into another crackling pile of leaves.

At age six, that answer sufficed, but as Josh got older it became more and more difficult for him to come up with an answer that would not only satisfy others but also himself. At the time, there were no easy answers to these seemingly easy questions, no role models or words to describe Cindy’s role in our family configuration.

Before going any further, perhaps it would be useful to explain our family’s relationship dynamic. Tom and I have been legally married for 34 years. In fact, we were married twice: once in Bombay, India in 1976 while living in an ashram, and a second time in 1977 in a Jewish ceremony in my parent’s apartment with a handful of family members in attendance. Cindy and I have been partners in a relationship for 27 years, and the three of us have lived together with our two children for the last 18 years. Cindy and Tom have a close, supportive relationship that involves more than friendship, in part, because they have me in common. They have travelled together, and supported one another when either one of them was in relationship hell with me. As a result, there is an intimacy between them that differs from other friendships. No, they do not have an intimate sexual relationship, yet they are intimately related. If asked if they are polyamorous, both Tom and Cindy would say that they are in a polyamorous relationship but that they do not necessarily identify as polyamorous. This is because they are not in love with two people; each of them is in love with me, and I am the one who has multiple loves. I deeply love both Tom and Cindy, and feel fortunate to have had so much love in my life.

As for myself, I am not entirely sure of how I identify. It is still an unfolding question and answer for me, but for the purposes of this paper, I will refer to myself as polyamorous. Having heard the word for the first time just a couple of years ago, calling myself a polyamorist feels a bit like a retro-fit; giving myself an established name and identity where once there was none. I don't have a problem with the word, but it feels a bit like a suit of clothing that doesn't quite yet fit or like a wool sweater that causes my skin to itch a little. Regardless of whether it fits perfectly or not, polyamory does describe a life relationship pattern that is meaningful to me and, I have found, to others.

Loving more than one person is not always a walk in the park, and much of this paper is focused on the challenges facing people in polyamorous relationships. It has been a difficult undertaking for my family to carve its own path in the world, and by bringing forth parts of our story here, I hope to articulate some of the difficulties and joys of living an unconventional lifestyle that is still in the margins of today's mainstream culture. When Cindy was invited into the family, we hadn't thought it out, we didn't have a plan or a map, and didn't know anyone else living like this. We just thought we'd give it a go and try it out, telling ourselves, "How difficult could it be?" Not only were there no role models or advisers, but we hardly had the courage to speak with anyone in our community for fear of how they might react to our lifestyle.

Slowly, over time, we found our own way, made our own rules, and confided in people who we hoped would not condemn us and might even embrace our relationship configuration. After 27 years of paving our own way, I've recently come to the realization that I am now in a position to be an adviser and role model to others who are pursuing a polyamorous lifestyle, and in the last year I've been facilitating polyamorous support groups, offering workshops and presentations, and working therapeutically with polyamorous clients. Unlike our own haphazard

beginnings, I now advise others on how to proceed and often suggest moving forward slowly and with caution.

As this paper will demonstrate, issues of marginalization are an ongoing challenge for people in polyamorous relationships, and our family has had its fair share. I am no stranger to life on the margins: not only do I have two primary relationships, but I am also a woman, Jewish, and 64 years old. Any one of those identities would suffice as a marginal subgroup, but I believe combining them creates a subgroup of its own. In coming up against societal norms, I have often been fearful of how family, friends, and colleagues might react, as well as how people from circles that naturally extend beyond the family such as friends of children and their families, schools and teachers, and the larger community might behave towards us. Marginalization occurs daily in small and large ways, from inside of the relationship, from extended family members, and from the world, and it has proven to be a difficult and interesting challenge.

Wondering who, if, and when to tell people has been one of the biggest challenges facing our family, and in the beginning "coming out" to our immediate family members was the subject of frequent discussions. I feared that my parents, who were quite modern but also quite conservative, would believe that it might be in the best interest of my son to remove him from our household and raise him themselves, so I held off from telling them until my son was a teenager and my parents would be too old to pose a threat. Sadly for me, I had underestimated my mother's response, which ended up being loving and accepting and a bit jealous as well. "I always suspected it," she said. "I am so happy that you have so much love in your life. I can tell that both Cindy and Tom love you, so what could be wrong with that! I only knew your father, and sometimes I wonder if I had it to do over again, well, if I might have been with a woman." That was quite a shocker, and I wished that I'd had the courage to tell her sooner.

My father was another story. He questioned Cindy for 17 years about why she wasn't married and wondered why she was living with us, but advised by my mother to leave well enough alone, I did just that. My brother, my sister, their partners and children were told early on in the relationship, but to this day we haven't had a lengthy discussion about my relationship dynamic. The good news is that everyone accepts it in their own way; the bad news is that it feels very much like a "don't ask/don't tell" situation in which no one really wants to know more or support the relationship explicitly. Perhaps they believe that it is none of their business, which is fine too.

Another issue that has surfaced time and again over the past 27 years has to do with defining our roles. Who is who, and how do we explain ourselves to others? People have made numerous assumptions and drawn many incorrect conclusions in their efforts to try to make sense of our relationship configuration. Cindy and I have been asked if we are mother and daughter or sisters, and there were times when people assumed that Cindy was Tom's lover, the children's mother, and even our maid. Yes, maid! In the early 90's, I was on the board of a private school and hosted a fundraising event at my home. Cindy was in the kitchen helping her self to a glass of wine when one of the guests had also gone in the kitchen to get a plate. When the guest returned to the living room, she said, "Do you know that your maid is pouring some wine for herself?" These are painful moments for us all, but they put Cindy in an especially difficult position of marginalization.

When Tom and I step out into the world, there are no queries about our relationship. Even though I am 7 years older than him, it is fairly clear to most people that we are a couple. But when Cindy and I step out into the world, who we are as a couple is less clear and often interpreted as some other type of relationship. When the three of us step out into the world, a

whole different scenario unfolds. It is difficult to know what people are thinking, because in our experience, 99% of people do not ask about our relationship, either because the possibility of a trio doesn't even enter into their mind or because they suspect it but are too embarrassed to ask. For 20 years now, our family has lived in the same house, on the same block. Neighbors see us come and go, neighbors come over for parties, and neighbors are neighborly, yet not one person has ever inquired about our relationship. On the one hand, I feel relieved to know that we are at least tolerated, but on the other hand, I don't feel known or accepted, and I'm left wondering what people think about us.

In our culture, it is huge privilege and rank to be in a monogamous, heterosexual relationship, and for those of us who exist outside of that cultural norm, it can be difficult if not impossible to avoid internalizing mainstream judgments and criticisms. As a result, over the past three decades, I have lived with an internalized "husher" who conceals my relationship life, and I'm not the only family member who feels this way. In addition to Tom and Cindy having their own hushers to deal with, my children (whose names have been changed in this paper) have also had to live "in the closet" at times. They did not choose this lifestyle; they were not free to say, "Sure, go ahead and bring another adult into our life, and let's have you and dad and Cindy as our parents," nor were they free to say, "No, we don't want this." The kids did not have a voice in the matter, and I am aware that at times it is an invisible burden that they carry. Not only do we, the adults, have to find ways of describing our relationship, but our children have to as well, and like us, they also have to face the possibility of rejection by peers, teachers, the parents of boy/girl friends, potential spouses, employers, and so on.

In addition to the societal marginalization that we experience both internally and externally, marginalization also occurs within the relationship itself. Within a polyamorous

relationship, it is very common for one person to feel marginalized by the other two, and this marginalized role is frequently passed around and experienced by each member at one time or another. Sometimes the marginalized role is more frequently occupied by one member of the relationship because of contributing external forces. For example, in our relationship, Cindy does not have the protections that heterosexuality and legal marriage offer me and Tom, nor does she possess the status of being my "first" partner or a biological parent to our children. At other times, Tom is the more marginalized person in the relationship, because Cindy and I share a deep interest in and connection to Process Work, which gives us a shared "vocabulary" and way of looking at life that sometimes excludes Tom. There are also times when I feel marginalized because Tom and Cindy want to do things together without me, or because I feel forced to choose between them. The worst thing about marginalization within the relationship is its potential to lead to painful jealousies, which is a topic that will be discussed more later in the paper.

After years and years of dealing with these various types of marginalization, I find that my internalized husher doesn't want to be hushed any longer. I want to share what it is like to live in the margins, and I want to bring forth new ways of thinking about relationships and families. I want to express the freedoms, joys, and possibilities that nonconventional relationships can offer. For instance, in our polyamorous relationship, there are the everyday things like sharing the burdens of household chores, raising the children with more than two adults, helping each other to process emotional upsets, getting our needs met by more than one person, and the general camaraderie that ensues. If we are planning a party and the three of us are humming along working as a team, it is so enjoyable and so much more fun!

And then there is the love! The love in this family is far beyond anything I could have imagined. To be deeply loved, appreciated, tolerated, accepted, and admired by more than one person is such a privilege and really quite amazing. It is a love that is not limited, a love that expands our abilities to give, to receive, and to work on ourselves. Whoo hoo for that! And, in spite of the many difficulties that our family has faced, I firmly believe that the challenges have also been gifts to us. By following a path of heart, Cindy, Tom, my children, and I have all had to learn how to take chances and risks in the face of a disapproving culture. We have put love first, even when it felt dangerous to do so. Is it risky? Yes, I think so, but we have been willing to take the risk, and now I am risking a bit more by sharing our life publically in this paper.

My fingers are crossed as I venture out and ask the question, "Will we be safe from those who would criticize or attack us?" For example, those who take a moral position that one man, one woman monogamous relationships are better, healthier, holier, or just right. In my imagination, these people might be from the religious right, political conservatives, or members of the moral majority. Beyond opinion and belief, is there a physical risk as well as a political or social risk? Historically, members of marginalized groups have been threatened with bodily harm and even killed for expressing their beliefs or just being who they are. And at times, the threat has seemed very close to home. In the early days of our relationship, I feared that my parents might decide we were unfit to raise my son and take legal action to become his legal guardians.

While our family still struggles with when and where to "come out" publicly, there is another more personal part of the polyamorous lifestyle that does not tolerate hiding. In order for a polyamorous relationship to work successfully, each person must be committed to working on themselves. Many monogamous relationships can ignore nagging feelings of jealousy, insecurity,

lack of boundaries, etc., because the construct of monogamy inherently puts these concerns at ease (at least for some). In a monogamous model of partnership, it is generally clear which relationships are legit and which are not. Polyamory offers no such net to fall back on, so jealousies, insecurities, boundaries, and the like all have to be explicitly and constantly worked on (both personally and in the relationship). Polyamory offers a certain level of personal and relationship freedom that I adore and cherish, and this paper is written in part to present the possibility of doing it differently, of stepping outside of the norm, of living life closer to oneself, and allowing the process to unfold. But with that freedom comes the hard work of forging your own way and facing off with all of your limits and edges. You must discover who you really are and expand as a person, which is a beautiful and challenging thing to do.

Recently a colleague who attended one of my presentations said, "What I am taking away from this presentation about polyamory is: double your pleasure and double your pain." There is some truth to this statement. Polyamory blazes a path of personal growth, love, and freedom that can be unbelievably rewarding and unbelievably difficult. It may not be for everybody, but I feel endlessly grateful to have found partners willing to carve out this path with me. I feel a bit shy to say this, but I am so proud of us for having the courage to embark on this journey and for having done the work necessary to sustain it all of these years. In fact, I am proud of everyone who has the courage to follow their own path of heart, however that may look, and this paper is in part a testament to them.

Polyamory in the Therapy Room: The Origins, Purpose, & Goal of this Paper

As mentioned earlier, it was only about two years ago that I heard the word "polyamory" for the first time. I was surprised to find a word for the lifestyle I had been living all of these years, and curious to find out more, I looked online and found a local polyamory meet-up group. At first, I was hesitant to join because I worried that the group was for "hooking up," which was not something I was interested in, so I just watched and waited for a while before finally clicking the mouse and discovering some interesting online discussions about polyamory. Then I found a local polyamory book club and attended a meeting. There I found honest, sincere people engaged in the serious endeavor of exploring polyamory, and my own interest began to grow. Several months later, on the meet-up website, someone posted an interest in starting a polyamory support group. Again I waited and watched to determine if that was something I might want attend, but before I knew it I had volunteered not only to attend the group but also to facilitate it! Thinking that only five or six people would attend, I was surprised that within a couple of days of announcing the support group, 20 people had rsvp'd and another 10 had signed up on the wait list. This was a real wake-up call to me about the desire polyamorists have for support and acknowledgement that specifically addresses their unique issues and needs.

Prior to my facilitation of the polyamory support group, I had worked with a number of clients who were exploring polyamory as a viable relationship option, and who sought therapy with me because they knew me both as a professional and as a woman who had been engaged in a long-term polyamorous relationship. Immediately after the support group began, polyamorist individuals, both in and out of relationships, approached me with an interest in my therapy services. In addition, there were people from other countries requesting therapy via Skype to help them sort through polyamorous issues.

The issues that surfaced in my work with these individuals dovetailed with many of the issues that I had confronted over 27 years of living a polyamorous life. One unexpected issue that clients consistently described was their challenge to find a therapist who would be open to, knowledgeable about, and accepting of their polyamorous lifestyle. It occurred to me that many, perhaps most therapists, process workers, social workers, psychologists, etc. were not educated about polyamory as a relationship style. This led me to wonder whether or not polyamorist clients have specific clinical needs, and if so, what were they? I began to research what kind of literature might already exist on the clinical issues of polyamorists and found very little on the subject. According to Geri Weitzman (2009):

> There is still very little education about polyamory in graduate psychology departments. Grad schools are ahead of the curve if they even include mention of polyamory in their human sexuality unit – and very few do. Even then, there is little training on what one actually does in the therapy setting with said clients. Hence, very few mental health professionals are truly equipped to work with poly clientele. p. 4

With this in mind, I developed the following research question: "What issues and themes can be identified within the subjective experience of polyamorists that can help inform therapists and Process Workers who are working with polyamorist clients?" In order to explore this research question, I decided to interview 12 people who identify as being in polyamorous relationships about their experiences with polyamory (for detailed descriptions of the research design, methods, and findings please see chapter two). The goal of this research was to educate therapists about some of the issues that might be present when working with polyamorous people, and it is my hope that this paper will give Process Workers and other clinicians the oars with which to row the boat when floating down the river with polyamorous clients.

Deep Democracy: How Process Work Has Made All the Difference

What is Process Work?

In the late 1970's, Arnold Mindell founded Process Work (otherwise known as Process-Oriented Psychology), which has its roots in Jungian psychology, physics, and Taoism. In very general terms, the practice of Process Work is of understanding people's "processes" within the context of the Tao or the flow of experience as it unfolds in oneself and in the environment. "The Taoist view of life assumes that the way things are unfolding contains the basic elements necessary for solving human problems" (Mindell, 1995, p. 22). In order to stay close to this "unfolding," Process Work is focused on expanding personal awareness and "paying attention both to events that support your identity and to the disavowed aspects of life – to which you do not usually pay attention – that disturb" (Mindell, 1993, p. 34).

As an awareness paradigm, Process Work has a wide range of applications including individual work, relationship work, and group conflict facilitation work. In the sections that follow, I discuss some of the Process Work theories and methods that have been most helpful to me both as a person involved in a polyamorous relationship and as a clinician and group facilitator to polyamorist clients.

Believing in My Path of Heart

One of the greatest gifts that Process Work has given me is the ability to accept my wild, adventurous, intense, and outrageous nature with greater ease. As much as I knew I could never

really deviate from my deepest self and path of heart, I was nonetheless chronically conflicted about my relationship scene and wondered if something might be wrong with me, wrong with us. I had a tendency to pathologize my curiosity, my intensity, my sexual explorations, my counter-culture relationship, and my general out-of-the-boxness, but Process Work helped me to see the value in my diversity. It offered a perspective that emphasized "the belief that inherent within even the most difficult problem lays the seed of its solution" (Mindell, 2002, p. 6.). In other words, Process Work suggests that what you doubt about yourself or what you think is wrong with you may in fact be the seed of something beautiful and perfect that wants to unfold and be lived more completely. For me, the idea that my family's polyamorous relationship might somehow be *perfect* and exactly what's needed was a radical and deeply relieving perspective.

Process Work does not hold preconceived notions of what is right or wrong, "it follows experiences rather than holding fast to any culturally determined standards" (Mindell, 2006, p. 6.) According to Diamond and Jones (2004), "following the flow of process involves caring for the absurd and impossible and going against conventional beliefs and ways of seeing things. . . . [it] also involves going with what is happening in a given moment, rather than resisting it" (Diamond & Jones, 2004, p. 18). This lack of judgment, attention to personal experience, and respect for the unconventional was liberating, and as I began to unfold and follow the flow of my individual and relationship experiences, my internalized judgments and resistance began to slowly dissolve. This cleared the way for me to embrace my path of heart more fully.

In the words of Arnold Mindell (1993)

> The path of heart makes you feel strong and happy about your life because it follows your dreams, your dreaming body, your mythical task. . . . If you view the world from the path of heart, you understand it to be the place . . . that you need in order to grow. The world is awful and awesome; from the viewpoint of the path of heart, what happens is meant to be used, completely and fully . . . to find our entire selves. pp. 143-144

By bringing forth awareness of how polyamory is an aspect of my life myth, Process Work has helped me to de-pathologize my view of myself and my relationship. It has kept me close to the dreaming and meaning that flows through this path, and it has paved the way for greater self-development and relationship growth.

Becoming Aware of Marginalization and Internalized Oppression

Cindy, Tom, and I have always been aware that our non-monogamous relationship meant that we were outside the mainstream, but Process Work provided me with the additional framing of marginalization, which has helped tremendously. To realize that non-mainstream people are marginalized by the dominant culture in such a way that it leads to internalized oppression was eye opening and relieving. As Mindell (1995) points out, "many people from minority groups are plagued by self-doubt, self-hatred or hopelessness and think these feelings are only their own problems" (p. 37), when in reality these people "suffer from different forms of internalized oppression picked up from the mainstream" (p. 69).

It is often difficult to recognize internalized oppression because it can take on the form of an inner critic, a relationship argument, or some other personal manifestation, but Process Work helped me to de-personalize it and wake up to the ways in which our difficulties and feelings of self-doubt were not entirely our own. Such pervasive forces can creep into a polyamorous relationship and have a huge impact on the interactions and atmosphere of the relationship. "You can exhaust yourself dealing with your personal pain and fighting not only the mainstream but members in your [relationship] who are unconscious of oppression's effects" (Mindell, 1995, p. 39). In addition, it can enhance and reinforce marginalizations that occur

within the relationship and between the members, but having some awareness of the internalized oppression goes a long way towards minimizing these effects, because "every time you free yourself from a sense of internal oppression, you begin to transform the cultures [and relationships] you live in" (Mindell, 1995, p. 38).

Our Relationship is a Worldwork Issue

Process Work suggests that, in a marginalized group or relationship, much of what people fight about is not necessarily related to personal psychology, but is instead a world issue being played out through the relationship. From Mindell's point of view, it is important to understand "that the inner self, relationships and the world are all aspects of the same community process" (Mindell, 1995, p. 66). In this way, "whenever you work on personal problems, you also address political issues" (Mindell, 1995, p. 65), and "you notice that you are a secondary process for the whole community. It is not you alone who wants to change, but a cultural path that wants to change. Your changes may therefore somehow be right for everyone else" (Mindell, 1993, p. 142).

Realizing that my marginalized voice and experience was not just tolerated but actually *needed* in the world was yet another breakthrough moment for me. After so many years of inner and outer criticisms and judgments, suddenly there was a perspective saying that the world needs our polyamorous relationship and experiences; that the mainstream may also slightly suffer from a rigid adherence to monogamy; that both the freedoms and the difficulties of a polyamorous relationship may be something our culture actually craves or may learn something important from. Is it possible that adherents to monogamous relationship structures need more openness in

their lives? Might they need more awareness and attention to their own inner diversity, to the myriad needs and interests they have that might not be wholly satisfied by one partner?

Mindell (1995) articulated the concept of worldwork wherein issues or world problems can be felt and processed by individuals through relationships and manifest in group dynamics. Viewing our relationship as a worldwork issue helped me to value our path of heart that much more, and it supported and encouraged me to come out, to express myself, and to step into yet another worldwork role: that of a therapist to polyamorous clients and a facilitator of polyamorist groups.

Discovering My Own Rank

In Process Work, rank is defined as "a conscious or unconscious, social or personal ability or power arising from culture, community support, personal psychology and/or spiritual power" (Mindell, 1995, p. 42). In other words, rank is the power or privilege that a person or group has in a given circumstance, and Mindell believes that when people are unaware of their rank, this lack of awareness can lead to increased oppression and escalations in conflict. "Power struggles are ubiquitous. People with less power are jealous, hurt and furious when others are not conscious of rank. Rank-consciousness reduces struggle universally" (Mindell, 1995, p. 53).

As a person in a polyamorous relationship, I'm often aware of the rank and privilege that monogamous people have, and at times it is easy to get frustrated with their lack of rank awareness. While it is important for me to recognize that I have little social rank in the world (at least when it comes to mainstream relationship styles), it is also important for me to recognize where I do have rank. As Mindell (1995) points out, "the trouble is, most of us are aware only of

the rank or power we do not have. We forget to notice the rank and power we do have" (Mindell, p. 58). Process Work has helped me to notice the rank that I do have. Although my social rank in the world is low, my psychological rank is relatively high because having a counter-culture relationship has forced me to work on my awareness, my edges, and my relationship in a very determined way.

Also, being part of a marginalized and oppressed group provides me with certain amount of spiritual rank that I may not otherwise have. Our relationship has given me ample opportunity to experience isolation, feeling on the outside of mainstream relationships, feeling afraid to celebrate our relationship both within the context of our extended families and in the world, and always feeling like I/we should act "normal" so as to not call attention to us. This made me feel unseen and unknown, and one person even called us an abomination. These experiences forced me to go deeply inside, to find a place of detachment and love for all voices, including those who judge me harshly. Opening to judgments made me aware of my own judgments towards my lifestyle choice, the ways in which I (like those who I accuse of marginalizing me) marginalize our relationship and me. At one point, I realized that I have a kind of spiritual rank that can only be gained by suffering.

> By surviving any kind of suffering, you gain power. . . . A tough life destroys many people. But for others, it can lead to insight, power and psychological radiance that . . . can intimidate and educate the mainstream . . . it can raise your consciousness and give you the power of understanding" (Mindell, 1995, p. 59-60).

In addition, I recognize that I also possess a certain amount of social rank that results from having two wonderful loving relationships, while many people struggle with loneliness and wish that they could find even one partner to share their life with. Becoming aware of my own rank has been an interesting and enlightening process, and part of that process includes coming

to terms with the rank issues that exist within our relationship. In a polyamorous relationship, some members have more rank than others. For instance, Tom and I have more social rank within the relationship because we are heterosexual and legally married, while Cindy and I have more psychological rank because we are both dedicated to psychological learning, personal growth, and awareness training. As the person in the middle, I have a certain kind of rank in the relationship because both Tom and Cindy "share" my time and attention.

Rank is fluid, it changes all the time depending on the circumstances, and developing my rank awareness has been tremendously helpful in our relationship, because "when we are heedless of rank, communications become confused and chronic relationship problems develop" (Mindell, 1995, p. 49). Noticing who has rank in a given moment can really help in the midst of a difficult relationship situation because it makes it easier to identify which perspectives or feelings may be in need of more support and understanding. "If you use rank consciously, it's medicine. . . . You can't get rid of rank, so you might as well put it to good use." (Mindell, 1995, p. 64).

Deep Democracy

Deep democracy is a term coined by Mindell to "addresses the perennial conflict of marginalization by emphasizing the value of all viewpoints and the necessity for them each to find expression" (Menken, 2001, p. 14). In other words, deep democracy means being open to all viewpoints, experiences, and emotions, not just the ones that we agree with, but also those that are uncomfortable, unknown, or frightening. This is a difficult thing to achieve, but it is worth the effort because "if change occurs by devaluing one state and throwing it out in favor of

another, the part that has been thrown out may come back to assert itself and sabotage what has already been accomplished" (Diamond & Jones, 2004, p. 36). Ignoring one viewpoint in favor of another only polarizes the two sides and moves them farther apart, but deep democracy tries to honor "that special feeling of belief in the inherent importance of all parts of ourselves and all viewpoints in the world around us" (Mindell, 1993, p. 5).

In my personal work, deep democracy has meant trying to accept and value all of my inner voices, diverse emotions, conflicting thoughts, subtle movements, etc. and trying to discover the important message or contribution that each has to offer. On a relationship level, deep democracy has meant honoring the viewpoints and emotions of each of my partners equally. The tendency in any relationship is to get polarized into your own position and fight for it, but Process Work has helped me to see "that instead of holding on to your position and defending your opinion, you [can] become aware of your process and that of your partner[s]" (Mindell, 1987, p. 97). Recognizing the contribution each individual makes to the relationship, and opening my eyes to the energies and nature of each of us has been amazing and wonderful. It made me feel a bit regretful that I didn't recognize all of the rich perspectives and contributions earlier, but it's a gift to recognize it now.

For example, there has always been a bit of a social activist in me who wants to burst forth from the closet, challenge societal norms, and force people to deal with my relationship style head-on. However, both Tom and Cindy are less inclined towards a social activist stance, and the topic of disclosure has been an ongoing negotiation. There were many times when I just wanted to change their minds, convince them that we needed to be public in order to pave the way for ourselves and others, but the philosophy of deep democracy sort of turned that on its head, and I had to ask myself, "What's right about their hesitation?" This question allowed me to

see and value Tom and Cindy's perspective in a new way. It helped me to realize there are forces and energies out there that could be malevolent and should be feared, and it reminded me that our family also needs a certain level of protection. I tend to always think that I should overcome fears and hesitations, but deep democracy encouraged me to ask what might be right or useful about them and to respect and appreciate the parts of self and family that are fearful.

Applying the philosophy of deep democracy is difficult work because there are always aspects of self or other that I would rather just change or just get rid of. Still, I do strive to develop an inner elder and facilitator that can hold and honor a diversity of perspectives simultaneously. It is this developing skill that I attempt to bring to myself, my relationship, my clients, my group work, and the world, and it is part of a learning that takes me into the depths of an oceanic process within me that has the room and space for everything, every way of being, every state, every thing.

This review of the key Process Work concepts relevant to the experiences of polyamorists is offered to Process Workers and other practitioners in the hope that it can be useful when working with polyamorous clients. While there are numerous Process Work theories and applications that can be used when working with polyamorous clients, the ones that I reviewed above have proven useful to me in my own polyamorous relationship, in working with polyamorous clients, and in facilitating groups of people exploring polyamory.

CHAPTER 2: THE RESEARCH STUDY

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the initial research question guiding my inquiry was, "What issues and themes can be identified within the subjective experience of polyamorists that can help inform therapists and Process Workers who are working with polyamorous clients?" In order to answer this question, I conducted a qualitative research study in which I interviewed people who identified as being in a polyamorous relationship. In the following sections, I will present the methodology, design, researcher biases, and findings.

Methodology

Phenomenological Research

This study uses a phenomenological research approach, which falls under the larger umbrella of qualitative methods. Unlike quantitative methods that use mathematical measurements to obtain empirical data, qualitative methods attempt to understand human experiences and behaviors by collecting data based on the subjective experiences of research participants. According to Denzin and Lincoln, "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them." (As cited in Spark, 2005, p. 9), and they are more interested in exploring and describing phenomena than testing or explaining them.

Phenomenological research is one of many qualitative approaches, and its primary purpose and goal is to explore phenomena through comprehensive descriptions provided by people experiencing the phenomena. Phenomenology is commonly considered the study of lived

experience, because it attempts to "describe how the world is constituted and experienced through conscious acts" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 184) and aims to "elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people" (Patton, 2002, p. 482). Spark (2005) offers this slightly more accessible description: "the phenomenological approach studies the way people experience their world, what people say about their experiences, what their world is like for them, and how to understand them" (p. 30).

Since my research question aims to explore the phenomenon of polyamory and the subjective experience of polyamorists, it became clear that a phenomenological study would be the best fit. This approach often employs in-depth interviews as the primary method of data collection because it elicits detailed descriptions of experience. According to Spark (2005), "a phenomenological researcher collects comprehensive, detailed descriptions from their respondents. Once information is gathered the researcher is open to emerging themes and patterns, and develops an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon" (p. 30). Sitting with people, asking questions, and listening to stories and emerging issues is an approach that suits my personal and professional style, and also encourages open, honest, and frank disclosures and self-reflections from the interviewees that can shed light upon the research question.

As a result, I decided to conduct interviews with people from the polyamory community as my primary method for collecting data. This data is then used to seek out issues, themes, patterns, and meanings that emerge as a part of the complex phenomenon of polyamory and to help generate an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experience.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Phenomenological Research

The biggest advantage of phenomenological research is that it seeks a broad exploration and understanding of complex phenomena as opposed to proving or disproving a specific hypothesis. Such explorations into the quality and experience of a phenomenon reveals levels of understanding and meaning that cannot be achieved through the more scientific quantitative approaches. By using interviews and first-hand descriptions, phenomenological data is rich and honors the complexity of individual human experiences. The approach is also a non-linear and emergent process that allows for unexpected information to unfold and guide the direction of the research.

The biggest disadvantage of phenomenological research is its subjectivity, which means the results have low reliability and validity and cannot be generalized to larger populations. In addition, because phenomenological research requires a great deal of time to conduct interviews, collect data, and analyze responses, sample sizes are often small, which further limits generalizability. Another disadvantage is that phenomenology relies heavily on participants giving accurate and complete answers, but there is always the probability that participants will omit information for privacy or fashion their answers to try to please the interviewer. Researcher subjectivity is also cited as a common disadvantage of phenomenology because the lack of researcher neutrality is likely to influence the findings.

Researcher Bias

In phenomenological research, the researcher does not aim for objectivity or neutrality and is instead an integral part of the investigation (Patton, 1990). This subjectivity is an advantage because it allows for in-depth conversations that can elicit interesting data, but it is essential for the researcher to engage in a process of self-reflection that accounts for personal biases since they will influence the research. By acknowledging biases, the researcher draws attention to the personal history, belief systems, and perspectives from which she views the research and inevitably influences it.

Many of my biases are already apparent from chapter one, but I would like to revisit some of them here and draw attention to some additional ones as well. Of course, my most obvious bias results from being a polyamorous person and from having my own experiences and beliefs about what it means to be polyamorous. In general, I believe that polyamory is a viable relationship path, one that calls for a willingness to engage in diverse relationships and an open attitude toward change. I see polyamory as an inclusive form of relationship, inclusive of others outside of the original couple, inclusive of additional points of view, issues, talents, skills, problems, concerns etc. Just more of everything.

Another one of my biases comes in the form of a love for freedom: freedom to be one's self, freedom to choose who one loves and lives with, freedom to live closely to one's unique path of heart. I am not a promoter of polyamory and do not think it's for everyone, but I do believe in freedom of expression in its many forms.

I am interested in marginalization in whatever form it takes, and I'm biased towards a deeply democratic process for polyamorous relationships. By that I mean that I am on the side of

hearing and respecting all voices on all sides of the issue. I am hoping that through compassionate conversation, through tough tussling of ideas, and through love, passion, and vision, that all sides will be considered and heard.

Because of my belief in deep democracy, I am also concerned about some of the language used in the polyamory community because it has a built in potential for marginalization. Words such as primary, secondary, tertiary, etc. are used to describe hierarchies of relationship, which also subtly imply the importance of those relationships. For example, the term "primary" could refer to a preferred relationship suggesting that others are excluded, of less import, or marginalized in some other intentional or unintentional way. I find some of these words problematic at best, and hurtful and marginalizing at worst. I am aware that this vocabulary is not problematic for everyone in the polyamory community, and that for some it is relieving to put a name on it and to clearly identify individual roles within the relationship.

I find that I am also concerned about the emerging notion that people who are engaged in or open to polyamory are somehow more spiritually or psychologically advanced. While I do believe that the challenges of living a polyamorous lifestyle can push a person to work on themselves and develop their awareness and relationship skills, I believe its complete nonsense to suggest that they are more advanced than other people. I am especially concerned that partners or spouses who are in polyamorous relationships but don't personally identify as polyamorous will be made to feel that there is something wrong with them if they are not polyamorous too. In my view, polyamory is not everyone's path; hurray for those for whom it is, and hurray for those for whom it is not!

I also want to speak about therapist bias, mine and others. I want to underscore my assumption and concern that most therapists do not know what polyamory is and therefore end up pathologizing clients by telling them to refrain from having "affairs" and to commit to their monogamous relationships. This possibility is disturbing to me, and my bias is that therapists do their best to educate themselves and examine their biases around monogamy.

Finally, I am biased in that I use a lot of my own personal insight and experience throughout this paper to help inform readers about polyamory and to help demonstrate some of the findings that emerged from the interviews. There is also a strong bias resulting from the fact that all of the participants are personally known to me, either because they are involved in the polyamory support group that I facilitate, are former therapy clients, partners of people I know, or are members of my own family system. I made the decision to include my partners, Tom and Cindy, as participants due to the longevity of our relationship and the insights that they can offer after 27 years of living a polyamorous lifestyle. Asking family members and former clients to participate in the study presented an ethical dilemma for me as I found myself in dual role relationships with them. In an effort to make the interviewing process more comfortable for these participants, dual role issues were discussed openly with each person and all of them self-selected to go forward with the interview process. Because I sometimes had intimate knowledge of participants, there is a greater likelihood that their answers were influenced by our dual role relationship and that my own interpretations of their answers could be influenced by prior knowledge.

Research Project Design

Participants

Participants for this study were selected on the basis of their involvement in a polyamorous relationship and their willingness to be interviewed about their relationship experiences. Twelve participants were interviewed for this study, and six relationship configurations are represented amongst those twelve (i.e., I interviewed multiple partners within relationships).

All twelve participants live in the Midwestern United States and were located through one of the following sources: my polyamory support group, my psychotherapy practice (former clients), or the partners of people in these two groups. I found participants for the study by asking people who are currently in or had previously been in polyamorous relationships if they would be interested in participating in a research project about polyamory. I also sought out participant volunteers who are involved in varying polyamorous constellations in order to explore a variety of experiences.

The following table displays some relevant participant demographics:

Age range:	32-69 years old
Race:	12 participants are Caucasian
Gender:	4 male participants, 8 female participants
Biological children:	7 participants have biological children
Legally married:	8 participants
Separated from spouses:	2 participants
Currently divorcing:	2 participants

The following table displays how participants identify themselves within the context of polyamory:

Involved in a polyamorous relationship:	All 12 participants acknowledge being involved in a polyamorous relationship configuration.
Identify as being polyamorous:	3 participants identify as being polyamorous in such a way that they cannot deny this aspect of themselves and feel they must live according to it.
Identify as polyamorous only by association:	6 participants identify as being polyamorous only because they find themselves in a relationship with a polyamorous person, and they are open to being involved in a polyamorous relationship constellation.
Do not identify as polyamorous:	3 participants identify as being monogamous within a polyamorous relationship configuration.

The following table displays participant involvement in and experiences with therapy:

Attended therapy while in polyamorous relationship:	11 participants
Had negative experiences in therapy with regards to polyamory:	5 participants
Had positive experiences in therapy with regards to polyamory:	6 participants

Data Collection

Data for this project was collected through face-to-face interviews with participants. Each participant was interviewed once, and the interviews were approximately 90 minutes in length. All interviews were conducted in my psychotherapy practice office in Evanston, Illinois, except for one couple that requested for the interview to be conducted in their home. All participants were given consent forms (see Appendix A) and provided with participant information sheets (see Appendix B) that outlined the intention of the study. Consent forms were signed by participants and collected before the interviews took place, and participants were informed that their identities would be concealed and remain confidential (an exception to this is my partners, Cindy and Tom, both of whom agreed to be identified by their real names in the paper).

The interview questions were semi-structured in that I had prepared a list of questions prior to the interviews, but the sessions were conducted in an informal way, and the structured questions were used as prompts from which new questions, in-depth conversations, and candid reflections emerged. The list of questions that guided my interviews is as follows:

1. What is your understanding of polyamory and how were you first introduced to polyamory?
2. Do you identify as a polyamorist?
3. What is your ideal for relationship?
4. What is your current relationship scene like?
5. If you do have children, what have you told them about polyamory? If you haven't shared with them why not?
6. Have you told extended family members, friends, co-workers, others in your community? If no, why not?
7. What has been the biggest source(s) of support to you in your endeavor to live an unconventional relationship?
8. What is your biggest struggle or challenge as a polyamorist?
9. Have you ever thought about therapy as a way of assisting you in your endeavor?
10. If you have not sought therapy, why not?
11. If you have, how was it finding a therapist? Did you have concerns about finding someone who would be knowledgeable of and sympathetic to polyamory?
12. What are the issues that brought you to therapy?
13. Who attended the therapy? You, partners, family?
14. How long did your therapy last?

15. Can you give an example or tell a story about what was most helpful about the therapy experience?
16. Can you give an example or tell a story about if you didn't feel understood or helped in therapy?
17. Do you think that there are issues unique to polyamorists that therapists should be aware of that we haven't touched on yet?
18. What do you think are the biggest benefits or most enjoyable aspects of being in a polyamorous relationship?

The interviews were audio recorded using a digital recorder and a tape recorder as backup. Once all interviews were completed, the recordings were typed into transcripts and used for data analysis.

Reviewing the Data

A subjective approach to reviewing the data was taken, which involved a process of reading and re-reading the transcripts to identify general and specific themes that could be explicated from the interviews. The first reading focused on understanding the general content of each interview, and the second reading was done with an emphasis on explicating specific themes from participants' expressed meanings. Once these themes were identified and collected, they were organized into groupings that constitute the findings of this study.

Findings

In this section, major themes that emerged from the data will be reviewed and discussed. Upon collecting and reviewing the data, the following six themes were identified in the interviews as significant findings:

1. Marginalizations and social obstacles for polyamorists

2. Challenges of disclosure, identity, and community

3. Agreements, negotiations, and contracts

4. Jealousy in polyamory relationships

5. Benefits of polyamorous relationships

6. Therapy challenges

In the sections that follow, each of these themes will be explored using participant statements and my own personal experiences to corroborate the findings.

Marginalization and Social Obstacles for Polyamorists

In this study, 9 of the 12 participants interviewed reported struggling with experiences of marginalization directly associated with their polyamorous lifestyle. Marginalization often occurs when one individual or group minimizes or disavows the legitimacy, rights, or privileges of others who are believed to be somehow different than the mainstream. Marginalized groups can be explicitly or implicitly marginalized. Marginalization often occurs outside of ordinary

awareness which means we do not notice when we are marginalizing ourselves or others, or when we are being marginalized. Internalized marginalization is the experience of oppressing one's self with inner criticisms or judgments. For example, I used to blame myself for putting my children in a position where they might feel like outsiders because I had chosen or created an unconventional relationship within which they also had to live.

For polyamorists, like other non-mainstream groups, marginalization occurs daily in small and large ways, from inside their relationship, from extended family members, and from the world. We live in a culture that places high value on monogamy and often fails to recognize or anticipate relationship structures that fall outside of the traditionally accepted constructs of single, married, or divorced. Our culture rewards and reinforces these relationship structures in big and small ways. For instance, athletic clubs offer family memberships and substantial savings to nuclear families but not to alternative ones. Teachers and school administrators tend to react awkwardly when three adults show up for parent's night. And the law has yet to legitimize homosexual and polyamorous relationships by sanctioning their unions with the same rights and privileges of married heterosexual couples.

These and other instances of marginalization surfaced during the interviews, and many participants reported feeling social pressure to choose monogamy over having multiple committed partners. Helen, a 32-year-old mother of three who is currently in the process of divorcing, reflected on her experience of trying to reconcile her early pull towards polyamory in light of social expectations that she embrace monogamy:

> Helen: My first serious relationship in high school was with a guy who lived in a different town . . . at the same time I had feelings for [2 other] men. I did not really know how to explain that. I had no vocabulary for that and did not even understand the idea of open relationships. I did not know anybody who had had an open relationship. But I

> knew that it was possible to have strong emotional connections to more than one person at the same time and that there was no problem with that. I was not cheating on someone or falling out of love with one person to fall in love with somebody else. . . . It became something that I put aside, that I had to watch out for, in terms of if I am in a relationship, there is a possibility that I could meet someone else that I could fall in love with and that is a problem. Society says I am not supposed to do that. So, the easiest way to do that was not to talk to other people that I found interesting and attractive when I was in a relationship.

Helen's comments highlight the difficulty that individuals face as they become aware of their own polyamorous inclinations and begin to consider options other than monogamy. As a teenager, Helen wrestled with this mainstream expectation and her own impulses toward loving more than one man. The pressure to minimize and disavow her feelings is a reflection of the marginalizing forces in the community around her. Her resolution to avoid talking with other men she found attractive reflects an inner marginalizer that suppressed her and argued with the part of her that actually believes her polyamorous attractions are natural and somehow right.

Others experiences of marginalization reported by participants included discrimination and a lack of legal protections related to shared property, inheritance, child custody, hospital visitations, etc. Although these issues are important and socially relevant at this time, only one participant in the study alluded to these concerns. As the following quote demonstrates, one of the biggest challenges and social concerns for my husband, Tom, has been the legal ambiguities of polyamory:

> Tom: There is no right way [in polyamory]. With no right way, there are no rules. I would say start with the legal issues, especially if there are children and property. In your [Rami] absence, not even death, but let's say you are in a coma -- all the legal stuff has to be as clear as possible, it is not always going to be perfectly clear.
>
> The law revolves around precedent and there is no precedent . . . It is going to take a long time before there is anything in the legal code. Things are changing very, very slowly.

> I think the culture that we live in, the society that we live in is based on family life . . . so I think that anything - polyamory or communal living - does not threaten it [the culture] but it treads around the perimeter where the boundaries are vague, the expectations are vague. So society has a hard time interacting with it, and it has a hard time interacting with society. There are all kinds of things that can unfold because a person decides, "I am not going to abide by this law or cultural norm." There is a lot of havoc that can be caused by seemingly innocent stepping outside of convention. And I think this [polyamory] is one of those cases. It is a social experiment in progress and . . . could get messy.

Tom is talking indirectly about explicit marginalization that is codified or unaddressed by the law. His perception is that our society and law is based on the traditional heterosexual family structure, and that choosing to step over that line means wading into areas where boundaries are vague, things are messy, the potential for havoc exists, and there is no "right" way.

In the following interview quote, Cindy, my partner, describes the impact of living in a culture of non-acceptance:

> Cindy: I think that everything about how the culture seeps in between us, because it does not accept us – every form that that takes, takes some joy away from our life together, and I think without that . . . I imagine without that we would be a lot freer.
>
> I think the most insidious are pervasive subtleties that are really hard to get a hold of and I think that that keeps a kind of exuberance out of our relationship that I really miss. I feel that it is a big element that is kind of like an obstacle or something . . . It is so constant though. It is part of our relationship. So, I mean I don't think you would recognize me without it. It is just such a big part of the context.
>
> I think that is what it is, and I think without that really deep acceptance from the culture that we are just not free. I am restricted, so we are restricted - we are restricted all the time.

These comments suggest that marginalization impacts both the relationship and the individual by stripping exuberance and freedom from the experience. Beyond that, they also reflect a sense of self that is tempered by or adapted to the social context within which the relationship exists.

Each of these participants describes themselves in relationship to a larger culture that they are not quite apart of. They struggle to reconcile their desire for full privileges with their desire to honor a part of themselves that lies somewhere outside the mainstream. Their compromises, fears, and losses are poignant and illustrate three different ways that marginalization manifests: implicit messages from the culture, institutionalized forms of marginalization, and the persistent impact of marginalizing forces on one's personal identity and relationships.

Navigating the endless maze of explicit and subtle forms of marginalization is challenging. Often it is not obvious what is happening. It is easy to internalize cultural messages and believe that something is wrong with the individual or relationship, when in reality institutionalized marginalization and subtle cultural beliefs and conditioning are at play. When these social and cultural issues get projected onto oneself, one's partners, or the entire family system, they may be mistakenly seen as individual or relationship issues and put pressure on the system. Unconscious internalizations of societal marginalization and the lack of awareness that often goes along with it have been ongoing challenges for many of the participants in this study, as well as for my self.

An example of this from my own life was when we had two school-age children in the house, and there was periodic stress about which adults would attend school meetings and events. Every time one of these events approached, Cindy, Tom, and I would find ourselves in a complicated negotiation or difficult interaction because we were concerned about making our relationship public or making one of the kids uncomfortable if we did disclose it. Cindy would often become sullen and withdrawn, imagining that the distress she sensed in the house meant Tom or I did not want her to attend the event. Then her feelings of being excluded would

seemingly multiply over mundane decisions like where to go to dinner. Conversely, I thought Cindy was being self-centered and had lost sight of the central importance of the well-being of the children and their need for normalcy and to fit into their social world. The high level of stress related to this process would frequently overwhelm and drain us of the desire to attend school events at all and there were many times when we blamed our personal psychology and relationship dynamics for these complications.

Then, one day, I learned about a Process Work theory that opened a new window, a new way of looking at these struggles. Worldwork theory (large group process) suggested that, yes, our personal psychology played a part in our difficulty, but a much larger part of our conflict might be connected to and resulting from larger world issues. It was not only us who were saying "no" to our whole family coming to the school; it was also the world saying "no, you don't belong here." The larger system of the school and the world was not very welcoming of our alternative family, so the problem was actually between the unwelcoming system and us, not between Tom, Cindy and me. The world was excluding us in subtle and indirect ways and we felt it. From a worldwork perspective, the world, represented by the school, needed to be more inclusive. Because it was difficult to recognize this dynamic, and because it seemed impossible to have a direct interaction with the school and larger culture, the dynamic manifested as a problem within our family that we had to work out alone. Now we are much less likely to assume full responsibility for such difficulties. Instead, we allow for and explore the ways in which outside world issues may be surfacing through our relationship.

Challenges of Disclosure, Identity, and Community

In this study, 11 of the 12 participants interviewed discussed challenges involved in disclosing their polyamorous identity or relationships to family, friends, and community. Disclosure implies that a person has both a public identity and a lesser-known private identity. When members of a marginalized group cannot be identified by their appearance, they inevitably face the questions of when to disclose, to whom to disclose, and how much to disclose about their non-mainstream status to others. Disclosure, or "coming out" to others, is rarely a single decision, announcement, or event, and is instead an ongoing process of decision making that must be made at many points in one's life. For polyamorists, the disclosure process often includes coming out to oneself, to potential or current partners, to friends and family, and to a myriad number of people in public life where the question of one's relationship status is raised for legal, institutional, vocational, social, or other reasons.

For most people, polyamory is still a relatively unknown or unacknowledged relationship possibility, so coming out means crossing personal as well as social edges. The disclosure journey starts with a recognition that you are not who you thought you were! Since most people begin with the assumption that they will be a member of the mainstream world of monogamy, a shift in self-perception must occur at some point in their personal development. The path to identifying as belonging to the sub-group of polyamorists is a long and winding road complicated by society's lack of awareness about polyamory and the common confusion of polyamory with other alternative relationship practices including swinging, open relationships, polygamy, etc.

While people choose to handle disclosure issues in many different ways, it is frequently a major source of stress and anxiety for polyamorists. Challenging questions emerge: What does being polyamorous say or mean about me? What will others think? How will they respond? In addition, people's reactions to the news that a friend, relative, or co-worker is engaged in an unconventional relationship structure can be varied, and participants in this study reported a wide range of responses spanning from warm, accepting, and embracing to confused and indifferent to withdrawal, anger, and condemnation. Telling others that you are actively involved in or considering a relationship that runs counter to mainstream expectations and values means having to shift away from your presumed identity of "normalcy" and the social safety it affords.

The 11 participants in this study who discussed disclosure issues recalled struggling with at least some of the following: deciding whether to come out or not and to whom they should disclose; deciding when and how much information should be shared; dealing with judgments from others and with desires for acceptance and understanding; managing fears about being discriminated against, rejected, or attacked; handling concerns about the impact that coming out might have on others; and realizing desires to reach out to other polyamorists for support and community. The following interview description and excerpts touch on several of the disclosure issues mentioned above, including the participant's attempts to keep her polyamorous relationship hidden from others as well as the judgment and rejection that can follow a disclosure:

> *Sue and Michael are married. Sue identifies as a polyamorist while Michael does not. Sue's life story is somewhat unique in that she is both the daughter of polyamorous parents and identifies as a polyamorous woman. Currently 42 years of age, Sue was 6 when her parents brought a female partner into the family. Several years later, her father's partner had a child with him as well. While Sue's maternal grandparents were accepting of her family's relationship configuration, Sue's uncle (her mother's older brother) responded with outrage.*

Sue: It has been quite a personal journey for me, and a relatively painful one. The painful part began even before I heard the word polyamory. My uncle said, "This is unacceptable, you cannot do that!" [He] took the stance that my father was an abusive, bad man, and if my mother was going to stay with him, he was going to have nothing to do with any of us. But the painful part for me was around 13, where it really came into my awareness that this [my parent's relationship] was different, and this was something that we didn't talk about. And along with that came this question, "What if we talked about it? What would happen if people knew?" And …in 6th grade I told a friend, the first person I told outside the family.

The one friend that Sue told began telling other friends. Soon word of Sue's unique family configuration spread throughout the school and she started feeling pressure.

Sue: It became this thing [at school], "Well, what is it about Sue's family?" I felt a mix of discomfort and also liking the attention . . . I was popular but [there was] also this thing that if I tell them, they might not like me. And . . . the hardest part was . . . that if I tell them, I would be betraying my parents in some way . . . I felt guilty about it . . . so, I told my Mom that I had told my friends. My mom got really upset that I had told my friends . . . They were doing their thing, and I was NOT supposed to talk about it. It was none of my business.

What I can say is that their [my parents'] discomfort with the situation made it uncomfortable for me. They basically took the response that it was nobody's business outside the family, and who we choose to tell is nobody's business. So [dad's other partner] was [described as] a friend of the family, and if anybody poked or said "I don't understand" they were considered rude. "They were a jerk!" And my dad was just fine with that.

Amazingly, I mentioned it to her [my mother] a couple of years ago, and she still had that reaction, "Yeah, I can't understand why you did that," and I said, "Hate to say this Mom, but I really felt you should have supported me [to tell my friends and not keep the secret] . . . Now I feel like, wow, you really did not do your work around that!"

Sue's family story illustrates some of the complexities related to disclosure. The grown ups in Sue's family (i.e., mother, father, and father's partner) decided not to disclose their relationship beyond the immediate family, perhaps because of her uncle's strong reaction and rejection. Perhaps in an effort to protect Sue, her mother forbade her to share the details of their family life with others, but their story reveals another interesting dynamic related to disclosure. Her parents' attempts to avoid discrimination and keep their relationship secret lead them to preemptively reject and criticize others, potentially increasing their isolation.

When the decision to explore polyamory surfaces many years into a marriage the repercussions of disclosing to grown children and longtime friends can pose difficult challenges. Two participants in this study, Fred and Nancy, have been exploring a polyamorous lifestyle for a year and a half. Fred, in his 60's, identifies as being polyamorous, while his wife, Nancy, does not identify as polyamorous. In the interview, they each reflected on what it was like to tell others about their polyamorous explorations.

> *After Fred had his first relationship with another woman, he worried about disclosing his polyamorous identity to his oldest son for fear of damaging their close relationship.*
>
> F: My children were raised Jewish. My eldest son is now an Evangelical Christian, born again. My fear would be that if I told [my son] that I was polyamorous, he probably would never talk to me again. This is our [Fred and Nancy's] relationship. I see no need to out us to the kids.
>
> *When asked about disclosing to her community of friends, Nancy shared her experience of coming out to them. Nancy's account suggests that her attempts to accept and support her husband's exploration of polyamory were very challenging for her friends, and Nancy suggests that their monogamous identities may keep her friends from being able to accept their choices.*
>
> Nancy: Some of my girlfriends know some details and they are anti. They are totally anti because of the fact it [Fred's explanation] was a "don't ask/don't tell" . . . which in hindsight was not a healthy decision. We can understand GLBT and [my friends] can too, but polyamory is something that I think the "normal" couple can't grasp and understand, because they have a partner. A normal couple would be a monogamous couple . . . and I don't think that any of them [Nancy's friends] knew the term polyamory. First thing somebody said to me was "Is that swinging?" and I could almost see the disgust in her face, and I said "No, it is not that!"

Because most friends, family members, and colleagues have never heard the term polyamory before and do not understand what it means, they can be quick to reject and harshly judge polyamorous people. As a result, the process of disclosure can be challenging, painful, disappointing, and frightening, all of which were experienced by the following interviewee:

Anna is currently in the process of getting a divorce from her husband, James. James tried to embrace his wife's love for another man and accept her exploration of polyamory, but he finally realized that polyamory was not for him and that he wanted to be in a monogamous relationship. As a result, after much pain and suffering, Anna and James decided to end their 15 year marriage. Anna has now been together with Paul for 3 years. Paul has been married for 26 years. According to Paul, his wife, Rita, is aware of and open to his unfolding polyamorous arrangement with Anna.

Anna: [Disclosing to others] has been the most shattering, horrible part. I have no relationship with my siblings except for my younger brother, who does not know. I have had no relationship since I told them because they have been extremely judgmental and condescending and horrible, really awful - incredibly painful. I don't know which has been worse, the separation from my husband or being rejected - abandoned, really - by my older brother, sister, by friends. My brother just started putting me down and yelling at me . . . he texted "You are creating destruction in your wake." [Anna's sister said] "The first thing I want you to know is I will never have an interest in having a relationship with Paul."

While some of Anna's friends were supportive, two of her closest friends of 20 years "dropped" her. They saw her relationship with Paul as an affair, an illegitimate relationship, and accuse her of infidelity and of being narcissistic.

Anna: I got nothing but judgment, condescension, and finally they just stopped calling without an explanation. There have been friends on the periphery who have backed away. Let me tell you, being honest, I am still questioning if it [polyamory] is a good thing or not. There are days when I wonder if it was worth it. Then, I think about Paul and of course, it was worth it. I cannot imagine not having him in my life in an important way. But, boy, it came with such a price that I never dreamed it would come with, and it is still unfolding.

For Anna, disclosure has been accompanied by significant losses. She did not anticipate the reactions that others would have to her polyamorous relationship with Paul, and her story reflects the complexity of dealing with other people's reactions and the heavy burden that it can exact socially and emotionally.

The participant experiences cited above illustrate some of the diverse struggles polyamorists face when disclosing their identities, interests, and relationships to others. Other participants shared similar themes and challenges. Family and friends sometimes express their own reactions in harsh or disturbing ways, and even close friends who are perceived as being

liberal and tolerant may have edges to seeing beyond prescribed formulations of relationship. In addition to fears of rejection or public scrutiny, internalized oppression may cause some polyamorists to remain closeted or to disclose sparingly.

In addition to disclosure issues, many participants expressed challenges having to do with their own identity. One of the interview questions was, "Do you identify as a polyamorist?" and answering this question was not always a simple "yes" or "no" for those interviewed. The question frequently stimulated reflections on what it means to be polyamorous, who does and doesn't identify as polyamorous, and why. In this study, three participants identified as polyamorous, three identified as monogamous, and six were not sure and drew a distinction between being in a polyamorous relationship and having a polyamorous identity.

One unique aspect of polyamory is that sometimes all of the partners in a relationship identify as polyamorous, while at other times only some of the partners identify as such. The symmetry of all partners identifying as polyamorous does not in itself say anything about the structure of the relationship or the kinds of issues they will encounter. However, asymmetrical relationships may cause some people in polyamorous relationships to question their identity. In essence, these partners are asking themselves if polyamory is circumstantial for them (i.e., are they only in a polyamorous relationship because they are in love with a polyamorist?), or if polyamory is something they identify with independent of their particular relationship constellation.

Crystal is in a committed relationship with, Wanda, who identifies as a polyamorist. Although Crystal did not have another girlfriend at the beginning of their relationship, she is

open to the possibility of having one in the future, and her answer to the question, "Do you identify as a polyamorist?" is complex:

> Crystal: I don't consider myself polyamorous, but I am a part of a polyamorous triangle. I am in a loving relationship with one person but she is also in love with and in a loving relationship with someone else. I am in a polyamorous relationship because the person I love loves someone else. And that is interesting because I am not the one that loves more than one person. So, if someone were to ask me if I were polyamorous, I would say "No?" with a question mark at the end. It is more like a process right now, because it did not start out that way.

Crystal went on to explain that if or when she has a girlfriend in addition to her primary relationship with Wanda, then she would think of herself and identify as polyamorous.

Several other participants expressed the point of view that developing a polyamorous identity is a process that unfolds over time. Anna, who is in the process of getting divorced and in a polyamorous relationship with Paul, answers the question as follows:

> Anna: I think [I'm polyamorous] but I am not sure. I think that had my husband been able and willing to be open to my relationship with Paul, I would have continued on with both of them. So, I suppose I could consider myself polyamorous. For me, right now, it is still so new, and I would say it is an ongoing question and consideration.
>
> Paul and I are very committed to each other and we love each other very much. We talk about what would it be like [to live together] once in a while. He lives with his wife and their youngest daughter up north, and I am down here. So, I see him every other weekend for three nights, sometimes longer, sometimes two nights. That is really hard, and I miss having someone to come home to. Once in a while, I wonder if I should start dating, but right now that feels too complicated for me.
>
> I suppose technically I could consider myself polyamorous. I am dating a married man and it is all open and honest. Rita [Paul's wife] knows me, and I am going to be up there on Friday. I will sleep over [at their home] for the first time.

Some people experience polyamory as a deep sense of self that pre-existed their discovery or contemplation of relationship constructs other than monogamy. Among some

polyamorists there is controversy and debate about whether polyamory is a lifestyle choice or a hard-wired, innate pull. Sue and Michael have been married for 18 years, and in the following excerpt they explore their thoughts about polyamory as an identity:

> Sue: It is much more about being open to what comes along. For me polyamory, is not a choice. For me it has just been dealing with my experience.
>
> Michael: That is interesting because I have heard people saying that they are polyamorous as an identity, like being gay. Once recognizing they were gay, that was their identity. Do you think of yourself that way?
>
> Sue: For me, I don't have an identity beyond noticing what happens to me. And what I notice is that I have this pattern. Every three to five years somebody will show up where I need to pursue this thing of the heart, this very strong uncontrollable attraction. I need to be with that until it resolves itself in some way, and that seems to be my nature, seems to be who I am. Every time it happens, that may be the last, [and I think] maybe I have out grown it.
>
> Michael: There are people who intentionally endeavor to engage in a polyamorous lifestyle, which is different from what you are saying.
>
> Sue: For me [it] is an evolution around my awareness of touch and my need for connection. And that is one thing that I do try to do more of in my life, and in the relationships that are open to it. So, it has opened my boundaries to being sensual, affectionate, and physical with people in a way that traditionally in our culture, we would say, "That is not OK! That does not fit into monogamy."

Other interviewees also expressed a strong feeling that polyamory is a deep identity and not a choice. Helen reports that she believes polyamory to be an inborn identity that is super-ordinate to other identities she may hold and essential to who she is. Helen believes that she cannot choose to change this identity, that it is political, and that it defines where she belongs in the world.

> Helen: I do identify as polyamorous. The term is a differentiating term. What it means to me is that you have multiple emotional connections with people, or you have emotional connections with multiple people at the same time. You are able to be in love with more than one person at a time, which is very distinctive, to me, from *swingers,* let's say. The term s*winger* has a sexual definition . . . and polyamory is not about sex. To me, it is about the emotional connection. If sex comes out of that emotional connection that is

> something you decide with your partners, but it [polyamory] is about the fact you have an emotional connection and want to be friends and lovers in every other sense of that term. S*wingers,* in contrast, have no emotional connection; it is strictly "we want to liven things up in the bedroom thing."
>
> It is an identification that mirrors LGBTQ identification in the sense that it is not something I can control, squash, or stop. I did not make a decision to do this. It is not something I can stop. So it is an identification in the sense that I can either use the identification and belong somewhere or I cannot - in which case I am really struggling against myself. It is a "where do I belong" identification.
>
> So there is a distinction between someone who is polyamorous and someone who chooses to be polyamorous. It is different to me in the sense that you have people who are gay, lesbian, or people who are honestly bisexual. But if you are bisexual and you are monogamous, in the end you will end up being straight or queer. If you get married and are monogamous you are no longer bisexual. Monogamy trumps that. So in my life, polyamory trumps everything else, so it is sort of the first for me.

In addition to disclosure and identity challenges, 8 of the 12 participants reported a desire for a supportive community that would accept their polyamorous relationships and encourage their coming out processes. In my own experience, this need was clearly reinforced when members of a local polyamory group put out a request for a group facilitator, and my partner Cindy and I responded to the call and have been facilitating the group for over a year now. More than 30 people attended the first group meeting, and several hundred people have attended over the course of a year.

This section illustrates some of the issues that people in polyamorous relationships face regarding disclosure, identity, and community. By recognizing how these complex issues are entangled with self-perceptions, internalized oppressions, relationship conflicts, family dynamics, and social roles, perhaps friends, family, colleagues, and therapists of polyamorists will have a greater appreciation for the difficulties that polyamorous people face when trying to define their identity, come out to others, and establish a supportive community.

Agreements, Negotiations, and Contracts

Because polyamorous relationships can be formed in a multitude of ways (e.g., triads, quads, etc.), there are no clearly defined roles or expectations about how to share, divide, or let go of valued commodities like attention, sex, time, and money. This lack of established conventions is also partially due to the fact that there are few, if any, polyamorous relationship models to guide people through the maze of relationships concerns that inevitably arise. As a result, many polyamorists make painstakingly crafted relationship contracts and agreements, which challenge all of the partners to explicitly accommodate and appreciate the needs and desires of everyone in the relationship.

Critical areas of concern that must commonly be negotiated in the process of creating and sustaining a polyamorous relationship include questions such as the following: How are new polyamorous relationships formed? How will new partners fit into the existing relationship? Will there be a distinction between primary and secondary relationships? What kinds of rules or boundaries will be established and followed? How, where, and when will partners share time, money, attention, sex? What happens when a partner feels left out or is not getting their momentary needs met? How are individual and relationship boundaries defined, established, maintained, and protected? In this study, all 12 of the participants spoke about some of the challenges mentioned above, and they shared the ways in which they have attempted to create and define their needs and boundaries within a multi-partnered relationship.

In the growing polyamory community, a vocabulary has developed to help individuals, partners, and spouses talk about their sometimes complicated relationship structures. Some people use the terms “primary,” “secondary,” and “tertiary” to specify and describe the roles of

their partners. Viewing and relating to one partner as secondary may help the primary partner retain a sense of their importance and protect the relative strength of that relationship. Such distinctions can provide clarity and help to avoid conflicts, but they can also indicate a hierarchical structure of higher and lower ranking partners, which can cause secondary partners to feel marginalized within the relationship. The intricacies of trying to define roles and formulate constellations of relatedness across multiple partners are a challenge that virtually all polyamorous relationships must come to terms with.

Anna, a woman in her 40's, shared her experience of being a secondary partner to Paul, whose primary relationship is with his wife, Rita. In describing her role, it is interesting to note that Anna refers to herself as "the mistress," yet she finds the language of primary/secondary difficult and marginalizing.

> Anna: We talk about that now, and Paul hates the term "secondary." I am very much a primary in his life and yet, you know, there is a reality and that is that he is with his family most of the time, and I am here, and if there are the holidays or birthdays, his birthday or Valentine's Day . . . do I get to be a part of that or not? Does he come down here? Does Rita join us? So, I would have to say that, in some ways, I do feel marginalized, not because he has any desire for me to feel that way, but because the reality dictates that at this point.
>
> Paul is working on getting me there for Thanksgiving for the first time. I want to meet his mom who is terrified to meet me. It is all very scary! I don't know how I will fit in, especially if her [Paul's wife's] family is there . . . I am the "mistress," and they are very conservative politically and religiously. And there I am, this Jewish girl coming out to the farm and sleeping with their sister's husband!

In this example, the term and designation of being a secondary partner was painful for Anna and for her partner Paul. She associates the designation with having less privilege in the relationship, less input in decision making, and being less included. That Anna used the term "mistress" to characterize how the family probably views her, points to her fears and concerns

about the illegitimacy of her relationship with Paul and her desire for validation, power, and acceptance. However, another participant in this study described having a very different relationship to the term secondary. Helen, a woman in her thirties, currently in the process of divorce, at this time in her life prefers the role of being a secondary partner.

> Helen: I would rather not be anybody's primary. Ideally, I would be involved with someone who is already involved with someone else . . . so, that I am not the center of attention. Part of that is because I am still coming out of my current relationship, and I don't want to be the center of anybody's life. I don't think I have ever wanted to be the center of anybody's life. I think that you have to be the center of your own life. So, the relationships I look for now are with very self- reflective people, or people who are with other people.

Although both of these participants were in the process of divorcing at the time of the interviews (they were divorcing because their husbands could not accept their polyamorous identities), they each described very different experiences of being in the role of the secondary partner. For one of them, being in a secondary role was painful and marginalizing, while for the other, it was relieving, positive, and preferred. This diversity highlights how important it is for therapists to keep their assumptions about relationship roles in check and to take the time to discover how the client thinks and feels about their role, whatever it might be.

In the following interview excerpts, 3 women participants who have been in a polyamorous relationship together for just under one year discuss how they formed their polyamorous relationship, manage boundary issues, share attention, and create time for sex.

> *Wanda and Crystal live together and consider their relationship primary, while Wanda and Ella are girlfriends and their relationship is referred to as secondary. Wanda met Ella when Crystal was living in Europe. Wanda and Crystal decided together that it would be ok for Wanda to have a relationship with another person in order to meet her needs for sexual intimacy in Crystal's absence. Wanda met Ella and, after a brief period of time, Wanda and Ella found themselves falling in love with one another. Wanda felt that it was important for she and Crystal to make the decision together about Wanda and*

Ella pursuing an emotional relationship as this was outside their original agreement. Together they decided to work on a relationship contract to make the boundaries and expectations clear.

Wanda: We spent a lot of time working on a contract. I think [it took] 2 weeks . . . I felt that it really helped our relationship because it underlined the idea of boundaries and communication, and we had to discuss what things were allowed and what things were not allowed . . . That contract time was one of our closest times together because we were discussing really hard topics . . . It helped Crystal feel good . . . and Crystal did not feel she was being replaced.

When asked what has been the most challenging aspect of identifying and living as polyamorous, Crystal responded as follows:

Crystal: I have mentioned that experiencing and letting go of your partner, and understanding that just because she is loving someone does not mean she is not loving you. Understanding that emotional part, and then being outspoken about a lot of things, and the practical side of organizing who is with whom when, and if that feels good for everybody, has been I guess the most challenging at this stage right now.

We have tried different things. For example, splitting the weekend, my partner spending one day with me and one day with her, [but] that has not worked out and has not been very practical. We are currently trying to have one weekend with one partner and one weekend with the other one, so at least if there are changes in schedule for whatever reasons - for example it is Ella's weekend and for whatever reason they are spending it in the city - it is still her weekend with Ella. So Ella has the priority. And it seems to work well in that way. That there is a recognition that that is your time and sometimes we are having respect and are staying away, and then sometimes we are off spending the time together the three of us.

In this next excerpt, Ella describes working on boundary issues and reflects on building a relationship with Crystal as well and what it is like to share her girlfriend, especially in the area of sex.

Ella: I feel strange just walking in the bedroom when Crystal is there . . . I know it is Crystal's space. At first there were issues of how much of a friend can I be with Crystal, but now there is not. I don't feel that at all. I think I did mention before that if Crystal and I are together, I am really aware that we are not talking about Wanda, so I think that Wanda is comfortable with that. That she knows that is not something going on. I know that there are some things that Wanda has talked with Crystal about me, and I know there are some things that she hasn't. I am OK with what she has told Crystal.

It is interesting - I am not saying [polyamory] is not something I would choose, but it is not something I would have thought about on my own. Not that I didn't know it existed, but I had not thought it was something I could do. It takes different work, more head and heart work. I have to learn how to deal with Wanda's relationship with Crystal. In a monogamous relationship, that is not there.

> I spend the night at their house, on the pull out-couch and them in the bedroom. I did say that it would be weird to hear them having sex. I have not heard them having sex, possibly they have and I didn't hear it, but that is something I guess that I have to get used to, or adjust to, or request that it does not happen while I am there. If Wanda and I are on the sleeper sofa together and Crystal is in the bedroom what does Crystal think of that? Her feelings are different than mine. I think she is more OK with it. I think she thinks it is hot. I don't think it is hot.
>
> I think of it more as my girlfriend having sex with her other girlfriend, and that is not so comfortable for me right now. It is too much . . . I like watching reality shows so I think of myself as a voyeur in that sense, and I watch porn and most of the time I like watching it, but it is not the person right there. They are removed by TV-land or whatever.
>
> In an apartment when there is someone above you having sex, it is like "Oh my god, can you stop that?!" But when it's Wanda, it is more than "Can you stop making the noise?" There is something more personal to it. I have not quite figured all of that out. If I can get over that, or if it will always be there.

Another strong theme in Wanda, Crystal, and Ella's interviews deals with issues of inequity, marginalization, and disclosures within the relationship. Some of the inequities are unintended and result from Wanda and Crystal's longer relationship, but intended inequities are also evident in the explicit agreements made between Wanda and Crystal around disclosures of information. When these inequities started to impact Crystal in a negative way, the trio had to re-evaluate their arrangement.

> Wanda: At the beginning, Crystal was very much the primary, she still is, but there was a point where I was dating Ella and was with Ella. Crystal got to know all of the details. That was part of the agreement. And that was really hard for Ella, because Ella is a very private person. It was really hard for her to know that Crystal got to know everything. Sometimes, Crystal wanted to know everything and sometimes she didn't . . .
>
> And another turning point was when Ella had shared something with me that I did not feel Crystal got to know. It was Ella's story, and it wasn't up to me to tell Crystal. At the same time, I did not want to just tell Crystal that I was keeping something from her. Instead I told her that there were things that she didn't get to always know any more. At that point, we all talked about who gets to know what and that if it was something that was going to affect all of us, then Crystal got to know those things. But if it was simply Ella's story, that was Ella's decision to tell or not to tell . . .

> I don't think that Ella is up to the level of knowing what Crystal [knows] . . . It is not proportional, Ella does not know [as much]. And that has to do with Crystal and I being friends for so long. I am much more used to communicating with Crystal than I am with Ella . . .
>
> There are times when I notice that there is a cycle that happens in me, where I feel like every once in a while I have to choose. In the beginning, it was difficult because I was trying to divide weekends between them. I felt like nobody was getting attention. I had no time for me. I had to be "on" the whole weekend.

In this section, interview excerpts were used to illustrate how people in polyamorous relationships must consciously work on defining their relationships by making contracts, setting boundaries, deciding on disclosures, and negotiating time, attention, living arrangements, and sex. Although none of the excerpts above mention jealousy directly, it is nonetheless an undercurrent that often accompanies such negotiations, and it is a central issue that polyamorous relationships must contend with.

Jealousy in Polyamorous Relationships

An acquaintance of ours, a man who has always lived an open relationship life style, tried with all sincerity to live with three women whom he loved. His wife and his secondary partner were completely on board with an open marriage, and eventually brought in a third woman. After a year, our friend said, "It is completely impossible to pull this off. I cannot begin to tell you about the jealousy, the impossibility of being the one in the middle. I don't believe that anyone can succeed in this kind of relationship. It is absolutely impossible!"

In this study, 10 of the 12 participants spontaneously brought up the subject of jealousy. Jealousy is a relationship issue that has the potential to open doors to new levels of self-awareness, but it is more commonly experienced as a problem. When jealousy is viewed as a

problem in polyamorous relationships, there is a tendency to either see the person they are jealous of as the cause of the problem or to blame the person who is feeling jealous for not being more open, confident, evolved, or mature. Jealousy can be both a source of conflict and a reason for breaking off a relationship. In monogamous relationships, jealousy can (in principle) be resolved or eliminated by keeping the object of jealousy outside of the relationship, but in polyamorous relationships jealousy is frequently a reaction to someone or something inside the relationship, which cannot be easily eliminated without changing the essential nature of the relationship.

Three of the participants in this study were either in the process of divorce or considering divorce at the time of the interviews. Each of these participants entered into marriage with different visions of their futures; for instance, one couple entered into marriage with the intention of being open to other relationships, and the other two marriages discovered or decided to explore polyamory after 15 years or more of marriage. In the case of all three marriages, the spouses of the polyamorous partners were ultimately unable to include a third party in their relationships. Each of the non-polyamorous spouses (not all were participants in this study) identified as monogamous and claimed that issues of jealousy drove the couples to therapy and to work on the relationship. The non-polyamorous spouses interviewed in this study complained of feeling downed, excluded, marginalized, angry, and betrayed.

> *Helen and her husband agreed to an open marriage, at the time unaware of the concept of polyamory. Helen's idea of open marriage evolved into an awareness of her polyamorous desires, and after a couple of years of marriage her husband realized that he was monogamous. Sadly for Helen, her husband wanted the option of seeing others but could not tolerate it when Helen also wanted to see others. Their marriage could not survive his jealousy, and in the following excerpt Helen talks about her experiences of jealousy.*

> Helen: The bane of my existence is jealousy. I don't understand it. I cannot wrap my head around it. I just don't get it, and it is totally my stumbling block. I don't experience it, and so it is very difficult for me when my partners experience it. Even when I am being patient and what we need to do is work through these issues, it is not a logical thing to work through, and it is just so selfish which makes me angry . . .
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> I have been separated for 6 months from my husband of 2 years . . . Every couple of months, the idea of the open relationship has come up either in conversation with friends or [when] he is attracted to someone. About 8 months ago, right before he left, we had started going to counseling and he had the epiphany that he was monogamous – he liked the occasional sex on the side, but he wanted a relationship that was strictly monogamous, which led directly to him leaving. The separation was terrible. He wanted me to commit to being monogamous. If I would just give up this crazy idea . . . and not want to hurt him all the time. If I would just choose to do this other thing [monogamy], everything would be fine . . .
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> The culture teaches you to be jealous of other people, that love is a limited commodity, that the person you are with should only be in love with you, and if they are not, then they are being unfaithful to you and you should find someone who is better.

Helen's comments shine light on the difficulty that some people have in understanding other people's jealousies. In this way, jealousy is not really accepted as a legitimate experience that has value and can be understood or unfolded. In the excerpt below, Crystal shares how she has come to view jealousy, and the distinction she makes between jealousies related to her personal psychology (i.e., wanting or needing reassurance to deal with the complexities of polyamory) and jealousies related to polyamory itself (i.e., knowing your partner is having sex with someone else).

> Crystal: [The most difficult part of a polyamorous relationship] is the jealousy and [need for] reassurance, I would say. The reassurance is something that is more in my individual [personality] but the jealousy could be more the polyamory situation. It is just more in my face - the possibility that she gets her needs met somewhere else . . . In a monogamous relationship, you can always cheat, but it is not so much in your face and you don't know they are in the other room having sex with someone else. Well, I do, and I am dealing with that! Not only dealing with it but endorsing and agreeing to it!
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> So, I guess . . . insecurities that you might not work on in your individual relationship are just more exaggerated, more present [in a polyamorous relationship]. It does not mean the

relationship is not working. It just means some issues are bigger and therefore might need to be worked on more intensively because of it.

Crystal's comments demonstrate how people can decide to use their experience of jealousy to self-reflect and become more aware of their individual needs as distinct from their feelings towards the person they are jealous of. The opportunity to grow, learn more about oneself, and encompass new qualities is a lesser-known aspect of jealousy's potential, and it is not frequently embraced.

Two other married couples interviewed in the study introduced the idea of polyamory into their relationships after 20 years of marriage. The non-polyamorous spouses in these marriages identified as monogamous, were not open to including a third partner, and experienced jealousy issues that drove the couples into therapy.

Fred identifies as polyamorous, while his wife, Nancy, does not. They have been married for over 20 years and in the last year and a half, Fred became interested in finding out more about polyamory. He and Nancy discussed it, and decided that it was OK for Fred to pursue finding new "friends."

Fred thought that his definition of polyamory was clearly expressed, but Nancy had not understood that his pursuit included sexual intimacy. Fred began seeing Jane and Nancy befriended her not knowing that Fred was actively intimate with Jane. Fred and Jane saw each other for about a year and during that time Fred wrote a book in which he described his experiences with polyamory. When Nancy read the book, she realized for the first time what polyamory actually meant to Fred, and the revelation left Nancy feeling excluded, betrayed, jealous, and enraged.

Nancy: The most challenging thing was the feeling of betrayal, the fact that I was primping him to go out and not knowing that he was possibly . . . that he was going to have a sexual encounter with Jane . . . so it was hard to grasp.

Fred: I think jealousy has a lot to do with polyamory, and more specifically with polyamory than monogamy, though it can exist in both places.

Since then, Fred and Nancy have struggled to get their relationship back on track and are discussing the possibility of divorce. On the upside, they have also found that the process of exploring jealousy has supported them to communicate more deeply and to address underlying relationship issues that were previously unseen or unspoken.

Fred: To me it is discovering, learning, experiencing, emotions, feelings . . . The other day we were talking and I said "We have learned an awful lot about ourselves in this process."

Sue and Michael have been married for over 20 years and they have worked through some of their jealousy issues along the way. Michael does not identify as polyamorous, while Sue does. His self-reflective nature helped Michael negotiate issues of boundaries, equity, honesty, and jealousy that continue to surface in their marriage as Sue explores her attraction to others.

Michael: I have never considered myself polyamorous. I have always had one girlfriend at a time and usually I am just too busy. It takes enough effort with one, let alone with two, or three, or however many you want to get into.

The only reason we are even talking about this [polyamory] is that it was something that came up in our relationship - interest in other people - and it has been changing as we progress through our relationship. And thankfully, I have enough comfort with myself to be ok, as long as everything is within the boundaries we set.

Sue: To me, it was also like he was saying, that he got that there were no guarantees, and even if he could take it [polyamory], it did not mean he would not be hurt.

Michael: And we began our marriage dance then, with boundaries. We had some pretty heated arguments. I did not want to tell her not to see him because that was not my place, but I wanted her to not see him . . . A lot of it was dealing with it myself, and we had long conversations about how important the truth was, and bottom line is "If anything happens, if I leave, if you leave, whatever happens as a result of it, I need to know the truth."

And I needed to make a judgment because the mind is a horrible thing, mine is anyway. So, I decided that we have an agreement built on trust, and I have to tell my mind that that is where I am at, and what she tells me is the truth and there are no what if's and any of that other stuff. What came up for me thinking about multi-person relationships is equity. Thinking who is the most important and . . . I can imagine that will cause all kinds of friction. That happened with the first person she fell in love with and needed to be connected with, regardless of how it affected us.

Everybody has "Am I not important?" - Doubt. I did feel jealous, at first, and I had the fears, is she going to leave, is she going to fall in love with him? And then, I did a lot of sitting with it, and I realized that if that is what happens, that is what happens. I am not going to die from it. Figure something out and move on. That's life.

The excerpts in this section illustrate some of the ways in which jealousy surfaces in polyamorous relationships, and it demonstrates the complex background issues of rank, power, equity, marginalization, hurt, and betrayal that must frequently be navigated, but it also points to

how jealousy can act as the seat from which awareness, love, concern, and personal growth unfold and evolve.

Benefits of Polyamorous Relationships

Polyamory poses many challenges, but also brings many gifts including an abundance of intimacy, self-expression, self-knowledge, intensified communication, opportunities for personal growth and reflection, and a sense of family. Partners in polyamorous relationships often have a deep appreciation for the wisdom, strength, and courage that each partner discovers while navigating through these uncharted waters. One of the more surprising findings in this study was that all 12 participants reported believing that their experiences with polyamory have benefitted them. Even individuals and couples who were struggling and considering divorce at the time of the interviews were able to reflect on the positive aspects of their experience. As a result, this section presents participant responses to the interview question, "What do you think are the biggest benefits of polyamory?"

Several participants spoke about the high level of personal growth and self- knowledge that polyamorous relationships require and foster, and Helen shared the importance of being self-reflective when contemplating and sustaining polyamorous relationships:

> Helen: You really have to know yourself better and . . . understand what you want and need before you can even venture into a relationship with other people. And even when you venture into that relationship, it is always a growing, changing organism.

Crystal also emphasized how she has grown more independent through her polyamorous relationship, and how the entire relationship benefits from the independence that each of the three women has.

> Crystal: It is beneficial to learn to do things separately. We have been too exclusive for a while and that has not done us any good. And this [polyamorous relationship] is pushing me . . . [it] frees me up to do things on my own. I might not do that if I had Wanda all of the time around me. So, it is helping me as an individual to be more multi-dimensional. We are all constantly bringing something new in: new thoughts, new ideas, new feelings, and new experiences.

Expanded resources are another benefit that some participants recognize in polyamorous relationships. Having more than two sets of hands to prepare meals, more than one or two household incomes, more than two heads to solve problems, and more than two parenting figures in the house to nurture children and address the myriad number of day-to-day tasks associated with childrearing. The following comments describe the relief and high energy that can result from having more than two adults in the household:

> Helen: There is more of everything! More sharing, and caring, and time together with people that you care about. You don't have to get everything from one person. There is more ability to share the burden, and you get to raise your kids with more people!
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> Tom: It has been a net benefit, a net gain for our children not to have to lean only on you and me to answer every question they have had. Cindy is very bright and articulate. That has to have been a gain to them – I have no doubt about that.

Echoing Helen's earlier sentiment, one of the main benefits of polyamory for Crystal and Tom was the way that it supplemented and strengthened the primary relationship either by alleviating sole responsibility for meeting needs or by supplying something that compliments the existing relationship.

> Crystal: I think I have mentioned before that I don't have to carry the whole responsibility of making my partner happy. Sometimes, I don't have to do that all. It is a different relationship.
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> Tom: [It creates] more of a balance and better harmony for you and I, but I think we are unique. I think that many people can get along without that counterweight. Maybe they would benefit by it, but they are not going to stick their necks out that far. I thought it added balance that we lacked.

Many of the individuals who participated in this study recognized that intensified or enhanced communication was yet another benefit of polyamory, and that their appreciation for each partner grew as they worked through difficult communications about creating and adjusting relationship lives together.

> Ella: [Polyamory] might not be for everyone obviously. And in order for it to work successfully and happily and for everyone involved to be happy with it, it needs a lot of discussion and a lot of communication. It is amazing. I know I am with an amazing woman - that this is something she can do, [that] all three of us can do. It does take three! That's it!

When a new partner is being considered or introduced, there is often a need to articulate things that previously have not been spoken about, creating an opportunity for deeper communication and intimacy.

> Fred: There is no bull-shitting around in polyamory. We talk about our feelings, about what is going on inside of us, and we learn from other people about what is going on in them.

In this way, relationships are sometimes renewed and revitalized as partners openly share and express their different perspectives and wishes. Intimacy grows out of a shared effort to expand relationship boundaries and include others. This is especially important for partners who

love the same person but are not sexual with each other. Here is how Crystal and Ella described their growing connection to one another:

> Crystal: Already now, although we are only in this situation for 8 months, I have a more intimate relationship with [Ella] than I have with a friend. Some friendly relationship parts are still missing, but in other ways it is very intimate. We share in a way a partner and the love for someone, and are therefore differently connected than a lot of people are. We have an understanding. And there is more of an ability to rely on each other than just on a friend. So, we feel closer in how we organize and manage life, in that way.
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> Ella: The first thing that came to mind is that in some sense I feel like we are the Three Musketeers . . . It is almost like I have these two amazing women that are family, and we have Friday night dinners. We all sit down, and it has gotten to the point that I am not a guest . . . it feels more like family . . . Crystal and I are getting to know each other and I am more comfortable with her.

Finally, Fred talked about the creativity he accessed through his exploration of polyamory:

> Fred: I don't think I would have been able to write all that poetry, all those essays last year, if it were not for polyamory. It bubbled up from some place. I think it bubbled up from those experiences there. I was feeling alive again . . . it was like a re-awakening for me, yeah.

The theme of freedom was echoed by all respondents, and Cindy points out how this spirit of freedom may draw people to polyamory:

> Cindy: Each person has more freedom because the other partners are not as dependent on them as one would be dependent on a monogamous partner. I think people always go after more freedom. So, I think why people do something like polyamory is because, at some level, they essentially experience more freedom in it or through it.

Of course, not all of the polyamorous experience is free (internal and external limitations, discriminations, and oppressions come along with the territory), but to find, form,

and sustain a unique relationship structure and life path is a radical form of freedom and a huge privilege, because it allows a person to deeply follow and discover themselves and their partners.

Indeed, two common reasons that participants gave for embarking on the adventure of polyamory was a desire to be true to themselves and their polyamorous nature, and a desire to honor their love for multiple people, regardless of the unconventional constellation that it required. In her book, *Insecure At Last: Losing It in Our Security Obsessed World* (2006), Eve Ensler reflects on freedom:

> Freedom is not only being able to tolerate mystery, complexity, ambiguity, but hungering for them and only trusting a situation when they are present. [Freedom is] finding the place in me that connects with every person I meet rather than being different, better, or on top. Freedom means I may not be identified with any one group, but I can visit and find myself in every group. Freedom does not mean I don't have values or beliefs. But it does mean I am not hardened around them. Freedom is not knowing where you are but being deeply there. Freedom is about becoming vulnerable to one another, rather than becoming secure, in control, and alone. (pp. 197-198)

Therapy Challenges

The following pages are dedicated to participants' struggles with therapy as well their more positive experiences with therapy. Six of the participants in this study reported having had negative experiences and feeling dissatisfied while working with conventional therapists. Three participants had therapists who were polyamorous, and reported having positive experiences with therapy especially with regards to their polyamory relationship issues. The final three participants reported that they had not sought out therapists to deal with polyamory issues in their lives.

In my own life, I have been very fortunate to have worked with Process Work therapists who not only welcomed me and my polyamorous experience, but also helped me to see the impact of forces outside of our family that have played a part in our relationship dynamics. For that I am grateful and appreciative. Before I found Process Work, I was in analysis for six years with a kind, caring, supportive, related, and warm analyst, who helped me to work on early childhood issues. Today, when I was walking by the lake, I was reflecting on my experiences with this analyst and I couldn't remember discussing with him any of the issues that came up once Cindy moved in. How could that be? There were so many issues surfacing during that time. Was I shy to bring them up with him? Were they deemed unimportant by me or by my analyst? Twenty years ago, polyamory was barely on anyone's minds or lips, so now I find myself curious, incredulous actually, wondering if my analyst and I marginalized my relationships with Tom and Cindy and the difficulties we were having.

Today, it is clear to me that many therapists do end up marginalizing polyamorous relationship issues. In my private therapy practice, polyamory support groups, and in the interviews conducted for this study, I've heard frequent reports about the difficulties polyamorists sometimes face in their interactions and relationships with therapists. Two primary reasons cited by participants for these negative experiences were therapists' conscious or unconscious biases towards monogamy and their lack of basic knowledge about polyamorous relationships. Paul, who is married to Rita and partnered with Anna, spoke about his disappointing and painful therapy experiences.

> Paul: Twenty minutes into the interview . . . it was really clear that when I was talking about wanting to find a way to talk about our sexuality and how that is being affected by my new partner, this therapist did not believe me or my wife . . . [The therapist did not believe] that I was interested and committed to staying in relationship with my wife. The therapist did not believe my wife [when she said], "I am OK that he has sex." [The

> therapist] . . . stared her nose down at us, condescending almost . . . [and said] "I would be happy to take you as a couple, *but* no drug use, (there never was any) no physical abuse, (there never was any), and the affair has to stop!"
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> We went to see a second therapist, [and] I did not feel any judgment. I felt confusion from this person. She really didn't understand what was going on. We had to do all this explaining and bringing her up to speed. "What does this mean? What does that mean?" . . . She did not get it, she did not understand it.

Similar to Paul's experience in therapy, Cindy also felt that one of the therapists she worked with did not view her polyamorous relationship choice as valid and assumed that Cindy was struggling to define and understand herself. Ultimately, Cindy's perception that the therapist could not value her choice drove her to leave the therapy.

> Cindy: I was in once a week therapy with a traditional analyst. I just don't think that she could accept and support our relationship. I don't think she could hack our relationship as two women and further that you were married. The problem was that the stigma of being in relationship with someone who is married is so huge in our culture that it is really difficult to overcome.
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> To top it off, it was around the time that I was seeing [a man] also. So, to have this conventional, heterosexual option or this non-conventional, homosexual, polyamory option - seemed like I would have needed a lot more information to suggest that she [the therapist] was going to help me negotiate that in a way that felt consonant with who I experienced myself to be.
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> So, I had to basically choose between "Do I want to go through this whole thing of what I fully expected, and was right to expect, [which is] a kind of pathologizing of my relationship" or do I just say, "That is it! I see the writing on the wall!" - meaning it is unlikely this therapist is going to really support me in the relationship with you [Rami], and it is more likely that the kind of intervention that she is going to make is going to be something along the lines of "Let's think about what is *not* right about this for you." Which I think, at that point, if I did not have such a strong feeling for you [Rami], I would [have been] more willing to accept, but at that time I was thinking "I have been around this block before that I should move on."

Cindy also shared a more positive experience of doing therapy with Tom and me with a Process Work therapist who had had his own experiences with polyamory. There is a marked

contrast in her descriptions of working with this Process Work therapist and working with the previous analyst.

> C: It went really well. What worked about it was that everyone [Cindy, Rami, and Tom] felt that their position was honored and that the relationship was essentially supported. And I think that the things that did not work about it have to do with individual reactions to parts of what happened. Different people have different thresholds for intrusion and looking and investigation. I felt that that therapist was very interested in polyamory as an option for people, and very supportive of our relationship as a unit, and very sensitive to the nuances of our situation.

Sue reported on her therapy experience from the perspective of a young woman brought up in a polyamorous family where her parents had made an active decision not tell others about the family structure. Suffering from anxiety and depression, Sue sought out therapy when in college. Unfortunately, her experience in the school's counseling center reinforced her feelings of shame and a self-perception that she was abnormal.

> Sue: In college, I had a lot of anxiety and depression. I reached a crisis point and I remember going into the student clinic and having an intake with somebody in the counseling services. I remember this reaction, a couple of times, when I was telling them about my family. They would be taking notes and there would be this kind of…"Oh, oh my!" This sense that they did not quite know what to do with that.
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> I don't think I received anything other than compassion and empathy or just "How can I help?" But interestingly enough, I think it reinforced in me unconsciously that there was a problem. There was something really big, and I needed to do something about it. It reinforced, for me, that there was something abnormal about this and that it was something to be ashamed of, or that it was a problem.

The counselors that Sue met likely had little or no information about polyamory and although Sue experienced them as basically supportive, their lack of knowledge or sensitivity to what it might be like to be raised in an unconventional family was expressed as surprise and bewilderment.

The excerpts above demonstrate how polyamorists can have devastating and disillusioning experiences in therapy when the therapist is uninformed or unaware of their own predisposition towards valuing monogamy above other relationship structures. Conversely, polyamorous clients can have very positive, uplifting, and empowering therapeutic experiences when the therapist is able to show compassion, sensitivity, and genuine support. As a result, participants were very vociferous about identifying and clarifying their views on what therapists need to know and be alert to when working with polyamorous clients.

> Helen: [Therapists need to know] that you *love* more than one person. Therapists don't generally get that. That you *can* love more than one person!" Therapists need to consider that the relationship problem is not multiple partners. The problem is not that we are in love with other people; the problem is something else . . . To tell a person not to be polyamorous who is polyamorous, doesn't work.
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> Therapists should allow that the norms for poly relationships may be unique and distinct from what is considered typical for couples and other minority relationships. Therapists should strive for sensitivity to the importance of communication of individual needs in poly relationships - to know who you are and what you need, because if you don't know, no one else in the relationship can know that. And therapists can learn to recognize the pluses and minuses that multiple partners bring to conflict and its resolution, decision-making, time management and communication. Because you have more people, of course, things that might be minorly annoying in mono relationships, are amplified in polyamorous relationships. There are more things to do, more conversations to have, more feelings, more of everything!

Sue said she felt polyamorous clients have a unique need to explore and address issues of commitment, a need to be loved for their deepest selves and not for who they are supposed to be, a need to develop and connect with their experience of authenticity, and a need to be transparent with regard to conforming or not conforming to societal dictates. Paul expressed his concerns about therapist biases toward monogamy, and his desire for a therapist who is less goal-oriented, less judgmental, less pathologizing, and more willing to help clients explore the motives behind why they choose multiple relationships.

> Paul: Therapists will try to find ways of maneuvering, manipulating, shaming, doing whatever it takes to keep that [married] relationship functional. Therapists will say or do whatever it takes to keep that couple together. That success is defined by keeping them legally married and you negotiate whatever needs to happen in order to keep the marriage legally intact . . . [instead of] what would best serve them as individuals who will be in a relationship for the rest of their lives, married or not, irrelevant.
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> There is a strong focus on sex. If I am interested in having sex with someone outside my marriage, that is wrong. Get back in the box and we will deal with all the rest . . . later. The focus ends up being about sexual intimacy. [Sex outside of marriage] is viewed as betrayal, infidelity; it is an affair. It is wrong by definition. How can we make your life a little better in this box that does not fit well for you?
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> If that judgment [about sex] could be lifted from a therapeutic relationship, that would be a great thing. There are reasons why people move into multiple partnerships, and I think it would behoove a therapist to look at the motives running under that. Is it running away from something? Is it running to something? Is it how this person is wired?

Paul also acknowledged the importance of considering the life cycle stage that polyamorous clients are in the midst of when they arrive for therapy. For example, he articulated the differences between the issues of a 40-year-old man with a wife and several children vis-à-vis the issues of an unmarried 20-year-old woman who is considering a polyamorous lifestyle. The 40-year-old may be transitioning from a monogamous relationship to a polyamorous one, and he will have concerns about children, family, community, and his credibility as a father, husband, and partner. The 20-year-old woman, on the other hand, may be trying to figure out how to negotiate a living space with two partners, and how her relationship choices are helping to define her adult life and identity. In addition, Paul mentioned the issues of jealousy, envy, and boundaries as particularly unique to the polyamorous client, as well as the difficult work of pioneering new paths and broadening relationship structures.

In the excerpt that follows, Cindy draws attention to the counter-transference issues that may arise for therapists when working with polyamorous clients, and how such issues may contribute to marginalizations occurring in the therapy room.

Cindy: My guess is that if you have clients who are polyamorous, it kind of amplifies something about your own relationship life for you. It may serve as a stimulus or trigger for your own relationship issues and concerns that have you. And so, then you have to be even more rigorous in your own thinking [and] personal reactions to people, because there are so many potential taboos or implicit social agreements that polyamory goes against.

I think it has to do with your own personal human relationship experiences. I have never thought about it before, but I think that the therapist has to be aware of their own biases that relate to their own relationship experiences and wishes, their own ideals for relationship. Many things that all of us have, that are not worked through about being in relationship . . . there are just many, many more points of reflection when you are working with a polyamorous relationship. It is not as simple as looking at the dialogue between two people; it is a more multi-dimensional event. And it is easier to get tripped up or triggered with your own things, or to make one person wrong or problematic, or not recognize how they are marginalized. It calls for a whole new level of awareness I think in the relationship domain.

This section shines some light on the clinical concerns of polyamorous clients, as well as some of the biases, assumptions, and counter-transferences that therapists may have and need to be alert to when working with this population. Because polyamorists are a marginalized group in the very early stages of having and creating a public identity, very little is actually known about this population and its clinical needs. So far, there has not been enough social or political will or pressure to recognize polyamory as a legitimate relationship form, so therapists not only need to make efforts to educate themselves about polyamory, they also need to make efforts to reflect on their own biases and beliefs so that they don't unconsciously project them onto polyamorous clients.

The therapy room should be a safe place where polyamorous clients can explore the difficulties they face in meaningful ways; it should not be a place where they are pathologized and once again subjected to societal expectations and judgments. Metaskills (i.e., the feeling attitudes of openness, curiosity, acceptance, compassion, and exploration) could help alleviate potential fears of entering into a therapeutic relationship.

In addition, an important recognition on the part of the Process Worker is that the "we" of a relationship goes beyond the one-to-one relationship dyad and can include, three, four or more people in a polyamorous relationship.

CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSION

Reflections on the Findings

The purpose of this paper was to conduct research (i.e., interviews with 12 polyamorous people) that would help answer the following research question: "What issues and themes can be identified within the subjective experience of polyamorists that can help inform therapists and Process Workers who are working with polyamorist clients?" In answer to this question, several important themes were identified in the interviews, which shed light on the subjective experiences of polyamorists. The six themes prominently reported by participants can be summarized as follows: 1. marginalizations and social obstacles for polyamorists; 2. challenges of disclosure, identity, and community; 3. agreements, negotiations, and contracts; 4. jealousy in polyamorous relationships; 5. benefits of polyamorous relationships; and 6. therapy challenges.

While each of these themes appeared to have many potential subthemes, it was beyond the scope of this research project to identify sub-themes within the interviews. Instead, the purpose of the research question was to identify umbrella themes within the subjective experiences of polyamorists, which could be used to inform Process Workers and other therapists about the polyamorist experience. The six umbrellas themes identified above provide clinicians with important, rich information that can be taken into consideration when working with polyamorous clients to better serve this unique population.

A Few Other Clinical Considerations

In this section, I would like to review some of clinical considerations that have already been mentioned and introduce a few additional ones. Process work theory, in particular, offers several important concepts that can help clinicians effectively relate to polyamorous clients and address their unique issues. They include: metaskills (specifically, the therapist's awareness of and attitude toward her or his own inner diversity), rank, worldwork, and deep democracy.

From the interviews, it was clear that when seeking therapy with clinicians who were unfamiliar with polyamory, participants encountered numerous challenges related to the therapist's lack of knowledge regarding polyamory and biases toward monogamous relationships. Participants expressed hurt and disappointment when therapists were subtly demeaning or condescending, when they forced an unexamined pro-monogamy agenda, or when they expressed disbelief, intolerance, or judgment toward polyamory as a possible relationship option. As a result, some participants felt that they were put in the unfair position of having to spend time and money to educate the therapist. Many walked away dissatisfied or with mixed feelings and results. Given these participant experiences, it seems clear that more therapist education about polyamory is important and needed.

Recently, I joined a list-serve for therapists in my community that has approximately 800 therapists in the group. As part of my introduction, I mentioned my work with the polyamory community and offered to provide information on polyamory and the unique issues that polyamorous clients face. I was surprised to find that only three clinicians responded to this invitation, and two of them happened to be former clients of mine. One clinician who was new to the concept of polyamory asked to go for a walk with me, and her first questions was, "Is it the

same as bisexuality?" I thought to myself, "Wonderful! Now we can have a conversation about what it is and isn't," but the question also made me realize just how little is known about polyamory. Even though polyamorous clients may not yet be on the doorstep of every therapy room, it seems prudent to educate oneself in advance so that when such a client does arrive, you can both recognize and appreciate their unique needs.

Information is good but therapists also need to become aware of and work on their unexplored attitudes toward monogamy and their own relationship issues. Process Work emphasizes the importance of the therapist's familiarity with their own inner diversity as a key to embracing and affirming client choices or ways of identifying that may vary from the therapist's. Inner diversity is the idea that we have within us many voices, facets of experience, curiosities, perspectives, and interests that we are not always aware of or that we may not identify with. By becoming aware of ideas and feelings that may be actively or passively denied or disavowed, the therapist may find that he or she is able to respond to the client's presenting concerns in a more accepting and less one-sided manner. Seeing aspects of the other within your own inner world helps you to see the other as you, and you as the other. This reduces judgment and intolerance of attitudes and identities that are less known.

Based on my research, I want to suggest that it is essential for therapists to realize that people who identify as polyamorist or who are in polyamorous relationships are already being judged by society, family, friends, co-workers, community, and public institutions. Polyamorous people are stigmatized and pathologized by mainstream biases towards monogamy. Therapists can also carry similar judgments and feelings, which can recreate a pathologizing atmosphere and a predisposition to seeing polyamorous clients as disturbed, maladjusted, or somehow falling short of being able to create an emotionally healthy relationship life. Amy Mindell (1996) coined

the term metaskills to refer to the deeply held feeling attitudes expressed by the therapist that color their relationship with the client. The metaskills of acceptance, curiosity, open-mindedness, celebration of diversity, willingness to explore different relationship configurations, inner diversity, etc., are all important and applicable to the polyamorous client and are arguably the ethical obligation of the clinician. These essential underlying attitudes (or metaskills) of the therapist toward the client create and support a background of trust, empathy, and optimism for all the client's concerns to be expressed and explored.

Weitzman (1999) has suggested that therapists may need to assist polyamorous clients with any of the following concerns:

- Help partners decide if polyamory is right for them.
- Help partners decide what form of polyamory is best for them.
- Help partners negotiate agreements and boundaries.
- Help polyamorous people locate resources and communities in their area.
- Help polyamorous people with the coming out process.
- Help polyamorous people deal with discrimination and prejudice.
- Help partners deal with difficult relationship issues.
- Raise social awareness about polyamory.

These are all excellent clinical considerations to take into account, but if they are not approached with the right metaskills, the therapists' efforts may nonetheless end up marginalizing clients. As already mentioned, in my opinion, it is incumbent on the therapist to explore the ways they may marginalize polyamory and to develop a warm and accepting feeling attitude towards polyamorous people before working with clients from this population. This can be best accomplished by discovering and learning about one's inner diversity. Without finding

something of the other inside of yourself, it is easy to marginalize it in others too (Dawn Menken, 2011, personal communication). Personally, I do not believe that a therapist needs to be polyamorous in order to be helpful to a person who is, but I do believe that it is important for therapists to be educated and spend time exploring their own deep beliefs and attitudes as they relate to polyamory and other non-mainstream relationships.

Rank refers to the personal power we have in relationships, families, groups, communities, and the world. Individuals may be conscious or unconscious of their rank. In working with polyamorous partnerships, individual rank is an important element to recognize and discuss because awareness of rank inside of partnerships can help to resolve conflicts and deepen relationships. Being able to identify and work with the rank issues of polyamorous clients can also help clients to recognize the impact of their relative low social rank (as compared to monogamous couples), as well as to see the psychological and spiritual rank that experiences of unconventional relationships can bring forth.

Awareness that not all relationship conflicts are due to the psychological make-up of the client is important for all therapists. At times, problems in the relationship are being influenced by world issues. Mindell (1995) developed the concept of worldwork to emphasize the way that an individual's personal struggles may also be world or community issues related to larger forces and social issues in the background. Social conditions create stresses that individuals and relationships must avoid, endure, or address. Marginalized world experiences that are manifest in individual relationships are often seen as personal conflicts, emotional inadequacies or other kinds of psychological limitation. But individual successes and struggles also impact the world in small, local ways and sometimes with more dramatic and broader impacts. The concept of worldwork may be useful when polyamorous clients can see that what they are struggling with is

useful to the larger community or is a marginalized piece of world experience (Dawn Menken, personal communication, 2011). In my relationship, there are conflicts about not having enough love, time, or attention, and I recognize that our personal sense of scarcity mirrors a global issue of scarcity of resources. It is my belief that working through issues of scarcity within our relationship also helps the world in some non-local way.

The impact of social pressures, prejudices, biases, discriminations, oppressions, etc., all play a critical role in the ways that polyamorous relationships are formed and unfold over time. Therapists who can help clients see how these external influences may be affecting their relationships will be doing their clients a great service, because awareness of these influences can strengthen the relationships amongst partners by taking some of the pressure and pathology out of the relationship and locating it within a larger cultural frame.

My hope is that this paper will educate therapists about polyamory and inspire them to explore their own beliefs and conditioning when it comes to relationship structure. My high dream would be for all therapists to embrace the theory of deep democracy; to embrace the idea that all voices, all opinions, all points of view (especially those of people on the margins of society) should be heard and valued. In the spirit of honoring deep democracy, I also want to acknowledge that some readers and some therapists may feel conflicted about polyamory and may feel that it does not fit with their morality, values, or religious beliefs. That's fine, and I respect their point of view as well. For me, the most important thing is that people examine their beliefs and attitudes with awareness, and, if a therapist finds that she or he is conflicted about polyamory, then my hope is that that therapist will help their polyamorist client find a more appropriate therapist and locate other resources that may be helpful. Appropriate resources can

include books and articles on polyamory (please refer to the references section of this paper) and local and online polyamory support groups.

Limitations and Future Research

It is clear that this research project was limited both in its scope and participant population, which means it has low reliability, and generalizability. As a result, future research should be conducted in which interviews are carried out with a larger polyamorous population. I am also aware that this research is limited by the fact that all of the participants had dual-role relationships with me, which may have affected their answers and my interpretations of the data and findings. For this reason, a future research study could be conducted in which an interviewer who is unknown to the participants asks the same interview questions used in this study, and then the data and findings could be compared with my own.

A larger participant population would also provide an opportunity for outreach to people from differing demographic groups. In this research study, age, issues of class, race, religion, and sexual identity were not specifically identified or considered, but an area for future study could be aimed at identifying the ways in which demographics impact the polyamorous individual in his or her family and community life. While there was an overlap in many of the issues raised by participants in this research, I did notice that there were several distinct differences in responses between the different age groups represented in the study. The concerns of a 50-year-old male participant with a wife and grown children were quite different from those reported by three interviewees in their 20's trying to figure out how to live together. Conducting research on

individuals at different life stages and in different ethnic communities might provide important insights and add to the list of unique clinical issues that should be taken into consideration.

In addition to the ideas mentioned above, research could also be conducted in the following areas:

1. The unique experiences and concerns of adult children of polyamorous family structures.

2. The impact of hierarchical language and rank in the polyamory community (e.g., referring to partners as primary, secondary, tertiary etc.).

3. The psychological ramifications for individuals in the center of a "V" relationship configuration (relationship revolves around one central person who is primary with others).

4. The psychological and social ramifications for the partner(s) who are secondary, tertiary, and so on.

5. The psychological and social ramifications for the spouse or partner who is monogamous within the polyamorous relationship.

6. The different structures of polyamorous relationships and the psychological and social ramifications of these differing constellations.

7. The experience of belonging and not belonging in a hegemonic monogamous culture.

8. The ways in which jealousy manifests and can be worked on in polyamorous relationships.

9. The ways in which therapist biases may impact clinical work with polyamorous clients.

10. The legal rights and options of partners in polyamorous relationships.

Contributions to the Field

To my knowledge, nothing has been written to date about polyamory in the Process Work literature. By adding this research to the existing literature, my intention is to offer the Process Work community and therapeutic community at large a greater awareness of the complex needs, issues, concerns, and clinical implications faced by clients in polyamorous relationships.

Part of what made me realize that this research might be of value to the Process Work community was facilitating a group process on the topic of polyamory in the spring of 2010. The group primarily consisted of Process Work students and people from the Process Work community, and I was quite surprised to find that a number of people in the group had never heard the word polyamory before or were unclear as to its definition. This told me that polyamory is still very unknown, both in our larger therapeutic community and in our smaller Process Work community, and it reminded me of how important it really is for all of us to better recognize and understand the concerns, problems, joys, and clinical issues that might present when polyamorous clients show up for sessions.

In reviewing the broader literature on polyamory, I was heartened to find several books, articles, web-sites, newspaper, and magazine articles, yet there is very little research on the clinical issues of polyamorous clients or the biases that therapists may have to come to terms with when working with this population. While this paper is a hybrid of my personal experiences coupled with the experiences of participants, it is hoped that it will serve as primer for the Process Work community and society in general so that people can educate themselves on what polyamory is and isn't as well as become aware of the unique issues facing polyamorous people.

The painful experience of marginalization was clearly articulated in the interviews by virtually all of the participants in this study, and it is my hope that each of us will wake up to how we might inadvertently add to this pain by our lack of knowledge or by our deeply held and perhaps unexamined beliefs and conditioning. Whether in the role of therapist or in the role of human being, it is my hope that we are learning and will continue to learn how to support people who are being marginalized by mainstream society. If, by writing this paper, I have contributed in some small way to this endeavor, then my goal will have been reached.

Personal Learning and Final Comments

As recently as two years ago I didn't know anyone living a polyamorous life. When I found out that there was a group of polyamorous people meeting in Chicago, I was both excited and terrified. I was excited that there may be other people out there who understood my experience and terrified that those same people may only be looking for sex or that publically identifying with this group might put my family and me in danger. The thoughts churned in my head for several months before I finally went over my edge and attended a polyamorous book group. It was a relief to go over my edge in a number of ways. For the first time, I was meeting people who were living or considering a lifestyle close to what I had been living for 27 years. They were insightful, courageous people who were living on the margins of society and gathering together to support one another in this not yet popularized way of living. All of them were exploring, and hoping to find other explorers on the path with them. That was delightful!

This project took me even further into their lives, and therefore more deeply into my own life. Interviewing participants awakened me to the full extent of people's experiences of

marginalization, their discomfort and uncertainties around disclosure, the fears of rejection, condescension, discrimination, degradation, etc. These issues were all articulated, and, in the articulation, I could see my own life mirrored in theirs. As a result, I feel a new level of sensitivity, awareness, and appreciation for what it is to live as "the other" and to allow one to be seen as "the other."

In the introduction I asked the question, "Will it be safe? Is there danger lurking around the corner?" That has been the ever-present question since the day Cindy moved in 18 years ago. It has been lurking in the background every time we meet someone new, every time we step out of the house as a family. To have that constant question in the background has been challenging, but it's a challenge I'm willing to wrestle with in order to live a life full of love. There are other questions that also persist in my life, like "Who has the right to dictate who I love and how I choose to live my relationship life? Must we conform to a pre-conditioned set of beliefs, structures, and mores as we set our course in life?" For me, the answer to these questions is both yes and no. Yes to being aware of those beliefs and structures and to knowing that all relationships have spoken and unspoken rules and agreements that are needed and that govern over the relationship. But no to the part of those beliefs and structures that sometimes tries to control or limit the number of people that I am allowed to love and that marginalizes me as a result. I want to stand for deep democracy. I want all of us to deeply accept both the rules and the freedom, to appreciate the diverse and beautiful ways that love manifests, and to recognize marginalized people for the valuable contribution they are making to our world community.

Just yesterday, I had an experience that really brought this dream of deep democracy home to me. I was at FedEx sending books about polyamory to a therapist colleague who wanted to educate herself about polyamory. I had grabbed about eight books from my poly library and

plopped them down on the FedEx scale for weighing. As I did, the book titles caught the attention of a rather large man standing next to me and I noticed him glancing at them. Then he said, “Ah, free love! Great idea, like a harem. One man, lots of women. Wonderful!” he boomed in a strong eastern European accent.

“Where are you from?” I asked.

“Russia, USSR, Soviet Union, Union of Soviet Socialist Republic! I love free love,” he went on.

“Me too” I said. “I love free love, the freedom to choose who to love. I am a child of the 60’s. I grew up during a period of time when there was a new culture celebrating the freedom to love. But this is a little different. This kind of free love is not only for men but for women too. And for me, it is free love, but the freedom is within parentheses.”

“What do you mean within parentheses?” he asked. But before I could reply, he said, “ACH! Rules! No rules! If you have rules it’s just the same thing as one man and one woman. In the Soviet Union we tried that free love thing for a few years.”

“How’d it go?” I asked.

“Not so good,” he responded.

“How come?”

“The women got pissed off. They weren’t having such a good time,” he said.

“Hmmm” I said. “Yes, freedom to love, in my opinion, also includes women being able to choose who and how many they love.”

"Ah you are one of those feminists. Are you a teacher?" he asked.

"Well, I am a psychotherapist and a teacher too. I'm also a pioneer, carving out new ways to love and be in relationship," I said.

At this point the young man working behind the counter was sheepishly tending to my books, looking shy but hanging on our every word, and I noticed that other customers were closing in on the conversation too. "Wow!" I thought, "We could have a group process right here, right now." In a way, we were already in the midst of a spontaneous group process. This wonderful Russian man and I were doing a bit of worldwork together; the topic has been chosen and we were working on our relationship to each other and to the topic publically. Just as my excitement about the spontaneous group process started to peak, it seemed as though my comment about being a pioneer for new ways of loving had stopped the flow of things. The conversation suddenly shifted as my new Russian friend said, "You are too young to have grown up in the 60's. Did you freeze yourself in the freezer?" Then he clapped me on my shoulder and wished me a good day as he strode off.

The young man working behind the counter then breathed a sigh of relief, whispering to me that he was gay and that the whole interaction had been very uncomfortable for him. I was amazed at how these few moments of interaction brought forth so many cultural and world issues, and I was equally surprised to realize that in that interaction I was the one putting some limits and rules on the idea of free love. It was both a shock and a relief to recognize that I have a rule maker, as well as a freedom fighter within me. In our polyamorous relationship, we do have some "ground rules" or agreements, and we also have the freedom to re-negotiate and revisit these from time to time. To many people, freedom means doing whatever you want, when you

want. To me, "freedom in parentheses" means that we each have freedom *and* regard for each other's wishes, needs, and sensitivities. We are free to create our own limits and to determine with each other how we will follow and be true to ourselves including accommodations, and sometimes compromises, that we are willing to make.

As much of this paper has demonstrated, following a path of heart isn't always easy given the dictates of our cultures, religions, families, and societies, but following a path of heart can also be satisfying, joyous, life giving, and even ecstatic. A path of heart is a deeply felt direction that includes both rules and freedom. Mindell (1993) describes it in the following way:

> The path of heart makes you feel strong and happy about your life because it follows your dream . . . your mythical task. . . . The path of heart is a fluid path without rigid identities. It is the ancient Chinese Way, the Tao. It is water. It is formless and has no plans but flows wherever a passage opens up for it. The warrior on the path of heart is like a flute that lets the wind blow through it, making its own music. (p. 143)

As a warrior on the path of heart, I aspire to let the wind and water flow through me, to honor the force that guides me and dreams me into what I am. Of course, I have not yet fully achieved this lofty goal, but the aspiration, in itself, is a blessing and gift to me because it keeps my awareness close to my deepest, most mythical self.

In considering a path of heart, I want to support others to ask, "Who am I at my deepest level? What wants to live through me? How can I be a warrior on a path of heart?" I wholeheartedly support and even encourage such inquiries, but I also want to offer up some caution. A path of heart promises a life of challenge and chaos, joy and heartbreak, and maybe even death. Despite these risks, it is for me a life worth living. In this paper, I have shared my own experiences and the experiences of others who are engaged in the endeavor of living a path of heart. I chose to research and write on this topic, to speak personally with courage, to face the

inner and outer voices that sometimes silence and judge me. The experience has left me feeling open, excited, and somewhat fearful. From my heart to yours, welcome! Take it, leave it, judge it, love it, hate it, fear it, savor it! I imagine you will do all of the above, just as I have.

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Appendix A:

Participant Consent Form

Research Title: (working title) Swimming up the mainstream: An exploration of the Psychological, Relational and Social Issues of Polyamorists

Name of researcher: Rami Henrich

This research project is being conducted as part of MAPW

Supervised by: Salome Schwarz

At (name of department/institution if appropriate): Process Work Institute

About this study (brief description of the study): Phenomenological study to ascertain whether or not there are unique issues and needs for those who identify as polyamorists that therapists need to become aware of.

Participation in this research involves (details provided in your information sheet): Interview

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to not answer questions, end your participation, or withdraw from the research at any time. Your refusal to participate or withdrawal of consent will not affect how you are treated in any way.

If you would like to discuss this research further, please contact (Rami Henrich 847 983-0414) or (Salome Schwarz 503 241-0769). If you have any inquiries regarding the conduct of this research please contact (Rami Henrich).

I , (fill in participant name), consent to participate in the research conducted by (Rami Henrich) as it has been described to me in the information sheet. I understand that the data collected will be used for research purposes as outlined in the information sheet, and I consent for the data to be used in that manner.

Signed …….…..…. …… Date ……

Appendix B:

Participant Information Sheet

Research Title: (working title) Swimming up the mainstream: An exploration of the psychological, relational and social issues of polyamorists

Researcher: Rami Henrich

Supervisor: Salome Schwarz

Institution through which research is being conducted (if appropriate): Process Work Institute

About this research project: The intention of this project is to ascertain whether or not there are unique issues that polyamorists bring to therapy and what they are so that therapists can become aware of them.

If you agree to take part in this research: Interview for 1-11/2 hours, which will be taped for use in data collection and analysis.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of the research at any stage, please contact me by phone (847 983-0414), fax (), email (ramihenrich@yahoo.com), or in person.

If you have any inquiries about the conduct of this research, please contact Salome Schwarz 503 241-0769. If conducted through an institution, provide name and phone number of an individual or ethics department.

All of the information collected in the course of this study, including interviews.

In written reports of the research, anonymity will be protected by . . .names, family information, work, any and all personal information by changing names and other information if requested.

If the research is published at a later date, the same care will be taken to respect confidentiality and preserve anonymity.

Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary, and you are free to not answer questions, end your participation, or withdraw from the research at any time. If you do, this will not affect how you are treated in anyway. In any event, your interest and involvement is respected and very much appreciated.

Thank you for your participation!