



Institute for
Relational Intimacy

Couples Conference
2022
Workshop

Moving Towards Non-Monogamy: HANDLING COMMON CHALLENGES IN OPENING UP

Martha Kauppi, LMFT

AASECT Certified Sex Therapist and Supervisor

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Definition: Polyamory

An open relationship structure in which one, some, or all partners are free to engage in sexually intimate romantic relationships with others, with the consent of all concerned



Consensual Non-Monogamies

- **Swinging:** A couple activity with casual sexual connections between couples, often at parties or events
- **Non-monogamy or “open”:** Generally assumed no emotional connection between partners
- **Monogamish:** Committed relationship with some form of open relationship behavior



Versions of Polyamory:

Primary/Secondary: Hierarchy with a primary dyad, with secondary other relationships

Relationship Anarchy (RA): No hierarchy, individual decisions about each relationship

Polyfidelity: An agreement not to further open a group for a period of time



Polyamory Definitions:

Compersion: Experiencing positive emotions from your partner experiencing pleasure with someone else

Metamour: A lover's lover

Polycule: A group of people connected by romantic or sexual relationships.



Polyamory

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Infidelity

“Many Loves”

- Consensual
- Explicitly defined agreement
- Usually includes both romantic and sexual relationships.

“Unfaithful”

- Breach of an (often unspoken) agreement to be monogamous
- Often involves secrecy, lies, and deception.



What the Research Shows:

- 4-5% of people currently
- 20% have tried it at some point
- Happy
- Satisfied sexually and relationally
- Value personal growth
- Mentally healthy
- Securely attached
- Careful about safer sex practices
- Marginalized



More Research:

- Kids take it in stride and do well in polyamorous families, with the exception of some stress from marginalization and coming out issues



What I Know for Sure:

- Well-functioning polyamorous relationships do exist
- Polyamory is not the same as promiscuity
- One partner can be polyamorous, and the other can be monogamous
- New relationships don't take away from pre-existing ones
- Uncomfortable feelings are to be expected
- Polyamorous relationships can last a long time



Theory of Polyamory:

- Abundance of love--expansion
- Monogamy may not be human nature—there's a lot of infidelity!
- Marital agreements are negotiated, negotiable, and unique to the participants



Overlapping Populations:

- Kink/BDSM
- LGBTQIA2+
 - Many polyam people are bisexual
 - Many gay men are monogamish or open
 - Many queer folx have non-hierarchal polyamory



Conceptualizing the Case




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Well-Functioning Polyamory:

- Consent
- Secure Functioning
- Differentiation
- Mutual Benefit
- Fidelity



Handout:



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Polyamory Relationship Skills: Finding Strengths and Growth Areas

Domain:	Skill:	Rating: 1-5: 1= not proficient 5=very proficient	Comments:
<i>This portion of the document assesses consent in the relationship(s) as a whole.</i>			
Consent	Everyone is aware of the non-monogamous nature of the relationship		
	Everyone is aware of the relationship structure (primary-secondary, non-hierarchical, etc.)		
	Everyone concerned with each agreement is aware of their relational agreements		
	Everyone is participating willingly		
<i>This portion of the document assesses the relationship strengths and growth areas of individual partners.</i>			
Secure Functioning and Attachment	Tolerate differences between self and partner(s) well		
	Consistently connect intentionally with partner(s)		
	Stay present in the present moment (rather than obsessing about elsewhere)		
	Offer vulnerability even in tough conversations		
	Tolerate vulnerability in others		
	Sustain positive regard during disagreements and stressful times		
	Ascribe positive intention during stressful times		
	Continue feeling loved when apart		
Differentiation	Identify your own thoughts, feelings, desires, beliefs, values, preferences		
	Share the above with important other persons, even if it's hard for them to hear		
	Get grounded in the self/in touch with yourself		
	Stick with yourself during disagreement without becoming argumentative or defensive		
	Hold steady when someone shares something that is hard for you to hear		
Mutual Benefit	Access genuine curiosity about another's point of view		
	Identify advantages/benefits of the arrangement to you (be specific)		
	Identify advantages/benefits of the arrangement to the other partners involved		
	Support a positive experience for your partners and their partners		
	Can experience pleasure from a partner's positive experience with another person		
	Know what each of your partners finds unique and irreplaceable about you		
Fidelity	Identify what you find unique and irreplaceable about each of your partners		
	Know yourself: Desires, capacity, flexibility, tolerance of mis-steps		
	Know your partner(s): Desires, capacity, flexibility, tolerance of mis-steps		
	Make only agreements you can keep		
	Be willing to postpone gratification in order to keep an agreement		
	Renegotiate agreements rather than breaking them		
	Tolerate partner(s) desires to renegotiate agreements		

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This portion of the document assesses the relationship strength

Secure Functioning and
Attachment

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Consistently connect intentionally with partner(s)

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Offer vulnerability even in tough conversations

Tolerate vulnerability in others

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Need more information?

Polyamory: A Clinical Toolkit for Therapists
(and their clients) by Martha Kauppi