HAPPY PROBLEMS:
PERFORMATIVITY OF CONSENSUAL NONMONOGAMOUS RELATIONSHIPS

Tessa Vaschel

A Thesis

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Committee:

Lesa Lockford, Advisor

Angela Ahlgren

Margaret McCubbin

ABSTRACT

Dr. Lesa Lockford, Advisor

According to an April 2016 study published by the Kinsey Institute, one in five Americans has, at some point, been in a consensual nonmonogamous relationship. Consensual nonmonogamy, which includes polyamory, swinging, open relationships, and friends with benefits situations, is a relationship style wherein individuals have multiple romantic and/or sexual relationships with the knowing consent of everyone involved. This type of relationship has increased in both popularity and visibility in the fifty years since open marriages first entered the public sphere, and has veritably exploded in the last ten years. Popular culture and academia alike is rapidly expanding in its discussion and acceptance of nonmonogamous relationships between consenting adults.

In this thesis, I use concepts of performativity and performance as a metaphor for social action to examine the ways that individuals in nonmonogamous relationships perform "relationship" to one another and to the outside world. Using ethnographic and autoethnographic research methods, I draw upon the lived experiences of people in nonmonogamous relationships to study the effects that these relationships have on individuals and on the larger culture. I first study impression management to examine the ways in which people in nonmonogamous relationships choose to conceal and portray certain aspects of their experiences. Following that, I discuss performances of "polynormativity" and examine the ways in which nonmonogamous relationships adhere to, alter, or reject the so-called "life script" wherein individuals are expected to "settle down," usually with marriage and children. Finally, I use performance as metaphor to

study the ways in which power and privilege affect jealousy within nonmonogamous relationships.

       With this study, I aim to expand existing scholarship in the growing fields of both performance studies and sexuality studies. By using performance studies to examine nontraditional intimate relationships, I hope to bring those individuals and relationships that are continually marginalized to the center of these disciplinary conversations.

For my little family

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INTRODUCTION

I am not who I was.

My new fat body strains against the jacket I have owned for almost ten years. The strain is not enough to warrant a new jacket altogether, just enough to apply a constant pressure around me, a quiet reminder as I walk: *you've changed* (step left)*, you've changed* (step right)*, you've changed* (step left)*, you've changed* (step right)*.* The chill in the mid-October night air tickles my hands when I pull them from my pockets to light another cigarette. *You've changed*, my ever-critical mind whispers. The familiar harshness of the smoke creeping into my lungs is a welcome pain. It's a sneaky sort of self-harm, smoking, a way of committing suicide slowly.

My feet guide me. I'm not much of a walker, but tonight I couldn't be in the house anymore. Another fight. Not another fight. My patience is too thin to be kind or understanding anymore. *You've changed.* How can she stand to be around me? All I am to her anymore is pain and frustration. She ought to leave me. This marriage, this life, is not what she signed up for. *You've changed.*

Third Street. A block from home. At the corner of Third and Elm, I halt. This is too poetic to be real. To the right, on Fourth: home, that huge barn-like building with a worried wife wanting me to wander home. It's warm in there and cold out here. I know she will hold me and love me and take me back again, even though she shouldn't. To the left, on Second: his place, that silly ancient house converted into too many apartments for that amount of space. He's worried too. It's warm there, too. And maybe, to him, I am not yet a phenomenal disappointment.

I am walking both directions at once. Right and left. South and North. A freak breach of quantum physics allows me to somehow, for a moment, make everyone happy.

Two of me.

I am finally enough for everyone.

Right. Left. Pick one, not both. Not neither. You must choose. You must act.

The act itself has meaning. If the last three years have taught me anything, it's that what you do, what you say, that's what counts. What you think and feel, not so much. Words have power. Actions have power. Calling it a performance sounds disingenuous, but identity is formed through performance, through a "stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 187). Performance doesn't mean a lie or a production. It means acts and words. It means the physical reality of one's choices. My choices.

Wife or girlfriend? Are they mutually exclusive roles I play? Wife *and* girlfriend? How can they form a single identity? What would I even call that identity? My identity. How can anything as complicated as this be so simple as that one word: identity? Even the one word is fluid, especially with that little pronoun in front of it: my. Identity is fluid. *My* identity is fluid. It's formed over time through my acts, but it also doesn't exist. It may look real, seem real, even be real. But identity, *my* identity, is "a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment" that if I "do" well enough, everyone including myself will "come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (Butler 187). I make and remake my identity through my words and actions. But is it one identity or many that I create? Can I constitute an identity through words and actions if I don't have a word for the identity itself?

Nonmonogamous, polyamorous, swingers, open, slut, easy, adulterer, fornicator. There is a litany of words for what I am. How can a single word sum up one of the most transformative

experiences of my life? Since before we were even engaged to be married, my wife and I have both had multiple romantic and sexual encounters outside of our relationship with the knowing consent of the other. We are among the one in five Americans who has had such a relationship (Haupert et al. 2016 15). Does performing nonmonogamy create an identity? Our identity? My identity?

    You've changed.

    While close friends know about our arrangement, for the most part we are "closeted." We omit facts even with friends and lie forthright to our parents because "the dominant discourse in 'Western' cultures is still one of monogamy, where certain rules and assumptions are taken-for-granted including those of coupledom, privileging of love relationships over others, sexual exclusivity, and prohibition of relationships outside of the couple" (Barker and Langdridge 4). In a world where our same-gender relationship is only just beginning to achieve legitimacy after more than fifty years of fighting by our queer foremothers (and forefathers), we *must* be perceived as monogamous. Although she wrote it more than thirty years ago, Gayle Rubin's "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" affirms a current reality: "If [homosexuality] is coupled and monogamous, the society is beginning to recognize that it includes the full range of human interaction. Promiscuous homosexuality…[is] still viewed as unmodulated horror incapable of involving affection, love, free choice, kindness, or transcendence" (283).

    For decades, our forbearers fought for what we now have: a chance at normalcy.

    We cannot just throw that away. We cannot become some kind of stereotype; we cannot confirm what my hyper-conservative parents probably think we are. We are like so many of our queer nonmonogamous sisters and brothers who "feel they have to act against the baggage of

centuries of mis-representation and distortion of queer lives and intimacies" (Klesse 119). It is

baggage that says that we are somehow lower or less than our heterosexual peers. Baggage that

says that we are inherently flawed because of who we are and how we love. Baggage that says

we live in a perpetual state of sin.

What we say and what we do matters. The ways we act in the world matter. The ways we

speak about our relationships matter. The ways we speak to our friends and our family and each

other matter. They create us. They continually re-make us.

In her introduction to the collection of essays *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female

Sexuality*, Carole S. Vance writes that understanding our individual sexualities as women is

imperative to furthering understanding of women's sex, sexuality, and indeed feminism as a

whole. Vance states that feminists "need to sort out individually and together what the elements

of our pleasure and displeasure are" and that in order to do that "we need to know our sexual

histories, which are surely greater than our own individual experience, surely more diverse than

we know, both incredible and instructive. To learn these histories, we must speak about them to

each other" (6).

I answer Vance's call by speaking to you, here, now.

This thesis is unconventional. In it, I use feelings as evidence and apply scholarship to

daily life. My writing is performative and personal. I craft prose, attempting to soften and

question the coldness that some consider necessary for "true scholarship." This thesis is uniquely

mine in its successes and its failures. I, through my writing, meander rather than articulate. I aim

to create a conversation with a friend, a quiet reassurance. This thesis is raw. It is a bit too much,

like me. It answers Carole Vance's call for "a body of knowledge that is true to women's lives"

and in so doing it will not succeed "if sexual pleasure cannot be spoken about safely, honestly, and completely" (7).

I am speaking to you.

I am looking for answers.

Or, perhaps, I am looking for questions. The right questions.

As I write, I am guided by my research questions. The most pressing is: How do nonmonogamous individuals negotiate their identities as individuals in nontraditional intimate relationships? This question guides me as I utilize performance as a metaphor for social action in subsequent lines of questioning. I also wonder: How do nonmonogamous individuals perform "relationship" and how do they perceive those performances?

Delving deeper into the performance metaphor, I examine performative acts themselves including ways of being, doing, and speaking. In this vein I ask: What kinds of speech and behavior distinguish nonmonogamy and nonmonogamous individuals? How do individuals utilize this speech and behavior differently with their multiple partners? In chapter one, where I discuss impression management, I pursue questions such as: How do individuals and relationship groups perform their relationship(s) to each other and to the outside world? In what situations and environments and for what purpose do individuals choose to remain silent about their relationships and instead perform mononormativity by passing as monogamous? In chapter two I examine "polynormativity" and I ask: In what ways do nonmonogamous people perform normativity and nonnormativity? What effect do these performances have on their relationships and on public perception of these relationships? Finally, in chapter three I discuss jealousy, and ask: What do performances of jealousy sound like, look like, and feel like? How do these performances expose and adhere to mechanisms of power and control in relationships?

And yet, I get ahead of myself.

The history of monogamy exposes the artificial nature of this institution, which is considered "natural" by the dominant culture. It shows that although monogamy is taken for granted as the "default" for humans, monogamy itself is, in the scope of all humanity, a recent development. As Judith Stelboum points out, "Most of human history did not exist under a patriarchal structure" (41). Early human society, absent the institutionalized patriarchy that has dominated the last 3,000 years, was matrilineal. From this new patriarchy was born monogamous marriage, a necessary tool when inheritance passes from father to son and "legitimacy of a child relates to acknowledgment of the child's father, not to the child's mother" (Stelboum 42). In order to ensure this "legitimacy" of children, women must be contained and controlled by monogamy, therefore a culture developed in which "marriage and female fidelity are requirements for heterosexual relationships" (Stelboum 43). Codified by major world religions, monogamous marriage has become and remained a ubiquitous institution.

Contemporary consensual nonmonogamy in the United States, often referred to as polyamory, boomed with the Free Love movement of the 1960s, but its origins lie nearly a century before in utopian communities. These communities are typified by the Oneida Community, which was rooted in the idea of "complex marriage" wherein "all men and women in the community were considered married to each other" (Anapol 46). Around this time, the Mormon Church was founded in upstate New York, not far from the Oneida Community. Polygamy was widely practiced by Mormons for more than fifty years from the early days of the Church until their exodus to what was then the Utah territory. It was only at the threat of Utah being denied statehood that the Church officially discontinued the practice in the 1890s, although

"fundamentalist" Mormons continue to condone and participate in plural marriage to this day, as showcased on the TLC show *Sister Wives* (2010-present).

The irony that I was once a Mormon and now have multiple partners is not lost on me.

It was in the 1960s with the sexual revolution that consensual nonmonogamy began to develop, primarily through swinging and open relationships (Anapol 54). Group marriage, three or more consenting adults committing exclusively to one another in a marriage-like arrangement, became popular during the 1970s, although during that time a popular perception that open marriages don't "work" also developed (Anapol 56). The term "polyamory," derived from Greek and Latin roots meaning "many loves," was coined in the early 1990s.[1] Discussions about polyamory and consensual nonmonogamy, both in the world of academia and popular culture, began in earnest in the 1990s and gained traction in the early 2000s (Noël 604). In the 2010s, the topic has exploded, growing over the last ten years from thirteen published English-language books on polyamory or consensual nonmonogamy in 2005 (Noël 604) to forty-seven in 2016 (M.).

For the purposes of this project, I have relied upon a selection of these texts. For the most part, I have utilized academic literature published within the last ten years. One such resource is a special issue of *Sexualities* edited by Jin Haritaworn, Chin-ju Lin, and Christian Klesse on the subject of Polyamory, which seeks to provide a critical introduction to polyamory. Additionally, I use essays from *The Lesbian Polyamory Reader: Open Relationships, Non-monogamy, and Casual Sex* edited by Marcia Munson and Judith P. Stelboum as well as from *Understanding Nonmonogamies* edited by Meg Barker and Darren Langdridge. These two anthologies of essays along with the issue of *Sexualities* provide a foundation of background knowledge upon which I

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[1] There is some dispute whether the term originated with polyamory activists Morning Glory and Oberon Zell (Anapol 51) or with Jennifer L. Wesp ("polyamory, n.").

rely and which will help myself and others build continuing research. This background includes a current working lexicon, changes in thinking about consensual nonmonogamy and polyamory over time, and integration of nonmonogamy with theoretical frameworks. An additional, indispensible resource that reinforces this foundation is *Polyamory in the 21st Century: Love and Intimacy with Multiple Partners* by Deborah Anapol. Anapol was an early activist in the polyamorous community as well as a researcher who studied nonmonogamous relationships for over forty years. Her personal experience and research are reflected in her book and have provided me with an insider's look at polyamorous history and practice.

In addition to existing academic literature, I have also looked to popular literature both for information about consensual nonmonogamy itself as well as for information about the ways people talk about and engage with consensual nonmonogamy. The first of these resources is *The Ethical Slut: A Practical Guide to Polyamory, Open Relationships, and Other Adventures* by Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy. The first edition of this book was published in 1997 and the second, updated and expanded edition, published in 2009; it is still continuously referred to as "the Bible of polyamory" (Noël 607, Deri 81). Its readable, simple but radical approach to sexuality is based in ideas of autonomy, honest communication, and safer sex. The current most commonly recommended reading on the subreddits (online communities hosted by Reddit.com) /r/polyamory and /r/nonmonogamy, which together have over 54,000 subscribers, is the book *More Than Two: A Practical Guide to Ethical Polyamory* (2014) by Franklin Veaux and Eve Rickert. The book is a nearly 500-page resource for what Veaux and Rickert call the "second wave" of the polyamorous movement, or those individuals who discovered nonmonogamy through mainstream media rather than kink, fetish, or alternative channels.

Beyond published literature I also use qualitative research methods. One of these methods is performative writing, a broad term that can be used to "stand in for the many ongoing efforts for alternative modes of scholarly representation" (Pelias 5). In the case of this document, I use prose and prose poetry as part of my scholarly inquiry in order to capture what Ron Pelias refers to as "lived experience" (8). This type of writing uses language that is visceral and sensuous, language that shows instead of tells, language that evokes the *feeling*, rather than just the idea, of the topic of study. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the lives of individuals who are or have been in consensual nonmonogamous relationships in order to tell their stories, which would otherwise remain untold. It is essential in this endeavor to go beyond numbers and data in order to truly communicate the intricacies of not only the practice but also the "lived experience" of consensual nonmonogamy. To that end, I take my cue from Pelias and craft this document in such a way that it includes "telling, iconic moments that call forth the complexities of human life. With lived experience, there is no separation between mind and body, objective and subjective, cognitive and affective. Human experience does not reduce to numbers, to arguments, to abstractions" (Pelias 8). Through this type of writing, my data and research become more than abstract ideas, they are communicated in terms of the realities that they constitute for my study participants and for myself. Performative writing allows

I conducted interviews with eight individuals who have practiced or are practicing consensual nonmonogamy. Drawn in large part from my current community in the Bowling Green/Toledo, Ohio, area, my study is limited to the perspectives of these eight individuals currently residing in this relatively small Mid-western area who agreed to speak with me. Yet, they also provide a "ground up" contrast to some popular opinions that suggest that polyamory "only happens" in major liberal metropolitan areas such as New York City and San Francisco.

Additionally, autoethnography, or the use of my own personal experience as a source of data and a point of inquiry into culture, provides information, experiences, and anecdotes that I examined for their performativity. The participants' perspectives and autoethnography allow me to "ground abstract, esoteric, and impractical [theoretical] concepts in lived, material circumstances" and in doing so I create a method of inquiry that allows me to acknowledge the limitations of my own perspective (Boylorn and Adams 88).

The interviews I conducted for this study were approved by the IRB.[2] The eight participants in my study volunteered one to two hours of their time to answer open-ended questions about their consensual nonmonogamous relationships in interviews that were documented using a digital audio-visual recording device. The participants were recruited from a posting to the university's "Campus Update" email; additionally, some participants are people whom I already knew who volunteered to participate upon learning the topic of my research. Interviews were conducted between October 2016 and January 2017. Three women and five men participated in this study, all of whom reside in the Greater Toledo area in Ohio, USA. All participants were white presenting, although some identified minority heritages. Some participants opted to use a pseudonym when being quoted in this thesis; others preferred to use their real names. The participants are as follows:

Aaron is a 23-year-old educator. He is currently in a relationship that is sexually, but not emotionally, open to other partners. Aaron identifies as gay.

Andy is a 26-year-old graduate student. He is my ex-boyfriend; he, my wife, and I were part of a "triad" relationship in 2016. At the time of his interview, he continued to engage in

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[2] See Appendices A and B.

casual sex and had several friends with benefits but was not in an official relationship. He identifies as mostly straight.

Bob is a 38-year-old educator. He and his ex-husband were in a relationship that was sexually, but not emotionally, open. He identifies as gay.

Dan is a 26-year-old graduate student. For Dan, who identifies as gay, and for his boyfriend, long distance was the impetus for an open relationship. He describes his relationship as sexually, but not emotionally, open when they are apart.

Hannah is a 25-year-old musician and is also my wife. We have been together for nearly eight years and have been married for just over two. She identifies as queer or bisexual. She and my boyfriend share a complicated relationship that has ranged from distant to sexually and romantically involved to strong, but platonic, friendship.

Milana is a 25-year-old collegiate athletics coach. She currently has two long-term partners. Milana identifies as polyamorous and bisexual or queer.

Rachel is a 20-year-old college student and waitress. Although she and her current boyfriend were initially in an open relationship, they are now sexually and emotionally exclusive. She identifies as straight.

Sejohn is a 29-year-old graduate student. He is my boyfriend. We began dating in February 2016; our relationship is his first experience with consensual nonmonogamy. He identifies as straight.

Using scholarship on nonmonogamy and qualitative inquiry, my methodology is informed by feminist theory and queer theory. Vance's call for understanding of individual sexualities informs the structure and arguments I make in this thesis. Additionally, intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw to describe the ways in which co-existing

identities are more than the sum of their parts, is a key concept I use throughout the thesis (Crenshaw 1244). It provides a framework within which I can discuss interlocking identities and the effect that those identities and marginalizations have on nonmonogamous practice and identity formation.

Queer theory, too, allows for me to pursue a complex analysis of non-heteronormative relationships. Much of the academic literature that currently exists regarding nonmonogamy and polyamory focuses on queer individuals, be they gay men, lesbians, or bisexual people, although not all nonmonogamous individuals fall within the LGBT spectrum. Nonetheless, nonmonogamous individuals and relationships reside outside the confines of heteronormativity. The concept of homonormativity, which is the neoliberal practice of upholding and sustaining heteronormative ideals within homosexual relationships, provides a useful framework within which to study polynormativity, a term describing polyamorous and nonmonogamous relationships that play into and uphold mononormative ideals (Duggan 179). Both homonormativity and polynormativity can be damaging because they marginalize those individuals who are already marginalized, creating a "right" way and a "wrong" way to be queer or nonmonogamous. Queer theory gives me the groundwork for exploring these relationships, not only within the context of a heteronormative, mononormative world, but also in the marginal, liminal, queer world.

Using these theoretical insights and research methods, the principal point of inquiry for this thesis is performativity, using performance as a metaphor for social action. Performativity involves regarding the object of study as "an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' itself carries the double-meaning of 'dramatic' and 'non-referential'" (Butler 189). This examination is accomplished through careful analysis of

behaviors, acts, and speech. Speech itself can perform through performative utterances, wherein "*by* saying or *in* saying something we are doing something" (Austin 12, emphasis original). From saying "I love you" to holding hands in public, nonmonogamous relationships continuously demonstrate performativity. In studying consensual nonmonogamous relationships as performance I therefore recognize that they, like all relationships, may fulfill Richard Schechner's seven functions of performance: "To entertain; To make something that is beautiful; To mark or change identity; To make or foster community; To heal; To teach, persuade or convince; To deal with the sacred and/or the demonic" (Schechner 45). Additionally, a study of consensual nonmonogamy is in many ways a study of agency and negotiations of agency between individuals. To that end, the performance metaphor is a useful tool for this study because, as Mary Frances HopKins points out, "notions of performance can help us construct a place for agency in every theory" (235). Performance can be one way of describing and examining the ways in which occupying multiple subject positions, as individuals in consensual nonmonogamous relationships frequently do by being a partner to multiple people, can result in "a certain amount of squirming, of turning and tossing, [characterizing] our negotiations as we perform roles" (HopKins 235).

I turn first, in chapter one, to discussions of impression management. Using Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, I apply his six methods of impression management to nonmonogamous individuals' experiences. Following that discussion, in chapter two I introduce the idea of "polynormativity," derived from Lisa Duggan's work on homonormativity. I discuss the ways in which nonmonogamous people attempt to perform the "life script" and seek (or decline to seek) "normalcy" within non-normative relationships and examine the effect these performances have on individual relationships and on societal

perceptions of consensual nonmonogamy. Finally, in chapter three, I turn my focus toward performances of jealousy within nonmonogamous relationships. Through the performance metaphor, I examine the ways in which performances of jealousy demonstrate mechanisms of power and privilege in nonmonogamous relationships.

Before that discussion can begin, however, I must first pause and reorient. Language is a major component of performance; indeed words themselves have the power to perform (cf. Austin). It is therefore imperative that at the commencement of this project a certain common vocabulary is established. There are three types of words in and about consensual nonmonogamy: those that "claim identity…define relationships…and describe feelings" (Ritchie and Barker 585). Herein, I briefly present a glossary explaining terms in each of these categories. For the most part, this glossary is drawn from the most common lexicon used in published literature, although in a digital age language in common use tends to grow and morph faster than academia can keep up with it. Some words and phrases are drawn from popular or even "gossip" blogs and websites; others still reside only in community Internet forums. Many of these words are hotly contested in the community, either in their exact definition or because there are other words describing the same concept. In those instances, I have endeavored to select the definition and term that seem to be the most popular, but ultimately this judgment of popularity is my own. Many terms listed here appear in the main body of this thesis, although some do not. They are included here both as an aid to the reader who encounters the terms in my writing as well as to document the language of nonmonogamous and polyamorous culture.

Terms that Claim Identity

Polyamorous or poly – the state of engaging in multiple concurrent intimate relationships,
which, most often but not always, include both a sexual and romantic component or a
person who engages in such relationships

Solo poly – an individual who is currently single, either actually (celibate) or technically
(may have partners but none have an "official" title), but identifies as polyamorous

Metamour – a partner's partner who is not your partner (eg. Amy is with Brian, and Brian is
with Chad, but Amy is not with Chad, therefore Amy is Chad's metamour)

Polycule – a group of people who are connected to one another either by being partners or
metamours, although not every person in the polycule is connected to every other
person; derived from the words "polyamory" and "molecule"

Unicorn – a bisexual woman who is seeking to join an established heterosexual couple

Swingers – couples who engage in sexual activity with other couples; these activities may be
only sexual or may also include a romantic component and may be restricted to "one
night stands" or might last many years (note: the "line" between swinging and
polyamory can become a grey area in long-term swinging arrangements; the
distinction between the two is ultimately decided on a case by case basis by the
participants in the relationship)

Terms that Define Relationships

Triad or Throuple – a three-person relationship in which all individuals have sexual and/or
romantic involvement with one another

V – a three-person relationship in which not all individuals have sexual or romantic involvement with one another; the person with two relationships in a V is sometimes referred to as the *hinge*

Quad – a four-person relationship in which all individuals have sexual and/or romantic involvement with one another

N – a four-person relationship where only two individuals are connected

Group Marriage – a committed, often but not always closed, relationship between three or more individuals, often (but not always) creating ties between all other individuals involved

Hierarchal poly – relationships structured based on hierarchy, often formed when an existing couple opens their relationship resulting in *primary* and *secondary* relationships wherein the primary partner ultimately takes precedence over the secondary partner

Egalitarian poly – relationships wherein all partners are given equal preference and power

Relationship Anarchy – a relationship structure in which no individual is the *primary* partner and the relationship anarchist, who is often *solo poly*, maintains autonomy from all partners

Polyfidelity – the practice of maintaining a closed relationship group where no new sexual or romantic partners are brought into the relationship without the prior consent of all other individuals in the existing relationship

DADT – "don't ask don't tell," a type of consensual nonmonogamy in which individuals do not share details of extramarital sexual (or romantic) relationships

OPP – "one penis policy," a relationship wherein only females can be additional partners; usually occurring in a heterosexual couple with a straight male and bisexual female partner

Terms that Describe Feelings

Compersion – frequently positioned as the opposite of jealousy, feeling happy for a partner for their sexual and/or romantic successes

NRE – "new relationship energy," the feelings and behavior associated with the beginning stages of a new relationship, usually (but not always) lasting from 6-18 months

Beyond vocabulary, beyond the nonmonogamous community as a whole, there is me. The author of the words on this page, the ultimate authority on what will and will not appear before you, the reader.

Sometimes the best way to describe myself seems to be with the words of Augusten Burroughs: "I myself am made entirely of flaws stitched together by good intentions" (110).

I am a white, middle class, educated, able-bodied, functional neurodivergent, mid-twenties, ex-Mormon, cis-female. Graduate student, wife, girlfriend, dog mom. Not necessarily in that order. Bisexual or pansexual or queer or something.

Polyamorous.

Sometimes, rather than Burroughs, the best way to describe my love life seems to be with the words of Nanette Gartrell: "In the realm of relationships, we have the best of all worlds, and the most difficult of all worlds" (32).

Perhaps "the most difficult of all worlds" is an overstatement. Of all the worlds I could have chosen to inhabit, though, this is certainly among the most difficult. Jealousy, resentment,

hurt, betrayal, concealment, manipulation, and selfishness can be a part of any relationship, but they tend to rear their ugly heads disproportionately often in nonmonogamous relationships. In those moments, I feel as if my body will fall apart at the seams. The pain claws at the depth of my core. I feel that I am a terrible person, the worst person, a vile creature unworthy of the title of "person." *I am not who I was.*

And yet.

It's the sunshine I remember. "The best of all worlds." Morning breaking through the windows of the downtown hotel we absolutely could not afford, lighting our three sleepy faces in a cloud-like King-sized bed. The entirety of a Fourth of July spent indulging in food, drink, and stolen kisses from whomever happens to be closer at the moment, all the while watching the other two enjoy kisses of their own. A sunset drive home with all three of us, making fun of each other and making plans for the night, knowing that, for each other, we are the only people in the world.

Am I whole?

Am I happy?

I am in two relationships within a larger relationship. With even just the three of us, there are seven relationships. My relationship with her, my relationship with him, their relationship, all three of our relationship, my relationship to their relationship, his to mine and hers, hers to mine and his. This is a lot to steward. As humans, we are flawed. And despite our best intentions, our flaws work their way into the seven relationships and it is inevitable that at times it's not all compersion and sunshine.

But we are learning.

I am learning.

CHAPTER 1: IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

You should be aware that everything you're reading is carefully constructed.

Do not mistake my candor for ease.

I pause.

It's Friday night. Nine of us are crammed into a tiny living room, playing some weird board game. Intoxicated to varying degrees. The game is a more complicated Truth or Dare – each of us is assigned a number, one through nine; we each have a hand of cards with the numbers one through nine on them, and we use the cards to anonymously vote for our answers to questions like, "Who still sleeps with a night light?" During each round of play, someone draws and reads a question card aloud and all of us secretly place one of our numbered cards in a pile on the table to vote for an answer. I think the person who receives the most votes wins the round, but the instructions weren't explained to me very well before we started playing and I feel confused. It feels like high school all over again. I'm nervous and uncomfortable and I feel like I'm about to be in trouble, although for what I have no idea.

I am sitting on the floor, close but not too close to my brand-new secret boyfriend. Between us sits my friend, who has openly crushed on my new boyfriend for months. Despite his telling her he has no desire to pursue a relationship with her, she still pines. Around us, the host has a couple of old friends visiting from out of town and there is definitely *something* going on there. Some kind of sexual tension. Maybe something used to happen. Maybe something should have happened and never did. Maybe something has been happening at that party and I've been too preoccupied to notice. Regardless, something is going on. There's some kind of tension.

They decide that this will be the final question:

"If there were absolutely no consequences, who in this room would you sleep with?"

Immediately, my traitor face lights on fire. I find myself unconsciously mentally repeating my own anxiety-calming mantra: *Nobody is paying attention to me. Everybody is too absorbed with themselves and their own lives and problems to notice me. Nobody cares.* Despite this mantra, I force my gaze to stay on the cards fanned in my hand, like a poker hand meant to be kept completely secret from my fellow players. *Don't look at him.*

But is he looking at me?

If he's looking at me this will look even more suspicious. Don't look at him.

Nobody cares. There's nothing wrong with two friends looking at each other when they're in the same room together. You're being weird. This isn't an issue.

Don't look at him.

Instead, I focus on the cards, trying to pick one of these numbers that represents someone in the room. Numbers 1 and 2 are the people I don't know. Numbers 3 and 4 are my colleagues, two people that it feels weird to consider as potential partners, even in an imagined circumstance. 5 and 6 are fine I suppose, but they're in a relationship with each other – too much potential for drama. 7 is me. That might work, but what if somebody sees me putting my own number into the pile? 8 is my friend. My new relationship is a secret from everyone in this room but it is *especially* a secret from her. Number 9 is my new boyfriend.

Is it taking me longer than everybody else to decide? Does this feel weird to anybody else? Why am I so worried about this? *Nobody cares. Nobody will notice. But what if we all wind up talking about who we picked, even though we just said it would be confidential?*

I want to pick my boyfriend.

I want us to pick each other.

What if I pick my boyfriend and my boyfriend picks me and nobody picks my friend?

Cards held in my left hand, I raise my right to pluck a number to throw into the steadily growing pile in the center. My fingers brush both cards, 8 and 9, lightly.

I pause.

I carefully selected my story about making a careful selection.

It feels like there are a lot of wrong stories I could pick here to talk about impression management. Deciding not to shave my legs before a date because the partner I'm not going out with might notice. Making sure to send an equal number of text messages saying "hey just thinking of you" during the day, just in case. (In case of what??) Mentally keeping score so that I'm having sex with each of them an exactly equal amount.

I'm so exhausted.

I hesitate with each word I type. I know that my partners will read this. I love them both but it's been a hard transition from dyad to triad (and beyond) and I don't want to stir up past resentments. I know that my advisor will read this. I want to impress her and I don't want risky writing or bad behavior to diminish my standing in her eyes. I know that my best friend will read this. After years of struggling to make and keep friends, she genuinely seems to like me and I don't want that to stop.

I hope that my parents will not *read this. If I have anything to do with it, they won't.*

I am so careful. My stories are carefully chosen, my words deliberately placed. I can only control which words appear on the page. What that text says to *someone is a whole other matter. I am afraid that if I cannot explain myself, my words will be misinterpreted. I am afraid that I will make people angry. I am afraid that I will alienate people. I am afraid that the relationships*

in my life that I have so painstakingly built are exactly as fragile as they often feel to me. I am

afraid that this project won't be any good and I will have taken huge risks for nothing. I am

afraid that I am somehow fundamentally flawed and that by putting this text on the page

everyone will see that I am a sham. I am afraid that I am a phony, afraid that I only pretend to

know things. I am afraid that in describing the ways in which I was an idiot, I will look like an

idiot.

   I am afraid.

   But let's not talk about that right now.

It is, perhaps, odd to begin a study on performativity with a discussion of what did not

happen and what was not said.

Performativity after all, as defined by Erving Goffman, is "all the activity of an individual

which occurs during a period marked by his continual presence before a particular set of

observers and which has some influence on the observers" (22).[3] Goffman goes on to discuss the

performance's relationship to what he calls "the impression of reality" and "real reality," which

imply duality on the part of the performer (17). This duality could be viewed as deception,

trickery, or duplicity in their interactions, a process of continually keeping "actual reality" and

"the portrayed reality" separate. In contrast to this idea, however, Judith Butler situates identity

itself as "a stylized repetition of acts" which together provide "the appearance of substance"

(187). This apparent substance, as Butler demonstrates, is in fact "a compelling illusion, an

object of *belief*" (188, emphasis original). Applying Butler's theorization to Goffman collapses

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[3] Goffman actually uses the word "performance" throughout his theorization because his
theorization predates the concept of "performativity" by nearly forty years. Conceptually,
though, he aligns neatly with those who theorized performativity such as Butler and Parker and
Sedgwick. For the sake of consistency, I substitute "performativity."

"the impression of reality" and "real reality" in on one another. Reality, such as it is, is "not predetermined by some manner of interior essence" but can instead be thought of as "a set of possibilities to be continually realized" (Butler 189). These possibilities, made manifest in the presence of observers, can be studied as performativity.

Although both performer and audience are continuously constituting and reconstituting themselves, not as a role to play but as subjects embodying a "set of historical possibilities" (Butler 189) they can and do engage in what Goffman terms "impression management" (208). Through the process of impression management, which individuals are continuously engaged in based on their own perceptions of their audiences, "performers" will choose to say and do certain things and choose not to say and do others, consciously or unconsciously. To be clear, this careful selection of actions and words does not itself encompass performativity, but those choices that "performers" make and the subsequent choices that their audiences make are one part of their constitution of identity. Because none of my study participants, the performers of nonmonogamy that I spoke with, came into existence specifically for the purpose of my interviewing them, and likewise none of them immediately ceased existing upon the completion of our interview, it is most likely that their "past life and current round of activity…contain a few facts which, if introduced during the performance, would discredit or at least weaken the claims about the self that the performer was attempting to project" (Goffman 209). Because of their efforts toward impression management, almost everything these performers chose to speak about, even when bad, hard, or sad times are directly asked about, tended to paint themselves, their partners, and their relationships in a positive light. They knew I would be using their experiences to write about nonmonogamy, they were being video recorded and they were sitting talking with me one-on-one, so their use of careful impression management is unsurprising. As

part of this impression management, these performers occasionally took their time to answer questions; they carefully selected their words or they internally edited their own speech, sometimes aborting a potentially incriminating sentence before completely uttering it. I examine these "unperformed performances" in this chapter.

Beyond the interview room, people in nonmonogamous relationships, like all people, continuously engage in impression management. Perhaps the clearest example of this impression management for nonmonogamous people is in "coming out." Whether an individual, dyad, or polycule chooses to be open about their relationship style, and when and with whom, is an intensely personal decision. This personal decision, though, can have far-reaching consequences with regards to public behavior. Conversations must be carefully monitored so that the wrong story is never told to the wrong person or the wrong name never slips to an uninitiated person. Behaviors such as holding hands and kissing must be policed so that they occur only when and where they can do no damage. Impression management is key within consensual nonmonogamous relationships.

It is tempting to keep this discussion tied solely to my interview participants. Yet, my continual presence in the form of this text in tandem with you the reader, the observer, creates a performance all of its own; this thesis itself is performative. Like all performers, I too am drawn toward creating "an idealized impression…offered by accentuating certain facts and concealing others" (Goffman 65). Through the text on this page, I could perform the role of, perhaps, the wise and weary traveler looking back on a successful journey. Maybe I am the cool older sister, warning you which guys to stay away from and showing you how to look cool in front of the other girls. Or maybe I'm more of a Dumbledore type, aloof and all knowing. I am some of these things. Sometimes. Maybe. However, attempting to perform these roles would result in a

glossing over of the struggles and imperfections that are very much a part of me and my nonmonogamous relationships. Including my personal struggles and sorrows provides a clearer picture of the performativity of nonmonogamy. My current position certainly hasn't emerged from the void, fully formed and perfect without any mess along the way. So, in the course of interrogating my participants' performances, I also turn a critical eye on myself.

My own "not-performances," when I have carefully chosen what to do or say and in so doing engaged in impression management, might be similar to the experiences of some of my participants. While it might be that each of us is entirely unique from the other, with no overlap between us whatsoever, it is more likely that at least some of what I have experienced has also been experienced by at least some of my participants and others in nonmonogamous relationships. As I analyze what my participants said and did, and did not say and did not do, I cannot but filter everything through the lens of my own experience. This filtering is especially true when the person I was interviewing was a current or former partner of mine. In those cases, their memories were my memories. As they told stories, I heard what they said and also remembered the experience simultaneously. In this chapter, I give special attention to these performances. Alongside my understanding of these one-on-one performances, then, I include my own forays into impression management. As I do so, I use Goffman as my guide. He offers six common means of impression management, each of which I explore.

In his interpretation of impression management, which is not the entirety of (or even a large portion of) performativity, Goffman hones in on what a performer is concealing. Bearing in mind that impression management does not create or maintain a "false" "self" but is rather a single learned social behavior that contributes to one's constitution of self, Goffman points out that "it is important to note that when an individual offers a performance, he [sic] typically

conceals something" (43). In the following six sections, I examine what my interview participant-performers explicitly said about each type of concealment and I acknowledge my own field notes observations from their interviews, while I simultaneously examine my own concealments.

The first of these concealments as relayed by Goffman is relatively basic: an audience sees only the end product. Whether that product is a physical object or something more ephemeral such as a relationship, "in those interactions where the individual presents a product to others, he will tend to show them only the end product, and they will be led into judging him on the basis of something that has been finished, polished, and packaged" (Goffman 44). A simple example of this phenomenon might be this thesis. As a physical object, it is subject to intense "polishing" before it ever reaches an audience. Even as a representation of a relationship, though, it functions as a presentation of something of an "end product." As is discussed throughout this thesis, I have two partners whom I love deeply: my wife, Hannah, and my boyfriend, Sejohn. We spend most of our free time together, either as a group of three or in pairs. We watch television, try new restaurants, go to the movies, and even grocery shop together. We take vacations together and celebrate major milestones together. With a cross-country move on our immediate horizon, we discuss together what we do and do not need and want in a new town and a new home. We even, as of very recently, live together. In short: we are happy and we are happy together. This happiness was not always the case for us, though, as I will discuss in full throughout the course of this chapter. The "end" product may be lovely, but the process of getting to it was rough and ugly.[4]

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[4] Of course, because these relationships continue to live and breathe, they cannot truly be considered an end. The "end" is more of a snapshot, a perception of a moment in time.

The tendency to present relationships as a finished end product also appeared in my interviews. Dan, a 26-year-old graduate student, spoke readily about his boyfriend, Ben, and their newly open relationship. He freely used words such as "relationship" and "love" and even discussed talking to guys on Grindr about his boyfriend. But, as came up late in the interview, Ben and Dan were not technically a couple at the time of Dan's interview. Perhaps it is a matter of ease of speech; "boyfriend" can be a much easier shorthand for "friend with whom I share mutual feelings, with whom have previously been in a relationship, and with whom I hope to be in a relationship again soon." Yet the label of "boyfriend" puts their relationship into a certain box, one that presents their current state as less liminal and more fixed. The label creates something of an end product to be shown, thereby hiding the fact that their relationship is, in fact, a process.

Another of these types of concealments comes in the form of what I call "fringe benefits." These fringe benefits are the result of a circumstance in which "the performer may be engaged in a profitable form of activity that is concealed from the audience and that is incompatible with the view of his activity which he hopes to obtain" (Goffman 43). Within the realm of consensual nonmonogamy, some "perks" might reasonably be assumed, such as more shoulders to cry on, greater numbers and types of romantic and sexual experiences, and even more people with whom to split bills. The list of benefits to consensual nonmonogamy is too vast to enumerate here, even if all that is included are those that are "expected." The fringe benefits to consensual nonmonogamy are also numerous, although they tend not to directly fit within the discourse of relational communication, honesty, and trust espoused by popular nonmonogamous and polyamorous advice books such as, *More Than Two* and *The Ethical Slut*.

For example, in his interview, Andy, a 26-year-old graduate student, described a

relatively innocuous type of fringe benefit: friendship. He says,

> I have a friend that says, "the thing about fucking around, being promiscuous, is
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> that it's a really nice way to socialize." It sounds glib and silly, but being
>
> nonmonogamous now I've gotten to meet a lot of really cool people who I
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> otherwise would not be in touch with, because I've met them largely through
>
> online dating. So, I would not have had a reason, basically, to get to meet or get to
>
> know people from…different fields, disciplines, interests, all that stuff. (Andy)

So, for Andy, nonmonogamy is more than just a romantic or sexual experience, it can be a way

of meeting new people, whether that friendship is just for the night or one that lasts a lifetime. He

positions this type of friendship as unique to nonmonogamy, saying that a person can

> have uniquely frank, candid conversations with somebody you've just had an
>
> intimate experience with but who you don't feel inhibited in the way that you
>
> would be talking to somebody who you work with or go to school with or who
>
> sees you every day and whose opinion of you really maybe matters. Somebody
>
> who's a casual acquaintance…I wouldn't maybe say some of the [same] things to
>
> as somebody who I barely know, who I just fucked. (Andy)

Although it was not his initial intention and is not necessarily the defining characteristic of his

nonmonogamy, Andy's experience comes with the added benefit of new friendships.

> My own experience with fringe benefits is, perhaps, slightly less innocent.

> In the summer of 2015, I was struggling to finish my Bachelor's degree. I had, by this

point, moved away from the town where my undergraduate institution was located, thinking that

my degree was finished in everything but name. Due to several miscommunications and

processing errors, though, I came up one class short of my degree. This particular class was not

offered at any university or community college within 100 miles of my home, and I realized that

the easiest (and perhaps only) way to finish my degree would be to travel three hours each way

to Indianapolis twice a week. Admission to a graduate program, conditional upon the completion

of my Bachelor's degree, held my feet to the fire, and so, for six miserable weeks, I took the

class. I would work the night shift from two in the morning until ten in the morning, go home to

sleep for a few hours, then drive three hours to downtown Indianapolis and attend class from six

until nine. Because hotels are expensive and we needed the money, the plan was that at this point

I would then turn around and drive home and go back to work.

Around this same time, my ex-boyfriend returned to my life. E.B. and I had dated for a

few weeks in high school and shared a relationship that I considered fleeting but that left him

pining after me for several years afterward. E.B. still lived in the town we grew up in, just half an

hour outside of Indianapolis. Hotels are expensive, but E.B. had a warm bed for me with a (free)

home-cooked meal on the table every night I was there.

Also he was pretty decent in bed.

I feel the need to rush to my own defense: I wasn't consciously sleeping with him just to

get a free place to stay. But it *was* a free place to stay. And there *were* free meals. And he *did*

like to buy me presents. And the sex *was* fun.

And I *did* kind of sort of purposefully let the relationship fizzle out after my class was

over.

This is not a story I tend to tell to people, not if I can avoid it. Sure, there may be ways to

spin it where I don't come off looking like a complete schmuck, but by and large this experience

provides a classic example fringe benefits. While this relationship was certainly, at the time, a

"profitable form" of nonmonogamy, given its somewhat mercenary dynamic, it was and is "incompatible with the view" of nonmonogamy that I would like my "audiences" to walk away with (Goffman 43). I want to be perceived as someone motivated by love, driven to engage in multiple relationships because I just have *so much love to give*. I want to be seen as compassionate, empathetic, kind, responsive…none of which shine through in this example. So, I conceal this story.

Another type of impression management through concealment occurs as hiding mistakes and burying the evidence that the mistakes ever happened. When an audience comes into contact with a performer, "errors and mistakes are often corrected before the performance takes place, while telltale signs that errors have been made and corrected are themselves concealed" (Goffman 43). Without mistakes, only the squeaky clean, perfect version of the performer exists. Impression management will sometimes rely upon creating this false image of the performer: one who is without flaw.

I make a lot of mistakes.

And while I readily admit that, it can be difficult for me to articulate my mistakes exactly. Both to myself and to others, it is easier and more convenient to forget the technicalities of the mistakes and instead, while giving lip service to my own humanity, present myself as some kind of super-human who is above mistakes. While this is far from how I perceive myself, the performance I give and continuously berate myself for not living up to is one without stupid mistakes.

Perhaps it is overkill to classify an entire month as a mistake, but January 2016 was rife with mistakes. While it was an essential step toward creating my now-happy relationships with two different people, as well as the relationship between the three of us that I deeply treasure,

this beginning was not as beautiful as the relationship to which it eventually led. To best understand it, the story should come from both my own perspective and from the person who was most affected: my wife, Hannah. Alongside my own recollections of this mistake, or series of mistakes, that I would rather remain hidden, I include her words from the interview she gave in early January 2017.

As the new semester was beginning and Hannah was entering "crunch time" for her Master's thesis, her mother was hospitalized. Hannah left town for a few days to care for her mother, during which time I did the first stupid thing: I kissed someone I had liked for a while. Hannah says,

> it was just the worst possible timing. It made me feel small and like I didn't
> matter. Because even just the fact that he chose that time to try and make a move
> to you was just like, "Oh, you were really waiting for any excuse for me to not be
> around her for you to make a move on that." …part of me was sad because it was
> in poor taste that it happened that time. And part of me was sad because you did
> get more distant. (Hannah)

During this time, I fell prey to one of the classic pitfalls of polyamory: New Relationship Energy (NRE). Although Hannah was feeling hurt and abandoned, my emotional intelligence seemingly reverted to that of a pre-teen as I quickly "caught feelings" *hard* for Sejohn, which resulted in me seemingly ignoring her every request. From my perspective, she was continuously absent, either literally or at least mentally. Her energy was entirely consumed by her thesis and her mother's illness. Feeling abandoned and forgotten, I focused more attention on this new relationship.

The day after Sejohn kissed me, Hannah asked us to wait before moving ahead. She was still in Indianapolis at the time, and what I thought she meant was to wait until she came home and we could talk about it. What she had in mind, I learned later, was more of a several-month wait. This has since become a lesson in communication for us: it is important to communicate *exactly* what is meant and not make assumptions about a partner's understanding of what is being said or about a partner's intent. We both made assumptions, though, and, upon her return home, I very quickly began seeking her blessing to (what felt like) *finally* being able to see where this new relationship might go. Hannah says, "When I asked you to wait, I asked you to give me some time, I asked for your support because I couldn't handle that. And you just asked me to get over it. You asked me to let you do it anyway. … It made me feel like anything I asked for didn't matter" (Hannah).

I was an ass.

Let me put it in print, right here in black and white. My treasured relationship between the three of us is built on this foundation of heartbreak. Just a few decisions in the course of only a couple weeks resulted in almost a year of fighting. It nearly resulted in my marriage, not even a year old yet at that time, ending in divorce. This story is not something I am likely to readily disclose. It was never the answer to the frequent question "So, how's married life?" and it has never actually entered Sejohn and my relationship's origin story when I tell it to other people, so that the "telltale signs that errors have been made and corrected are themselves concealed" (Goffman 43).

This time period also demonstrates another method of impression management: in the course of any life activity, such as consensual nonmonogamy, bad things happen, often to other people, and we, as performers, tend to conceal those bad things, removing them from the

performance for audiences not already in the know. Indeed, "there are many performances which could not have been given had not tasks been done which were physically unclean, semi-illegal, cruel, and degrading in other ways; but these disturbing facts are seldom expressed during a performance" (Goffman 44). A relationship based on consensual nonmonogamy, especially one that was previously a dyad that is now opening up, will come against bad, hard, upsetting situations. There *will* be heartbreak. But when performing "relationship" to an audience of others, nonmonogamous impression management often dictates that the details of these ugly times remain hidden.

Following January 2016, Hannah and I entered the ugliest period of our seven-year relationship. Fueled in part by my NRE-induced blindness, in part by her ever-increasing stress levels (caused at first by her thesis, augmented by her mother's illness, and later compounded by her brief unemployment), and in part by seven years of never quite learning how to actually talk to each other, we fought bitterly and constantly for six months. While the constant fighting slowed down after those six months, it took many more months of continuous, concerted work and growth to repair our broken relationship.

From my perspective, this was a time marked by (mostly) her screaming, crying, name-calling, wild accusations, and willful deafness. I withdrew into myself, learning that the best response to almost anything was: "You're right. I'm sorry." It was better not to mention Sejohn by name, or even to allude to his existence. When she was in the room, I avoided texting *anyone* out of fear that I would be accused of not being present. I found myself saying two phrases more often than anything else: "What do you want from me?" and "I'm not a mind reader." Both of which would just make her angrier because, as she would scream at me, she *was* telling me what she wanted and I just wasn't doing it.

Hannah describes that same time differently. Her perspective, of course, is different, and she remembers the words and actions in contrast to the way I do, filtering them through another lens entirely:

> I just pretty quickly was convinced that it wasn't even a polyamory thing, that you were just going to leave me for him because it already felt like you had. …for six months I felt dehumanized and invalidated. And every time I asked for something, you did it if it was convenient. … I would spend literally entire fights just saying, "I need you here. I can't handle this. … I need to feel important. I need to feel like our relationship still matters to you." … I'd be exhausted from literally screaming at you, "Please stay with me." And you'd say, "Well I want to make this better. What can I do?" And I'd be like, "I don't know what to tell you, I've just spent the last hour sobbing over all the things I need you to do." (Hannah)

So, Hannah, too, felt completely unheard. Although we spent this time doing a lot of yelling, neither of us seemed to do much listening. Retrospectively, it makes me cringe because it does seem that those early days, now carefully tucked away as valuable experience but not stories to be shared with others, were "cruel and degrading" to Hannah in ways I failed to notice at the time (Goffman 43).

Milana, a 25-year-old collegiate athletics coach, alluded to the possibility of such a strained relationship and interaction in her interview. She identifies as polyamorous and dreams of eventually living in a house with many partners in what she calls a "polyamory family" (see Chapter 2). After learning about polyamory both in the classroom and from friends, she decided to try it for herself. When she entered a relationship with Will, a fellow member of the swim team and her training partner, she "was very upfront with him that if he wanted to date [her]…it

was going to be nonmonogamous… [She] liked him, was interested, but [she] wasn't going to do an exclusive relationship with him" (Milana). Will and Milana are still together; she considers him to be one of her two primary partners. Her other primary partner, Zach, was the person who initially introduced her to polyamory. When she and Zach started dating, she was already in a relationship with Will. In many polyamorous relationships, such as my own, the first relationship retains a "primary" status. For Will, Zach, and Milana, however, that is not the case. She says,

> My grandparents know of Will, but they don't know that we are together. And
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> that's just kind of the way that we've all – talking with both partners, that's how it
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> had to be. And it's similar for Zach's family, too. I'm his public partner and Zach
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> is, in a way, my public partner except for certain family members or in other
>
> settings. Will is definitely – it's not like we don't hold hands in public or kiss or
>
> whatever, just not in front of grandparents or whatever. (Milana)

So, although Will preceded Zach in the sequential order of the beginning of their relationships, it is Zach who functions as "the" boyfriend in closeted settings. She confirms this idea later in the interview when she talks about how she dislikes the terms "primary" and "secondary" to describe her partners. She says, "there's definitely been times in the past few years where other than using the words, Zach has been my primary and Will has been my secondary…I just don't use those terms to describe it even though that's just the characteristics of how the relationships were working" (Milana). She goes on to clarify that at this point in time, when she is in long-distance relationships with both men, she views herself as "having two primaries" (Milana).

Throughout her interview, Milana tends to mention that Will is less comfortable with polyamory than she or Zach, then quickly follow the statement with a qualifier to indicate that there is not *that much* discomfort on Will's part. For example, when she discusses Will's

reaction to her living with Zach, she says, "I know it was tough for him…but [pause] he seemed to roll with it" (Milana). Additionally, she says that Will has "had a much harder time with the poly thing. Like he hasn't dated anybody else and that's been a source of some, uh [a chopping motion with her hands] conflict a little bit" (Milana). Immediately after acknowledging this conflict, though, she softens the idea of conflict, saying, "There's also been a lot of – he has a crazy history" (Milana). She also acknowledges that she has taken pains to ensure that he knows "this wasn't just me in college, this is me outside of college. And I think that's just been more of a tough realization for him" (Milana).

In these statements and ways of speaking, I note some similarity between Will and Hannah's responses to their respective polyamorous relationships. Will, who has now been with Milana for around five years, appears to be ill at ease with polyamory, even through the lens of Milana's experience. As she spoke with me, it seemed that she was actively concealing the "disturbing facts" (Goffman 43) of the inner workings of her relationship with Will. Although her dream is a large polyamorous family, it appears it would come at the expense of Will's happiness.

Other impression management performances among my participants were seemingly unconscious. This unconsciousness is especially true of differences between public and private behavior. "If the activity of an individual is to embody several ideal standards, and if a good showing is to be made, it is likely then that some of these standards will be sustained in public by the private sacrifice of some of the others" (Goffman 44). In other words, the "front" that individuals put up may not be harmonious with their private behavior, creating a disconnect between the public and private self.

Rachel, a 20-year-old student/waitress, was excited to talk with me about her formerly open relationship. She says that she and her boyfriend "were in an open relationship for awhile before [they] became an official boyfriend/girlfriend thing because [she] feel[s] that relationships should be natural" (Rachel). Throughout the interview, she more commonly referred to their early relationship as "casual dating" as opposed to an "open relationship," remarking that being open, to her, was "a step" toward "a committed relationship…[with] boundaries" (Rachel). In contrast to this perspective, open relationships are, in her view, "where you're together but you're not fully together" (Rachel). She rejects the idea of an immediate "boyfriend and girlfriend" relationship, saying that "you've got to spend time getting to know someone" before dating (Rachel). Casually dating, according to Rachel, is "a maturity thing…if you can casually date then you're mature" (Rachel).

Maturity, for Rachel, was a major theme. She emphasized that "it's pretty immature to think that you either are in a relationship or not" (Rachel). She assured me that she and her co-workers "are all really mature. For as obnoxious as everyone is, we're all really mature" (Rachel). Within that same breath she mentioned that she and her boyfriend, who is a co-worker, "had to [be sent] home one day because we started fighting at work" (Rachel). Rachel was quick to mention her maturity and said that "boys are immature" when talking about her boyfriend (Rachel).

Rachel's descriptions of her relationship and life, however, seemed dissonant with her self-described maturity. Her actions did not seem to align with her definitions of maturity. She discussed subletting an apartment and getting a cat without asking her roommate, who "just freaked out" (Rachel). When a cute guy started working with her, she told him that she and her boyfriend of six months were "just friends" (Rachel). Her current method of birth control is to

"just kind of like [crosses fingers] hope and pray that nothing happens" (Rachel). Taken individually, each of these examples could describe one-time behaviors. Together, they create a pattern that could be perceived as, if not immaturity, certainly an irresponsibility toward others that directly contradicts the "mature" persona she attempts to cultivate through her words.

The final method of impression management through concealment is what I call acting perfect for the part. When practicing this type of impression management, "performers often foster the impression that they had ideal motives for acquiring the role in which they are performing, that they have ideal qualifications for the roles, and that it was not necessary for them to suffer any indignities, insults, and humiliations, or make any tacitly understood 'deals,' in order to acquire the role" (Goffman 46). While the role, or part, of a nonmonogamous person can be played well by people with certain predispositions and experiences, there is no "ideal" candidate, no one "performer" who is perfect for the part. In addition to lacking the ideal on a personal level, relationships themselves can spring from less than ideal circumstances. Some nonmonogamous relationships, for example, begin because one partner cheated, but neither partner wants to break up.

This type of impression management is perhaps the one I engage in the most often. The problem is simple: nonmonogamous relationships are non-normative and I already feel on the defensive about simply being in one, so I feel that *there can never be trouble in paradise*. Rather than subjecting myself to the scrutiny of a relationship in trouble, in addition to scrutiny toward non-normative relationships, I carefully cultivate a persona wherein all is continually well. When Hannah and I ultimately sought marital counseling, we feared that the counselor would be unable to separate our deeper problems from our nonmonogamous relationship. Popular mainstream relationship advice books, designed, of course, for normative monogamous relationships (of

which we read several), differ wildly in their proposed solutions to problems, but across the board there is one constant: if there's someone else, you need to confess and end it because a marriage cannot be healthy if one or both partners are focused outward. Although we ultimately did so, we hesitated to disclose that we were nonmonogamous because it seemed that the "solution" would be to simply "stop it." Thankfully, it was not.

Beyond the counseling room as well, I feel pressure to maintain the appearance of happiness and ease. Well-meaning friends who know that we are nonmonogamous often ask how things are going, as one does when catching up with friends. As the only nonmonogamous person that most of my friends know, I feel some strange responsibility to be *perfect* at not just nonmonogamy but relationships and marriage in general. Although all couples fight, I feel pressure to craft a public image of complete harmony. This may simply be a response to stigma, but on some level it is likely also a means of convincing *myself* that I am (still?) ideally suited to this role. By performing a person in a harmonious marriage, I constitute a version of myself where I am harmonious.

Each of these six types of impression management together feeds into individuals' presentations of self. The ways that we choose to speak and behave, and the things that we, consciously or unconsciously, avoid saying and doing, work together as one part of constitution of identity. This "stylized repetition of acts" surrounding nonmonogamy is a constitutive force for identity for these nonmonogamous individuals (Butler 187). Although it is significant to note that their impression management efforts are only one part of this performative constitution of self and identity, they allow us a deeper look into nonmonogamy and the performativity of nonmonogamous relationships and provide a useful backdrop against which to examine the subject of the following chapter: the "life script."

CHAPTER 2: POLYNORMATIVITY

What follows is not fact.

Imagine this.

SETTING: Somewhere romantic. Like a fancy hotel suite. The kind with French doors. Or a beach. At sunset. With drinks with little umbrellas in them. Or in a Jacuzzi. That has a built in ice bucket (which is of course full of bottles of champagne). Yes! Inside a ritzy hotel suite that has French doors that open straight to the beach, in a Jacuzzi, drinking champagne out of a flat glass (not a flute). With a little umbrella in it because why not. Perfect.

CHARACTERS:
    ME – strikingly beautiful (obviously)

    MY WIFE – perfection personified

    MY BOYFRIEND – pretty lucky to be sitting in a hot tub with these two women, to be completely honest

SCENE:
    ME: Wow guys, this trip has been perfect. Who would have thought we could read all the Harry Potter books, watch every episode of *Parks and Rec*, have nightly raucous sex, go to all the Disney theme parks, and still have time to visit a different unique, local, delicious restaurant and bar every night?

    MY WIFE: This has been the best trip.

    MY BOYFRIEND: I'm having the time of my life.

No, wait. Even *I* can't actually imagine *this*.

Let me start over.

What follows is not fact.

And it never will be.

SETTING: The living room and kitchen (open floor plan, hell yeah) of a largeish but still quite modest home in a college town (a cool one where stuff happens). Also there's a fireplace.

CHARACTERS:
  TESSA – a young college professor at a mid-level college

  HANNAH – also a young professor at the same mid-level college; TESSA's wife,

  SEJOHN – by some act of God, *also* a young professor at the same mid-level
      college; TESSA's boyfriend

  Also HANNAH and SEJOHN have had a thing sometimes but not all the time and
  they don't want to put a label on it so it's kind of hard to put in the character
  descriptions but that's probably important information to have.

SCENE:
  HANNAH: *(Enters from offstage with a corgi, a dachshund, and some kind of
  mutt puppy following behind her. She turns on the stereo, some Ed Sheeran-type
  music plays and she crosses to the front window and peeks out.)* Eep! *(to pups)*
  Guys! They're back! *(Attempts to strike a variety of "casual poses" ranging from
  sitting cross-legged on the kitchen counter to leaning against the fireplace mantle
  with an outstretched, straight arm. The door opens.)*

  TESSA: *(mid-conversation)* – flawed, and that's the whole point of the character.
  That's the whole point of the fucking play.

  SEJOHN: He's not flawed, he's an asshole.

  TESSA: *(playful)* You're an asshole.

  SEJOHN: *(kisses her)* Why are you kissing an asshole then?

  TESSA: Oh fuck off. *(louder, entering the living room)* Honey? We're home.

  HANNAH: *("casually" doing the splits in the middle of the living room rug, the
  dogs lined up on the couch watching the exchange)* Oh hey, I didn't hear you guys
  pull up.

  TESSA: Watcha doin'? *(offers a hand to HANNAH to help her up; HANNAH
  takes the hand, springs into the air, and kisses TESSA enthusiastically)*

  HANNAH: Oh, you know. *(gestures vaguely at the dogs)* Board meeting.

  TESSA: Uh. Yeah. I'm gonna pee. *(exit)*

  SEJOHN: *(kisses HANNAH's cheek)* We set?

  HANNAH: *(a blank look, complete innocence)* Set for what? *(at SEJOHN's look
  of mild horror)* We're set. *(she rises and dims the lights while SEJOHN retrieves*

a small box from a drawer under the TV) Does she suspect anything? *(SEJOHN makes a confused face, and shrugs)* Well, were you weird at dinner?

SEJOHN: Define weird.

TESSA: *(from hallway)* Hey can we watch something other than *Buffy* tonight, I'm just really not feeling – *(entering, sees the two looking suspicious)* 'Sup guys? *(they glance between one another, clearly trying to have a conversation with only their eyes)*

Okay. You get the picture. He asks me to marry him, she is somehow completely on board with that idea, I say yes and together they give me a sparkly ring with *two* diamond-type-objects-that-aren't-really-diamonds-because-the-jewelry-industry-sucks-but-also-I-like-shiny-stuff-diamonds on it. I don't cry, but he does. We all kiss and hug and have a dance party with the dogs and then we all eat desserts and drink champagne and I don't even have a hangover the next day.

Pause for a blissful sigh.

Back to work.

Why is this even "the dream?" Shouldn't having multiple partners immediately put a stopper on any traces of "normalcy" in my life and, therefore, my dreams? What is so compelling about this fantasy that my mind is already busily constructing the set for it to play out over and over again in varying ways?

Despite an outward rejection of monogamy, culturally ingrained norms are still present and often strongly felt within polyamorous individuals. With regard to sexual and romantic relationships, one of the most prominent narratives or "scripts," both in implicit prevalence as well as overt discussion, is the "relationship escalator." Much like my own fantasy script, the relationship escalator is driven by culturally sanctioned markers of time. It is "the default set of social assumptions concerning the 'normal' course of a relationship, usually proceeding from

dating to moving in together to getting married and having children" (Veaux and Rickert 458).

The relationship metaphorically mirrors physical up-escalators, continuously moving onward and upward. Progressing from a first kiss to sexual intimacy to moving in together to marriage and onward is seen as a one-way trajectory that is continually in motion. While individuals may at any time choose to get off the escalator, they cannot go backwards. Forward motion is expected. Although polyamory allows relationships the freedom to, to some extent, ignore or reformulate the relationship escalator, this cultural expectation is still socialized into people, whether they are monogamous or not. So my fantasies continue to ride the relationship escalator with just the slight modification that there are multiple parallel escalators running simultaneously, leading ostensibly to a polyfidelitous family unit at the end[5].

Polyfidelity is not uncommon within the polyamorous world. As the root of the name implies, polyfidelity is loyalty (*fidelity*) to multiple (*poly*) people. A polyfidelitous relationship is one in which all individuals involved agree that no new sexual or romantic partners will be brought into the relationship without the prior consent of each person already in the relationship (Veaux and Rickert 457). This is perhaps the easiest to understand version of polyamory for those who are encountering these relationships for the first time, especially when the relationship grows from an existing couple.

One of my study participants, Aaron, a 23-year-old music educator, exemplified this ease of acceptance even among those who are otherwise opposed to polyamorous relationships. Although he and his boyfriend are in an open relationship, it is restricted solely to sexual nonmonogamy. In discussing the possibility of romantic and emotional attachments outside his

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[5] Of course, marrying more than one person is illegal throughout the Americas and Europe. Furthermore, my particular set of unions, wherein I (a woman) would be married to a woman and a man is not legal anywhere in the world.

relationship, he said: "There's that whole moral. Why would you date someone else if you're already dating someone? What's the point?" (Aaron). However, he said that he and his boyfriend "would be open to talk about it and see if we could figure something out" if one of them developed feelings for someone outside their relationship (Aaron). He goes on to simultaneously discount and accept the idea of a three-person relationship, saying: "I don't know if it would necessarily be a throuple, so, like all three of us are going to equally be in love with each other, *unless that happened*" (Aaron). Even though his relationship, to some extent, falls outside heteronormative culture because it is both homosexual and sexually nonmonogamous, Aaron nonetheless aligns himself with dominant culture by professing to be opposed to the idea of romantically open relationships. In spite of this professed alignment, though, for Aaron, and some of my other participants, there remains an idea that a relationship between three people might *just happen*. Implicit in this *just happening* is the possibility of a polyfidelitious relationship between only three people.

Another participant, Rachel, who said that she "definitely think[s] there's a one" and that she is "all for finding your soulmate and your other half," expressed a similar sentiment (Rachel). Although she said that the reason she is "so into open relationships is because right now [she doesn't] know and [she doesn't] ever, when [she's] young, want to waste being young on one person," she quickly clarified that "eventually [she] want[s] to find that one person…in the end [she's] definitely just going to want to spend the rest of [her] life with one person" (Rachel). Like Aaron, though, she is open to the idea that something might *just happen*. Talking about the idea of multiple romantic relationships she said she is "all for it for sure" and while clarifying that she loves her boyfriend and so doesn't know that it would ever happen, she acknowledges that she "possibly could…build that relationship; there's no reason you can't build

that relationship with someone else" (Rachel). Although the idea is a nebulous one, clouded by

the idea of her current boyfriend, multiple relationships are not outside the realm of possibility

even for someone seeking their soulmate. These multiple relationships, though, to her mind are

again polyfidelitious and only among three people.

For another participant, Andy, who previously had been in a three-person relationship,

the *just happening* was and is a key component. As I noted earlier, Andy is my ex-boyfriend; he,

Hannah, and I were in a triad relationship from August 2015 through January 2016. He talks

about how his previous relationship with Hannah and me "was a really unique situation…[his]

best friends were and are two women married to each other who also like men" (Andy). He says

that although a triad "appeals to [him] a great deal," moving forward it's "hard to imagine how it

would come into being" (Andy). He goes on to say: "It's not something I want in the abstract. I

would want it if *it happened* and there was a situation" (Andy). So, for Andy, Rachel, and Aaron,

despite generally not seeking out polyamorous relationships (as opposed to seeking simply

sexually nonmonogamous relationships) they are each open to the idea if it were to be something

that might just happen. For each of them, though, it is a limited view: a polyfidelitous group of

three.

Just happening implies an existing couple growing to a closed group of three, an

important component to burgeoning mainstream depictions of polyamorous relationships. These

depictions, ranging from articles in popular publications like *Cosmopolitan* and *The New York

Times* to shows like *House of Cards* and *Shameless (U.S)* and even to plays like *Design for

Living* by Noël Coward (1933), *Yours Unfaithfully* by Miles Malleson (1933), and *How to

Transcend a Happy Marriage* by Sarah Ruhl (2017), all primarily situate polyamorous

relationships as an extension of a pre-existing couple[6]. Furthermore, the couple is almost

universally depicted as heterosexual, perhaps with a bisexual female partner, and is frequently

white.

This "idealized" and "palatable" polyamorous relationship echoes "idealized" notions of

homosexual couples. Lisa Duggan, in her 2002 essay "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual

Politics of Neoliberalism," describes a "phantom mainstream public of 'conventional' gays who

represent the responsible center" (179). She situates the phenomenon as a product of

neoliberalism, which she describes as "the brand name for the form of procorporate, 'free

market,' anti-'big government' rhetoric shaping U.S policy and dominating international

financial institutions since the early 1980s" (Duggan 177). Within this context, Duggan coins the

term *homonormativity* to describe "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative

assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a

demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity

and consumption" (179). Within the contemporary politics of neoliberalism, this "privatization"

of homosexuality effectively removes it from the public discourse by reinforcing a notion that

gay people are "just like" straight people and, like all good neoliberal straight people, they have

the same goals: consumption of material goods and domestication.

This same phenomenon is present within and surrounding polyamorous relationships and

communities. Within our contemporary neoliberal society, this *polynormativity* functions

similarly to Duggan's homonormativity. It creates an imagined polyamorous public, one that has

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[6] It is curious that two of the only English-language plays about open relationships are from this same year, 20 years before swinging and open relationships began to enter the public discourse and nearly 60 years before the term "polyamorous" was coined. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis, these two plays and their place within their culture and time period would be an interesting topic for further research.

goals oriented toward consumerism and domestication.[7] Reductive representations, such as those most commonly featured in mainstream media, effectively erase the multiplicity of types of polyamorous relationships. Additional relationships that do not fit within this polynormativity include those who are a part of kink and BDSM (bondage and discipline/dominance and submission/sadism and masochism) communities, "ethical sluts" who are happily promiscuous, relationship anarchists who seek no "primary" partner despite deep and loving relationships, queer folks whose sexualities and genders range beyond those that can be contained within this prim and neat cultural narrative, people with disabilities that require unique adaptations in their lives and the lives of their partners, and people of color whose experiences cannot be delimited in the normative.

Polynormativity is a logical descendent of heteronormativity. A polynormative relationship model is in many ways the typical "American dream," featuring a house with a white picket fence, 2.5 children, a car for each driver, and so on. There is just the one deviation: instead of just two people in a relationship, there are more; usually only three (if a couple falls in love with another person) or four (if two couples fall in love with one another). Polynormativity feeds directly into the idea that *poly people are just like you.* This presumption of normalcy has the potential to be damaging because it creates the idea that there might be a "right" way and a "wrong" way, or a "normal" and an "abnormal" way, to be polyamorous in the public eye.

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[7] The term "polynormativity" was most likely coined by Eleanor Wilkinson in her 2010 essay "What's Queer About Non-Monogamy Now?" Although she uses the word, she does not go on to explore its possible meanings or implications. It otherwise seems to be absent from academic literature. In a 2013 post entitled "The Problem With Polynormativity" on her blog "Sex Geek," Andrea Zanin states that while she doesn't think she came up with this term, she can't find any other resources that use it. Other than these instances, the only other occurrence of the term that I found was that it may have been discussed at the 2015 Non-Monogamies and Contemporary Intimacies Conference held in Portugal by INTIMATE, a large international research project (http://www.ces.uc.pt/intimate/), but there are no published conference proceedings.

Because polynormativity within a neoliberal culture is inherently reductive, it could have the possible side effect of turning polyamorous people into nothing more than a new demographic for a consumerist culture to target, which would, in turn, continue to reinforce polynormativity as the "right" way to be in a consensually nonmonogamous relationship.

Even within academic study of polyamory, polynormative language and assumptions run rampant. Recent research indicates that consensual nonmonogamy (of which polyamory is a subset) occurs consistently across populations in the United States regardless of race, class, age, education level, religion, region, and political affiliation (Haupert et. al 2016 13).[8] Previous studies, largely based in qualitative inquiry, that lacked large-scale hard data tended to represent polyamorous individuals as "a largely homogenous universe populated with highly educated, white, middle- and upper-middle-class professionals" (Sheff and Hammers 205). This lack of data is fueled in part by the fact that many of the researchers conducting these studies fell within those demographics and so had difficulty recruiting subjects of other demographics; additionally individuals who are already marginalized due to race, ethnicity, or class experience greater risk in self-identifying as minorities and thus may be less inclined to participate (Sheff and Hammers 215). This disparity is also, in part, a product of the distinction that many in the field place on polyamory as being multiple *loving* and/or *committed* relationships rather than those that are purely sexual.

This disparity is not just the effect of an external construction, however; research indicates that even within the polyamorous community, "one of the dominant narratives surrounding polyamory is the value placed on long-term meaningful relationships" (Wilkinson

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[8] There is, however, a significant difference in the prevalence of consensual nonmonogamous relationships when accounting for gender and sexuality. Men and queer people tend to participate in consensual nonmonogamy at higher rates than others, although the effect is not directly driven by gay men (Haupert et. al 2016 13).

245). In my interviews for this study, Milana says: "I would love to live in a house with a group of people that I love or that love each other, however that works…the polyamory family is sort of definitely a dream goal in life for me. I think that would be the best way ever to raise kids" (Milana). Andy also says that he loves the "nested little family environment" (Andy). And, of course, my own fantasy described earlier includes a family-type unit living in a house sharing custody of several dogs.

In the midst of heteronormative culture, though, it can feel easier, or perhaps even necessary to perform polynormativity. What others say about and to us can prompt us to attempt to dispel ideas and comments from others that suggest we are somehow inferior to our monogamous peers; I say we because I am not exempt from these performances of polynormativity. Advice books for nonmonogamous newbies are rife with statements packed with "normalizing" rhetoric such as this one from *More Than Two*:

> Many people in polyamorous relationships have straightforward tastes. Poly families spend their time balancing checkbooks, watching Netflix, doing laundry, all ordinary things a family does. If you're interested in polyamory because you imagine nonstop kinky orgies, you may be disappointed. … Many poly people dislike group sex, don't identify as bisexual or pansexual, and don't even own a vibrator, much less a trapeze. … We've met poly folks from all walks of life: political liberals and conservatives, evangelical Christians, fundamentalist Muslims, rationalist skeptics, working single parents, college students, you name it. (Veaux and Rickert 13-14)

Similarly, the mainstream press tends to "focus on the mundane aspects of a poly lifestyle: sleeping arrangements, how domestic chores are organized, who takes care of the children,

managing the life-work balance. Polyamory is often positioned in direct opposition to previous stereotypes about open relationships and free love" (Wilkinson 246). These efforts to make polyamory and nonmonogamy more "approachable" and "acceptable" to the heteronormative majority respond to both real and perceived critiques of polyamorous relationships and lifestyles. Of course, as Veaux and Rickert are quick to remind us, some people *do* enjoy orgies, kinky sex, partner swapping, and other "scandalous" pastimes, but much more space in popular advice books and media is devoted to "normalizing" polyamory (cf. Evans, Gunn, James and Alderton, Jenkins, Mogilevsky, Pandika, Safronova, Smith, Weigel).

Almost all of my research participants experienced commentary by others directed toward their relationships. Dan, Bob, Aaron, and Milana all said that they include that they are in open relationships on their online dating profiles on apps and websites, such as Grindr, Tinder, and OKCupid and, as a result, they have each received unsolicited comments about their relationships from strangers. Dan said that some have been extremely positive: "Some guys are supportive about it. Some guys ask me a lot of questions or want to see pictures of us and want to be like, 'Hey you guys are so cute together'" (Dan). Aaron, too, said that he "actually get[s] a lot of positive reactions" which has motivated him to speak more publicly to educate others about open relationships (Aaron).

Beyond responses on the internet, Sejohn said that when he told his mom that he was in a relationship with two women, she just said, "Okay…are they happy? Are they nice?" He went on to say, "I've never had anybody react negatively, I've never had anybody say 'you shouldn't be doing that' … I've had some people mad at me that it wasn't the first thing I told them" (Sejohn). Likewise, when Milana came out to her boss and his wife as polyamorous, "they [were] very supportive" and mostly curious about polyamory and her relationships because it was a new

concept for them (Milana). "They wanted to know, 'So, how does it work? Do you actually have multiple boyfriends and girlfriends?' And it's like [nodding her head], 'Yes, I wasn't lying.' And they want to know, is it more of a sexual thing, or is it actually an intimate relationship? … Just your general questions of people that are curious" (Milana).

Many comments, at least according to my participants, are not as kind. Bob, a 38-year-old educator, describes an instance where he was talking online to a man. He says: "[he] knew I was in an open relationship…and I thought he was interested because he wanted to exchange phone numbers. And the next day I got a huge long all-morning diatribe against my choice to be in an open relationship and everything that was wrong with it…as though I had done something to him personally" (Bob). Dan, too, describes online reactions where "people go off on [him]" (Dan). He says that people have said things like "Who the fuck are you to have a Grindr when you're in a relationship?" (Dan). Rachel says that even her friends have been hurtful unintentionally: "People were like, 'what are you, you're just using him,' or 'you're just leading him on,' or 'that's not a thing.' … It's really insulting" (Rachel). Milana says that when a friend decided to try opening up his relationship, "he was getting a lot of shit for it from our other friends…like 'that's too sexually promiscuous,' or like 'you just don't want to deal with commitment, you're just afraid of commitment.' You know, 'grow up, at some point you've got to experience what it's like to be in this committed exclusive relationship'" (Milana). So, despite our efforts at polynormativity, the normative world at large continues to marginalize and stigmatize nonmonogamous relationships.

I, too, am familiar with negative external commentary. Interestingly, the comments that are most seared into my memory are those made by one of my participants. Perhaps it is because I was hyper-attentive to his words when he first said them, and because I had to hear them again

as I transcribed the interview, that they stick in my mind. Access to the video recording allowed me to listen to the words that stung deeply several times. Aaron positioned multiple romantic relationships as a moral issue. He and his boyfriend share an open relationship where they are free to have any sexual relationship they desire with what he calls "hookup buddies" (Aaron). Aaron says, though, that within an open relationship he doesn't "necessarily agree with…building feelings with other people." He positions it as a moral issue, saying, "Why would you date someone else if you're already dating someone? What's the point? *Do you feel that the relationship you're currently in is not good enough where you have to add on another person?*" (Aaron).

Maybe these words stung so much because they so clearly echoed what I've heard much closer to home, from my wife. During my interview with Hannah, she shared many of her insecurities with me. Speaking of the time when our open relationship first moved toward romantic relationships beyond our own, she says: "I get why some people are okay with just the sexual and not the emotional, because it is way easier. It's one thing to be like, 'I don't have a penis so I can't give you those opportunities,' but it's another thing to see someone who's supposed to be a novelty receive the same attention and affection that you feel like you've put in so much time and support" (Hannah). It was I, after all, who created the push toward a sexually *and* romantically open relationship. Hannah says, "You're slutty with your heart. You're not slutty with your pussy. You won't sleep with people until you've already fallen in love with them, basically. But that's okay because you also fall in love with people after approximately half an hour and a beer" (Hannah).

Even now, after three years of polyamory, my desire for multiple romantic relationships is confusing to her. More than confusing, it is heartbreaking. Despite our short-lived triad

relationship with Andy (toward whom she felt only friendship), she has never really wanted to have multiple romantic partners. She says,

> I don't have that inclination. So it's really hard for me to understand why you do. I mean, I can understand why you'd want to spend that night with someone you love, and I can understand that [Sejohn] is someone you love. I just want to be someone you love more. … It's one thing if it's a one-night stand and you just want to get laid that night and I'm tired and you don't come home. It's another thing when it's someone that I know you want to be around and increasingly more so. It's another when I know it's…not necessarily just because you're looking for some dick. (Hannah)

Her heart breaks and my heart breaks. Her interview was months after Aaron's, but I heard his words come rushing back to my head, clear as the day he spoke them. "Do you feel that the relationship you're in is not good enough where you have to add another person?"

God, no. That's not it at all.

I fall in love easily and hard. It's not a reflection of a less-than-happy current relationship but the potential for *even more happiness*. In the moments when my polyamorous identity is challenged or is a source of discomfort for Hannah, who identifies as monogamous, I sometimes feel that it's not that one partner is not good enough, it's that *I'm* somehow broken so I crave that same level of intimacy and connection with more than one person. There's not a hole in my heart that needs filling, it just has room to grow.

I want so badly to be normal.

I sometimes want normalcy so desperately that I imagine having a "normal family" where I have a (singular) husband and children and a mortgage. We go to church and live near

my extended family. I don't have to keep secrets and my parents are proud. But even more than the "normal family," I want *my* little family, the one that I have built myself, to be considered normal. I imagine a moment when I bring both of my partners home for Thanksgiving and, while Hannah and I prepare the food with my mom, grandma, aunts, and girl cousins, Sejohn plays in the Turkey Bowl with my dad, grandpa, uncles, and boy cousins. I don't have to keep secrets and my parents are proud.

It is within this environment of critical commentary that nonmonogamous individuals must choose whether or not to "come out." Although the stakes are somewhat different when coming out as nonmonogamous as opposed to coming out as queer, many similarities exist. Bob, who is gay, said, "it was like being in the closet all over again. And anytime I told somebody it was like coming out again" (Bob). The main difference for him lies, though, in the fact that an open relationship is something that people might only share with one another after they have achieved a certain degree of closeness. While he is out as gay to everyone he knows, he positions coming out as nonmonogamous as something that is best kept between friends: "By the time you're in a place where you're confessing that to people you're usually in a safer space" (Bob).

As I stated previously, choosing to come out can also be a matter of intersecting positionalities and privilege. Both Andy and Sejohn, who are both able-bodied, educated, straight, white, young cisgender men, stated that they were and are personally very open about their nonmonogamous relationships (both men were out to their parents), but they occasionally chose not to come out to protect the comfort and safety of their partners. Andy said that he "probably would have been [completely open] but…there was a lot less to lose…patriarchal culture can understand a guy who's dating two women. The 'married women who also have a boyfriend' gets framed, seen, judged in a very different way" (Andy). He later emphasized that

he made deliberate choices that were contrary to his own desires in order to protect his partners: "I would probably have walked down the street holding hands with you both. But I'm not a policed body by any means. So within that situation, while I would have felt entirely comfortable with it, that doesn't mean that you both may have seen people's looks in a different way than I was or known to look" (Andy). Even within small town Bowling Green, Ohio, where we live, he felt that his queer female partners were under far more scrutiny than he, saying that he would not have felt uncomfortable being out "here or really any place else. Maybe if I was in Vatican City or Russia, maybe then. But no, generally, in everyday American life I would not" (Andy).

Sejohn, too, says that although he feels comfortable being out in any situation and with any people, he recognizes that he has "a lot of benefits that a lot of other people in this position normally don't. [He is] a straight white male dating two younger women. [He doesn't] really have much to lose by coming out" (Sejohn). He, too, emphasizes that for him the choice of whether or not to be out ultimately comes down to his partners' decisions, saying, "I always make sure to clear it with you first when it's somebody that also might have an effect on your life as well, or at least I try to. …we had very long conversations about how do we tell people… But that was all for your benefit. Like I said, I don't have anything to lose in this position" (Sejohn).

Both of these men subtly emphasize a deeper-rooted polynormativity. Because they themselves fall almost completely within the heteronormative, they feel comfortable and even happy to be public about their relationships. Two girlfriends for one man, for each of them, represents something that is not far off the beaten path; in fact it is a fantasy for many men, as evidenced by representations in popular film and television of rich and famous men who have a woman on each arm. Andy and Sejohn would feel comfortable walking down the street holding

hands with both girls, performing polynormativity through their use of "standard" relationship performances within a polyamorous context. Their openness, then, allows for most "traditional" relationship expectations to remain in place, at least when viewed through the lens of the male gaze, which tends to position women, especially lesbians, only as sex objects. When a relationship is closeted, it can hamper the relationship escalator. Even in a nontraditional relationship, though, when most other normative factors fall into place, normative narratives also continue to take shape.

I dream of the normative, of being "normal." Dreaming about the future is one of my favorite ways to daydream. I never quite lost that pre-teen part of myself that meets someone and immediately plans the rest of our life together. In spite of my queer and polyamorous identities, the narrative that I grew up wholeheartedly accepting as future fact continues to influence my daydreaming. My daydreaming, in turn, influences my daily behavior and speech. It leads me toward all-encompassing performances of polynormativity, which I often internally frame as the closest I can get to normal. I seek roles such as "home owner" alongside my partners. Like the mainstream representations of polyamory, I don't look for orgies or kinky sex, I mostly focus on communicating with and relating to my partners so we can effectively figure out mundane things such as who's making dinner tonight.

My performances of polynormativity do not always mesh seamlessly with my partners' needs and wants. While I dream of a large, shared home (perhaps even with a big bed), Hannah and Sejohn have different needs. Sejohn enjoys the space and privacy that his "bachelor pad" affords him, something that might be lost in a shared home. Hannah mourns the loss of the chance for us to buy our first home together just the two of us. Because these visions for the future directly conflict with one another, the ultimate action we take will be a compromise;

perhaps we will choose a home with separate living areas or maybe we will just be neighbors.

Polynormativity is in many ways a fantasy because of the differing needs of the people involved.

Despite my efforts to perform the polynormative, when I take my partners' needs into account

polynormativity is not always the most prudent or even desirable performance to stage.

Milana, who considers polyamory to be "a piece of [her] identity," also has

polynormative dreams. She currently has two long-term male partners and one occasional female

partner. Although she is not actively seeking more partners, she is open to the possibility. For

her, the ideal future is family-oriented. As I noted in part earlier, she said:

> I guess the only thing I know about my future that I would like to have happen is
>
> that I would love to live in a house with a group of people that I love or that love
>
> each other, however that works. … I personally do not want [kids]…but I think it
>
> would be really cool to help raise kids. I would love to have a piece in it. …the
>
> polyamory family…would be the best way ever to raise kids. (Milana)

Although she is career-oriented and currently establishing a promising career in a competitive

field, she said that the goal of a polyamorous family and home is stronger for her than any career

goal.

For some, though, this socially constructed ideal of polynormativity is not as strong of a

factor in their nonmonogamy. When polyamory first began to enter the public discourse in the

early 1990s, it was associated with kink and fetish communities, as, in some ways, it still is.

Milana pointed out that among the dating websites she uses is FetLife, a fetish- and kink-oriented

dating site, in part because people can be more accepting of non-traditional relationships and

sexual preferences. Although mainstream media is quick to mention that many polyamorous

people are "just like you," there remains a subset of individuals who do enjoy lifestyles beyond

the heteronormative ideal. In fact, in some cases their nonmonogamy frees them to get the best of many worlds by allowing multiple and potentially continuously new romantic and sexual relationships. Dan talked about how having sexual relationships with more than his boyfriend allows him to experience the full array of his sexual preferences. He said his boyfriend, Ben, "is amazing and I love him and we have this really, really great relationship, but there's things that Ben is not. There's things that I am not, clearly. And that's okay. And those things are fulfilled in these other areas" (Dan).

While we talked, Aaron made no effort to fit his relationship or "hookup buddies" into a normative box. He was proud to say, "It's who I am; I'm an ethical slut" (Aaron). He went on to say, "I have a lot of sex and I'm not ashamed of it. For me having sex is like shaking hands with somebody" (Aaron). In fact, he was happy to share that although he met his boyfriend online, their first in-person meeting and the beginning of their relationship was the result of group sex, "a foursome with [his] couple friends" (Aaron):

> They were like, "Hey we're going to bring this fourth person is that okay?" And I was like, "Yeah, sure! Who is it?" And that happened to be this guy. I was like, "Oh my god, yeah. I haven't met him yet so this'll be perfect." We were having the foursome [and] it wasn't even a foursome it was just like me and my boyfriend. So it was just us the entire time. … It was instant chemistry, just me and him the entire time. (Aaron)

Aaron said that he was raised in a sex-positive household, which he credits for his own openness about sex today. He is open with his family about his sexuality and although he has yet to talk about his open relationship with any of them besides his mom, he says, "I talked to my family

about my sexcapades and they're just like, 'Oh my god, Aaron, you're such a slut,' and I'm just like, 'Thank you'" (Aaron).

Although other people, like Aaron, are comfortable and happy with living free of its constraints, I still dream of polynormativity. Is it problematic on a personal level to fantasize about continuing to follow a traditional life script, just with a few "minor" alterations? Can I play the role of wife twice over and still be playing *that* role? Am I adapting the script, or am I throwing it out entirely and writing a whole new one? Which one of those *should* I perform to be a "good" polyamorous person?

For now, the traditional life script is in some ways a source of comfort, an anchor of normalcy in an otherwise tumultuous, uncharted, queer world. I never expected any of this. I never expected to be married to a woman; I never expected to have multiple partners. I expected to get married to a man, wait to have sex until after my eternal marriage in the temple of God, and then never have sex with anyone but my husband until the day I died. That's not what I want anymore. But trying to adapt the traditional life script, rather than throw it out entirely, provides me with some degree of comfort. The larger culture around me is codified into a monogamous, coupled structure. By creating my own adaptation of the life script, I can participate in this culture. I don't have to completely create my role from scratch, I can reinvent it from what is already there.

This isn't a new work, this is a revival.

Admittedly, though, it's a revival where the director took a hell of a lot of liberties.

What follows contains truth in its imagining.

> SETTING: A small house. Pretty run-down. Kind of messy. A living room with mismatched, secondhand furniture. HANNAH and SEJOHN are on the couch, flipping through channels on the TV.

CHARACTERS:
    TESSA – a first-semester doctoral student, already super stressed out

    HANNAH – TESSA's wife, teaching music lessons and looking for something
               more permanent

    SEJOHN – TESSA's boyfriend, HANNAH's something, a bartender for the
               moment

SCENE:
    TESSA: *(dramatically falling down on top of HANNAH and SEJOHN)* I'm done. I'm done. I completely give up. You guys were right, it was a mistake to even move here. I'm going to email them tomorrow and tell them I quit.

    HANNAH: I never said it was a mistake to move here.

    SEJOHN: Yeah, don't put this on us.

    TESSA: *(incoherent growling)*

    HANNAH: Hey. Come on. You've been stressed before.

    SEJOHN: And after Friday all your papers and presentations will be done!

    TESSA: *(continued grumbles)*

    HANNAH: We'll take you to a movie when you get done. *(TESSA stubbornly shakes her head, still facedown on top of the others.)* Okay, no movie. We'll stay home? *(TESSA nods, still facedown)* We'll stay home and I'll make you dinner and we can cuddle?

    TESSA: *(pause)* Keep talking.

    HANNAH: And there will be a puppy. *(a small terrier dashes onto the stage, jumping on top TESSA to make an increasingly large pile of living beings on the couch)*

    TESSA: I do like the puppy. *(lifting her head)* Can we order dessert from that place we found last weekend?

    SEJOHN: You mean the place we still have leftovers from in the freezer?

TESSA: Oh my god you're right! I completely forgot. *(sitting up, the dog scrambling not to fall on the floor)* Oh but that means I could have it right now if I wanted it.

HANNAH: Oooh, yes I am in favor of this idea.

SEJOHN: Wait, this was supposed to be a reward for getting through the week.

HANNAH: *(looking deep into SEJOHN's eyes, as though they may be sharing a romantic moment)* But the dog wants dessert. I can't say no to her.

TESSA: She's right you know. The dog wants us to eat dessert.

SEJOHN: What am I supposed to do with you two? *(petting the dog)* You three?

TESSA: *(nuzzling him in a pretty obnoxious way, using an obnoxious voice)* Love me!

HANNAH: *(giving mirror image obnoxious nuzzles on his other side)* What she said.

SEJOHN: You know I don't have to hang out up here. I could just go downstairs and go to bed. *(in spite of his words, puts an arm around each of them)*

TESSA: Yeah but you won't.

HANNAH: Because we're cute.

There's some kind of happily ever after here. It may not come standard with a diamond ring, a wedding, and clearly defined relationship roles. There might not be home ownership or 2.5 children. It might, though, include watching Netflix, doing laundry, and balancing checkbooks. In spite of ourselves we might become domesticated consumerists. Homebodies who buy things.

While happily ever after may be the long-term effect, though, daily life is, nevertheless, messy. With the wide range of emotions that feed it and come along with it, jealousy features

prominently in almost all consensual nonmonogamous relationships. Jealous words and actions disrupt picture-perfect normalcy. Of course, jealousy can and does exist in any relationship, whether it is monogamous or nonmonogamous. The key difference between monogamous and nonmonogamous performances of jealousy is that the "other person" who is the "cause" of the jealousy must also be considered; that person's feelings, desires, and views, unlike in monogamous relationships, can and do get taken into account. Because of this dynamic, "happily ever after," what it is and what it means, can be subject to change. Relationships never truly exist in the "ever after," only in the "now." For many nonmonogamous relationships, coexisting with metamours in the "now" can result in anger, resentment, frustration, and pain, hallmarks of jealousy. Polynormativity, too, is a fluctuating ideal, one that changes between relationships and also over the course of time. Performances of jealousy and the power structures those performances expose alter the landscape of perceived and actual polynormativity, as I discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: ACTING JEALOUS

You broke up with your boyfriend yesterday.

Your wife had to leave town because of a family crisis, and she encouraged you to take a night for yourself, something you almost never do. You hate being alone, though, especially tonight, on a night when you're already feeling pretty sorry for yourself. So when the guy you've been crushing on and flirting with for months asks if you want to hang out and watch a movie or something, you say yes.

You don't know him too well yet, but you've been getting closer over the last month or two. As you sit side by side on your couch, you have one of those thrilling conversations where you talk about everything. Everything you think, everything you know, everything that's happened to you, everything you dream of. Everything. Even though you can't tell why, you trust him. He talks about his past relationships, and what he wants now. You tell him the details of your breakup, and he empathizes.

"He's acting like a little bitch," you say. "He wanted me to be with him forever and ever and didn't want me to be with anyone new. But I'm already married so if I'm with him then the relationship is by definition open. If I'm going to be in a closed relationship, I'm going to be in a closed relationship with my wife. He was just so stubborn and stupid." You sigh. "I don't know why he couldn't just be chill."

"Look," he says, "yeah he didn't handle it well but…I don't know. It's not an excuse or anything, but we do crazy things when we fall in love. Sometimes we get kind of stupid."

"Yeah," you say, rolling your eyes. "Real stupid."

"Yeah, real stupid," he agrees. He turns toward you and looks you right in the eye. His gaze doesn't waver. "But you have to understand how easy it is to fall in love with you."

And he kisses you.

Jealousy is a tricky human condition. Jillian Deri, writing about queer women's experiences with jealousy in polyamorous relationships, notes that jealousy "is expected in the dominant culture…[it] may be experienced as an internal feeling, but it is embedded in a larger social context" (6). Jealousy is one of the most common and foremost concerns cited among monogamous individuals being introduced to nonmonogamy and it likewise is one of the most common and foremost topics of discussion within popular and academic literature on nonmonogamy (cf. Anapol 105, Deri, Easton and Hardy 2009 108, Mint 201, Parker, Veaux and Rickert 124). When presented with the idea of nonmonogamy, monogamous people tend to say something to the effect of, "Oh, I could never do that, I would get too jealous." Nonmonogamous people, however, are not immune to jealousy. Instead, they are keenly aware of it; each of my interview participants discussed their experiences with jealousy at length. While many, if not most people have some experience with jealousy, jealousy within nonmonogamous relationships and contexts differs in several ways on a psychosocial level from jealousy within monogamous relationships and contexts. Nonmonogamous individuals experience jealousy within an environment in which they are "working hard to open-up new ways of relating that [are] less possessive and arguably more productive" (Langdridge et al. 15). In so doing, they are "resisting normative (hegemonic) forms of relating in which jealousy is perceived as simply threatening to the established order" (Langdridge et al. 15). Additionally, because they fall outside of the scope of normativity, their relationships contain some degree of an "unknown quality" with regards to

both expected behaviors in specific situations as well as their relationship structure itself, which can, unlike monogamous relationships, fundamentally change while continuing to exist. While jealousy in nonmonogamous relationships shares many features in common with jealousy in monogamous relationships, the differences in context between the two create circumstances that ultimately differ.

Employing performance to examine how polyamorous people speak and behave when they, their partners, or their metamours are jealous reveals the dynamics of intra-relationship and social power at play within and surrounding the relationship. Jealousy itself is inherently performative. It is an embodied experience, one that is characterized by Langdridge et al. as "feeling lost or trapped in another's space, or with others with a vivid physicality" (6). Additionally, jealousy by its very nature is relational and involves interaction between multiple different individuals. Their actions in situations of jealousy can be studied both as "restored behaviors" (Schechner 34) as well as a "stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 187). The embodied, relational nature of jealousy embeds it deeply within the realm of performativity.

Although commonly positioned as an emotion (e.g., "I'm *feeling* jealous"), jealousy "is not a single emotion but a kind of umbrella term for painful or frightening feelings that might arise from thinking about a partner connecting sexually or romantically with someone else. Jealousy is the name of a stimulus, not an emotion" (Easton 208). The myriad of responses that individuals experience with regards to jealousy indicate that it "is a complex experience that combines many emotions including fear, anger, sadness, betrayal, pride, loss, and grief, and it is for this reason that some theorists are reluctant to call it a distinct emotion on its own" (Deri 17).

In spite of this litany of emotional responses among individuals, the body's physiological response to jealousy is often consistent:

In men, jealousy activates the amygdala and hypothalamus, regions rich in

testosterone receptors and involved in sexual and aggressive behavior. In women,

thoughts of emotional infidelity activate the posterior superior temporal sulcus, a

region implicated in the detection of intention, deception, and trustworthiness as

well as violation of social norms. … People commonly describe jealous

sensations as gut wrenching, churning, agitating, arousing, and overpoweringly

unpleasant. While different people become jealous for different reasons and in

differing circumstances, the actual physical feelings are remarkably consistent

from person to person, although they may vary in intensity. (Anapol 106-7)

So, although jealousy on an individual level manifests as a wide variety of emotional and

physical responses, it is nonetheless a common experience. Rachel described her feelings of

jealousy as physically distressing. She said, "I have really acute emotions and I feel my emotions

physically so I get really sick when I'm upset, my stomach is all over the place and I just get

nauseous and I get headaches and I get really sick when I'm emotionally upset. And so jealousy

is one of those things that gets me emotionally sick" (Rachel). Likewise, Aaron mentioned that at

times when his jealousy is piqued he often feels that his "heart is racing" (Aaron). For these

individuals, as with all jealousy, the feelings themselves, although internal, were performative

because they comprised "a felt bodily experiencing that was always fundamentally relational"

(Langdridge et al. 14).

In their popular advice book *More Than Two: A Practical Guide to Ethical Polyamory*,

Franklin Veaux and Eve Rickert point out that "there is a difference between jealous feelings and

jealous *actions*" (125, emphasis original). These actions are referred to as "mate-guarding" or

"mate-retention" behaviors (Eckels 52). In the same way that jealous feelings vary from person

to person, so too do jealous actions vary between individuals and between relationships, enacting a wide range of performances of jealousy. These performative behaviors can include a wide variety of spoken communication, ranging from solution-focused conversations to threats and verbal abuse. Additionally, performances of jealousy can include nonverbal communication such as putting an arm around one's partner in the presence of a perceived threat or even, in extreme cases, murder. Extreme abusive relationships are beyond the purview of this thesis; however, jealous feelings and performances of jealousy through speech and behavior are common among all relationships and individuals in nonmonogamous relationships are no exception. A key difference between monogamous and nonmonogamous relationships, though, is that for monogamous people, often the "responsibility for fixing jealousy falls on the partner. [Members of the dominant culture] typically expect the partner of a jealous person to adjust their behavior to assuage the jealousy, up to a point. They can do this various ways, by cutting off contact with the third person, paying more attention to the jealous person, and so on" (Mint 2012 203). Monogamous individuals and relationships have a distinct advantage with regards to the handling of jealousy: they can often limit or entirely eliminate contact with the person who is "causing" the feelings of jealousy. In a nonmonogamous relationship, though, jealousy cannot be simply ignored or assuaged. Instead, for nonmonogamous people, jealous feelings and the resultant performances of jealousy must be approached and handled head-on by everyone involved: jealous person, partner, and metamour alike.

The kiss is instant fireworks.

You are simultaneously enchanted by the sweetness of the moment and hungry for more. "Wow," you say, pulling away. "I've wanted you to do that for a really long time."

"I've wanted to do that for a really long time," he says.

So you kiss him again.

Things heat up. You've gained enough experience in the last couple years that you know the script by now: you'll keep making out for awhile, tease him, drive him crazy, make him beg, and then take him to bed and (hopefully) blow his mind. And it's all going according to the script, right up until you head toward the bedroom.

"Wait," he says. "We need to talk about what this means. Is this okay?" And he talks to you for a long time about the potential fallout of this one night since you are colleagues. He makes sure that this is all kosher, that your wife is genuinely okay with this. He is the first man you have ever been with who didn't just jump straight into bed with you at the first opportunity. Instead he seeks not just your enthusiastic consent, but also your informed *consent.*

When he goes to the bathroom you text your wife. "He kissed me!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" You have always told each other about everything, especially when it comes to sleeping with other people. You cheer each other on. You've had a few bumps in the road, snags along the way, but this has always been how you've done it. By now you've developed a rhythm, a sense of some weird kind of normal behavior in this decidedly not a normal arrangement.

You take him to bed with you. He spends the night, and in the morning everything has changed.

Oftentimes, for those who are new to nonmonogamy, it can feel easier to engage in the kind of nonmonogamy where external relationships are "just" sex rather than emotionally based. For many people including some of my study participants, this preference is due in part to the complications associated with jealousy that can arise from sharing a romantic partner. Avoiding

jealousy altogether can become an important mechanism of controlling jealousy within nonmonogamous relationships, especially relationships in their earliest phases.

Several participants in my study indicated that they engage only in purely sexual relationships outside their primary relationship; others indicated that purely sexual arrangements would be the ideal for them. Aaron, for example, is in a relationship that is sexually, but not emotionally, nonmonogamous. He says that in his current relationship, he and his boyfriend "just completely separate sex from love" (Aaron). For him, "everything's fine and dandy until somebody starts falling for someone. And then that's when it gets a little difficult" (Aaron). Dan echoes that while he and his boyfriend, who are in a long distance relationship, are sexually nonmonogamous when they are apart, when it comes to the idea of emotions getting entangled in the arrangement, "neither of [them] likes it too much" (Dan). Likewise, Hannah, who identifies as monogamous despite being in a nonmonogamous marriage with me, says that she "get[s] why some people are okay with just the sexual and not the emotional because it is way easier" (Hannah). Each of these examples show that for some people in nonmonogamous relationships, sexual and emotional nonmonogamy are considered different from one another, with purely sexual nonmonogamy taking a preferential position.

Some participants, like Langdridge et al., suggested that this difference might be in part due to what Andy called "the unknowness of it" (Andy). He said that his discomfort with multiple romantic relationships arose from "not knowing the when and how you can meet somebody and what it would turn into…the anxiety revolves around the unknowns of nonmonogamy. And how – where it'll end up going once it starts" (Andy). Andy and I ultimately broke up because of his discomfort with the idea that I might develop romantic feelings for someone other than him (or for Hannah, whom he considered a "constant" of sorts). This

discomfort may have resulted because we were a closed triad and an additional partner could represent changes in or an end to our collective performances of polynormativity. (Or it may have resulted from the fact that I *was* very attracted to and interested in Sejohn for almost the entirety of my official relationship with Andy, and Andy's not stupid.) Until another partner *did* arrive, though, the ambiguity surrounding the situation was a catalyst for Andy's anxiety. Another participant, Bob, echoed this idea when he indicated that the expectations within the relationship could contribute to jealousy or assuage it. He said:

> It seems to me that if I were in an open relationship where somebody was just having sex with somebody else, I would probably worry that they might develop feelings for that person and leave. If I already knew that they had feelings for someone else but they were still capable of having feelings for me that seems less upsetting somehow. I think it's because it takes away the wrongness of that emotional connection. (Bob)

The "unknown factor," or the idea that at any time a partner could fall in love with someone else and leave, is a powerful trigger for jealousy. As Andy pointed out, though, this trigger is not unique to nonmonogamy "because you can be dating somebody and have it be a closed relationship and you can meet another person" (Andy). However, as I previously discussed, the inherently non-normative nature of nonmonogamous relationships results in experiences and performances of jealousy that ultimately differ from those in monogamous relationships. And, unlike monogamous relationships, in nonmonogamous relationships jealousy is usually more a matter of "when" rather than "if."

While you were busy acting like a teenager and kissing a boy, your wife has been dealing with her family crisis and is feeling scared, confused, and alone. She doesn't care that you kissed him. In fact, she's kind of peeved that you kissed him. She had said you should spend the night alone, but instead you couldn't even wait one *night. And he, this guy who she was also kind of into, waited until she was out of town and then at the very first opportunity he kisses* you. *Even though you try to reassure her that that's not what's going on, she's not convinced.*

When you and the guy start seeing each other, it doesn't make things any better.

It's not that things suddenly become terrible overnight. Things have been up and down for a while. You and your wife had a rocky engagement. There were issues that neither of you had known about in your relationship, deep level things. You started out as high school sweethearts, but now you are adults. You didn't realize your relationship would need to fundamentally change as you grew, that it would change whether you wanted it to or not. Even though you worked things out to some extent, the issues during the engagement were never truly resolved. And now you have this boyfriend, all the old problems have come right back to the surface along with an assortment of new, terrible issues.

It's easy to escape what's going on at home. You have a boyfriend who you are rapidly *falling in love with. He's kind, funny, patient, interesting, and he cooks too! He's all you can think about. You find every excuse possible to spend time with him and when you're not with him, you're trying to figure out how you can see him again. You haven't felt like this since you were a teenager. He seems too good to be true.*

But visits to see him tend to be cut short by increasingly frantic text messages and phone calls from your wife. If you don't answer the first text, she rapidly spirals, flinging wild accusations until something sticks. You find yourself saying a lot of, "I'm so sorry to do this

again, but I need to go home." And when you get home, you try to act appropriately subdued. It never seems to work, and you fight with your wife. As time passes, the fights become more common and more terrible.

Soon, it feels like the only way you can talk to each other is by screaming.

In order to circumvent and diminish feelings of jealousy, and the subsequent performances of jealousy that often come with them, many people in nonmonogamous relationships utilize rules or agreements to regulate behavior. Veaux and Rickert indicate that both rules and agreements are mechanisms for changing behavior, the key differences between the two are in "how these different things go about doing it, what assumptions they make, how they are created, and whom they apply to" (163). Although many other authors regard rules and agreements as roughly similar, I find Veaux and Rickert's distinction between the two to be a useful tool and therefore quote them at length to establish this distinction:

> As we use the word, *agreements* are negotiated codes of conduct established among people who are involved with each other. An agreement is a covenant negotiated by *all* the parties it affects. Something negotiated between one set of people—a couple, for example—and then presented as a take-it-or-leave-it proposition to others is not an agreement as we define it: we call that a *rule*. … Agreements also allow for renegotiation by any of the people they affect. An agreement that does not permit renegotiation is more like a rule. An agreement that is binding on people who did not negotiate it *is* a rule. … Even when a rule is agreed to, it's a mandate that can only be obeyed or broken. Breaking a rule is

assumed to have consequences, such as loss of the relationship. (163-4, emphasis

original)

This distinction is helpful because, while rules are common within the nonmonogamous world,

they often lack the input and consent from *all* parties necessary for an agreement.

When Hannah and I first opened our relationship, we "tried to lay down basic rules: you

had to have protected sex, if you were out with someone but one of us had an emergency, you

would prioritize that and take the phone call or whatever" (Hannah). But, "just like with any

other foray into nonmonogamy, no matter how formal, of course things we didn't expect came

up, namely, the fact that feelings happened" (Hannah). Throughout the time our relationship has

been open, we have often struggled to shift our tendency to create rules toward a tendency for

creating agreements. As an established couple, we have often forgotten to include the third

person as we have created rules. Over the years, we have grown more adept at creating

agreements rather than rules, but the effort is still a highly conscious one and one with which we

are not always consistent.

Dan and his boyfriend have what they call "boundaries" in their open relationship, which,

at the time of his interview was about three months old, making it the youngest relationship

among my participants who were then currently in relationships. He said that the most important

of these was, "we're going to keep checking in. And if either of us ever feels uncomfortable,

that's reassessing whatever guidelines or boundaries there are, because this is primary…we come

first" (Dan). Other boundaries in their relationship include waiting until *after* "things happen" to

tell one another about dates and hookups, letting other sexual partners know that they are in an

open relationship, and maintaining a policy of having sex with people that is "only safe and only

with clean" (Dan). Additionally, one of their boundaries is not having sex "with close

friends…[or] mutual friends" (Dan). As many of these boundaries demonstrate, rules are not inherently bad; it is good to practice safer sex and it is good to be transparent with partners. Rules can be problematic, though, because they can strip additional partners who were not part of the rule-making process of their agency within the relationship.

Rules are a common response to jealousy and are often put into place with the hope of reducing or eliminating jealous feelings (Parker 88). In spite of this effort, or perhaps because of it, rule violations are a common cause for jealousy in nonmonogamous relationships (Parker 90). Rules can also be used as a way of treating the symptom rather than the cause because they tend to focus on eliminating triggers for jealousy, such as mandating that one's partner must be home by a certain time, rather than examining and relieving the deeper needs that cause the trigger, such as the need to know that one's partner is not gone forever and will ultimately return home. Implementing rules can create a contained, controlled performance of nonmonogamy that can assuage one partner's feelings of jealousy for a time; if the root cause of the feelings is not addressed, though, then it is likely that, with time, other elements of performances of nonmonogamy will trigger jealous feelings. Milana said that the key to managing jealousy is to have "a jealousy conversation" rather than creating new rules (Milana). Through this conversation, agreements may be reached and "negotiation can go a long way toward reducing jealousy to manageable levels" (Anapol 124). Healthy jealousy management agreements often include a time component wherein the people involved in the agreement decide together to participate in or abstain from a certain behavior while the jealous person makes a conscious effort to work through the jealousy; after the allotted time is up, the agreement is renegotiated. In nonmonogamous relationships, like monogamous relationships, communication between *all* parties involved in the relationship is essential to jealousy management.

You forgot to invite her to the movie.

Or maybe you just didn't want her to come.

When your boyfriend and your friends arrived to pick you up to go to the mall to see a movie, she became angry that you were going without her, that you hadn't even invited her. You fought. You apologized. Even you had heard how hollow the apology sounded. But you really did *think you had invited her and she said no. You could have* sworn *you had invited her. Or did you? It feels fuzzy now. And at the movie you hadn't been able to stop thinking about her and how angry she was going to be when you got home.*

And boy is she angry.

When you walk in the door, she is sitting on the couch. "Hey," you say tentatively, kicking off your shoes and putting your purse on the table. For a second you hope that perhaps she's going to let it blow over.

"Oh don't bother taking your shoes off. I know you're just going to leave again," she says. Her tone indicates that nothing *has blown over.*

"I'm not going to leave, honey. I'm really sorry about earlier. But now I want to hang out with you tonight," you say, hoping you sound convincing. Before today, you had kind of hoped you'd be able to swing going over to your boyfriend's after the movie, but the fight earlier dashed those dreams.

"No you don't. I texted him and told him to stay. If you want to leave, just leave."

"I don't want to leave." Lie.

"You hate being here. And you should. I'm needy and clingy and I bring nothing to this relationship."

"I do not hate being here." Lie. "And you're not needy. Or clingy." Lies.

"Just admit it. You want a divorce."

You stop cold.

Your heart skips a beat before you can respond. You try to respond as soon as your brain resumes functioning, hoping that any pause you may have made is completely imperceptible.

"No I don't."

Lie.

One of the most common causes of jealousy is comparison. Partners compare themselves to other partners and, in their own minds at least, come up lacking. While common, though, comparison is ultimately futile because, as Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy point out in *The Ethical Slut: A Practical Guide to Polyamory, Open Relationships, and Other Adventures*, "There's a reason there is no Olympics of Sex: sexual achievement is not measurable" (114)[9]. Jealousy, though, can be irrational and, even when unintentional, comparison can lead to feelings of inadequacy and fear of replacement.

One of the most common causes for comparison among my interview participants was gender. Milana (a 26-year-old collegiate athletics coach) shared a story of dating a woman who was "a little bit not super into the idea of this whole nonmonogamy thing but was willing to give it a try" (Milana). Because Milana's other two partners at that time were men, the woman was able to adjust to nonmonogamy with relative ease. However, when another woman entered the picture, the first woman's feelings changed. Milana said, "I was feeling very attracted to this other woman and, obviously told her [the first woman]… And she was not pleased. Was very,

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[9] As I noted previously, *The Ethical Slut* is commonly referred to as "the bible of polyamory" (cf. Noël 601, Deri 81, Ritchie and Barker 590, Klesse 2011 6).

very jealous of this girl. Ultimately it ended up, our relationship ended up not working out, either one. That was definitely a bummer" (Milana). Unsurprisingly, while the woman was comfortable with nonmonogamy if Milana had partners of a different gender, an additional partner of the woman's same gender created jealousy that was too much to handle.

Andy and Sejohn both indicated that they, too, had the common feeling that additional male partners would be more difficult to handle than additional female partners. Andy said that while he would have felt jealous of *any* additional partner, an additional male partner would have posed a special threat: "I wouldn't have been able to do it. Had there been another partner. … I couldn't have handled it if it was another female partner but to be entirely honest I absolutely could not handle it if it was another male partner. And I don't have a good reason" (Andy). He reinforced the idea that comparison is at the root of his increased jealousy of other males when he indicated that his jealousy could be tamed if he doesn't "ever have to see this person, basically" (Andy). He clarified: "Not that I pretend or convince myself that it didn't happen or it doesn't exist; it isn't that. But it's just the idea of having to make eye contact with a guy who had just fucked my girlfriend" (Andy). Sejohn dislikes that he would struggle more with jealousy toward an additional male partner than an additional female partner, calling it "a shitty part" of himself (Sejohn). He said, "If you brought a girl home I would feel very differently than if you brought a guy home. But there's also a weird part of me that's also like, it depends on what guy it is" (Sejohn). Like Andy, it seems that for Sejohn the idea of sharing a partner with another person of the same gender as his is inherently threatening, although to his mind the threat could potentially be mitigated, perhaps through interpersonal contact and communication. Their statements together paint an interesting picture of hetero-masculine jealousy: for these men,

jealousy does not indicate a fear of losing their partner but rather sparks a desire to neutralize the threat that another man in their "territory" represents.

Sejohn and Andy's comments indicate that their performances of jealousy, like those of many of my participants, change depending upon for whom they feel jealousy. These shifts in performance showcase, to some degree, performances of power, control, and relinquishment of control within a relationship. While a jealous person who feels relatively unthreatened by a metamour (as may be the case for a man assessing the threat posed by sharing his partner with a woman) may perform that jealousy through a passing comment, when the jealous partner perceives a "true" threat (as with a man sharing his partner with another man) his performances of jealousy may change to include petty or snide remarks, sulky or sullen behavior, physical threats of violence, or actual violence against his partner or his metamour. Because feelings of jealousy can be strongly influenced by the "security" that a jealous partner feels within a relationship, disruptions of perceived power can alter and intensify performances of jealousy.

Not all jealousy due to comparison, however, stems from gender. Power and social currency can come from a range of sources and common triggers for jealousy can include physical characteristics, personality traits, occupation, and even hobbies, which can all be seen as threats to partners who compare themselves to their metamours. A major source of jealousy for Hannah was the similarities she saw between herself and Sejohn. She said, "He was a grownup version of me. He did everything I do for you only better and he had a dick" (Hannah). Inversely, as the last sentence in Hannah's quote makes clear, significant differences between metamours where one partner feels that she comes up lacking, such as income, physical attractiveness, intelligence, or popularity, can be a source of jealous feelings.

It is important that I note that comparison does not always immediately equate to jealousy. Aaron, for example, finds that seeing his boyfriend with other men is a turn-on for him. Significantly, as I noted earlier, Aaron and his boyfriend do not have multiple romantic relationships and engage only in sexual nonmonogamy. Perhaps it is because of the lack of emotional entanglement that Aaron and his boyfriend are able to maintain eroticism rather than jealousy alongside other male partners. Aaron says, "it's fun, it's kind of like Jay-Z sitting on the couch watching Beyonce with another dude. …it's like exhibitionism or voyeurism. I like it. It's nice" (Aaron). He and his boyfriend swap photos and videos of their hookups, which he indicated they are both into. According to Aaron, his boyfriend "doesn't get jealous, he gets envious" (Aaron). Rather than jealousy, the responses that they have tend to be more along the lines of "oh why wasn't I there I would have had fun too" or "oh my god that person's so hot where did you find them" (Aaron). While it is a common source of jealousy, then, comparison for some can actually be erotic and desirable.

You are really trying. At least you feel like you are.

Your friend hosts a party and you ask your wife if she wants to get dinner before and make a date of it. Or maybe you ask her to be your date to the party. Later you won't remember what exactly you said, which will bite you in the ass. But no matter how you invited her, she seemed happy to go.

You take her to your favorite restaurant. Sit at the outdoor bar, eat good food, drink tasty cocktails, take cute pictures for Instagram. You're having fun. Maybe things are looking up. You haven't argued all day. This will be your first day fight-free in longer than you can remember.

Things are going well. You're happy and ready to have fun when you arrive at your friend's apartment.

People are hanging out and chatting. You talk with friends, circling around the room. Sometimes you chat with the same people your wife is talking with, but sometimes you separate off. This isn't her group of friends, but she knows these people well. Your boyfriend arrives and you give him a smile, but he's across the room from you. Besides, there is an unspoken agreement between you that both around your wife and around your friends you need to be careful how you act together. Keep it casual.

You haven't seen him in a day or two, though, and you'd like to at least say hi. So you, him, and one other friend go outside to have a cigarette. Your wife doesn't love it when you smoke, but as long as you change your clothes and brush your teeth when you get home it's usually okay. The other friend doesn't smoke and goes back inside pretty quickly. You and your boyfriend talk a little while longer, then when you go to head back inside you discover that the outside doors to your friend's apartment are locked. And neither of you has your phones. It takes a few minutes for someone to open the door.

When you get upstairs, you can tell your wife is pissed off.

She tenses up when you sit beside her. You grab your phone where you left it and turn it on to find a litany of text messages. All from your wife.

"Where did you go?"

"Are you with him?"

"People are noticing."

"Jesus Christ you couldn't go five minutes without fucking him."

And on. And on.

The angry texts don't stop just because you've walked back into the room and you quickly realize that things are about to boil over. You both make your excuses and get into the car to go home. You scream at each other for the whole five-minute drive. In the driveway, she tells you:

"Go home to the love of your fucking life, breeder."

You are taken aback, as you always are when your kind, sweet, compassionate wife says hateful things to you. This isn't the first time she has hurled insults and curses. But this hurts the most. So far.

You are in the driveway and need a minute to cool off or you'll say something idiotic. Well, even more idiotic than you've already been. Furious, hurt, and scared, you wish you could go to your boyfriend's house, but that would definitely *be idiotic.*

Kindness, compassion, empathy, words, fail you.

Instead, you growl, "Get out."

Performances of jealousy in a relationship most often involve three people: the jealous person, the partner, and the third person (metamour). In addition to the jealous person's feelings and actions, the partner and the third person also experience a wide range of responses to their partner or metamour's jealousy. It is a tricky balance for a person to strike: on the one hand trying to perform empathy and validation for a person who is acting jealous while, on the other hand, simultaneously maintaining enough distance and sense of one's personal boundaries and needs to recognize when that jealous person has become unreasonable. Pepper Mint, a prominent nonmonogamy activist and educator explains the problem of a jealous partner as "an interesting trick. One person, by experiencing a somewhat vague emotion, can cause a problem that needs to be fixed by that person's partner via particular actions" (2012 203). Whether intentional or not,

this "trick" creates a situation in which "jealousy is actually an intra-relationship control mechanism, potentially providing power over one's partner's interactions with other people, the outside world, and oneself" (Mint 2012 203). Just as there are many types of jealousy, there are many strategies that a partner may employ to attempt to alleviate jealousy that may or may not be healthy for the individual or the relationship.

As I previously mentioned, Dan waits until after the date is over to tell his boyfriend, Ben, about a date with someone else. Because they are in a long distance relationships, Dan and Ben communicate primarily via phone and video chat, meaning that Dan must *tell* Ben in order for Ben to know Dan has gone on a date. Dan indicates that waiting until after the date to talk is a way of protecting Ben, saying, "I don't want him to freak out [that] night and be like, 'Okay what's happening now?'" (Dan). Their policy is to wait until after the date to have this discussion, although this process is not without its complications. He says, "I was nervous the first time I had to make that call…like, how's this going to go? Am I going to break his heart? Because if I'm going to break his heart then okay, nonmonogamy ends and that's fine" (Dan). Despite saying "that's fine" the idea of an immediate end to their arrangement to be nonmonogamous while away from one another directly clashes with Dan's stated needs. He indicates that nonmonogamy is important to him while he and Ben maintain a long distance relationship because "sex has always been my release… And it's something that I always know that I'm good at. And as somebody who's struggled with some sort of depression and anxiety, something that I know I'm good at and I can continuously do has always been a nice release for me" (Dan). Although he acknowledges that discontinuing the nonmonogamous aspect of their relationship "translates to…Dan no longer has his release," he outwardly seems otherwise unfazed by this idea, focusing instead on his worries for Ben's feelings and needs (Dan).

This tension between Dan's needs and Ben's needs, though, can result in precarious performances, such as those that arose early in their relationship: "I didn't tell him things…I was never lying to him, but I wasn't telling him either" (Dan). When the truth that Dan had been sleeping with other people ultimately came out, Dan says that Ben "was just kind of okay…he was just taken very aback…but since then each time it's been better" (Dan). In spite of being "better" each time, there are still topics of conversation that Dan avoids at certain times because Ben, according to Dan, can sometimes have "an extreme paranoia about things" (Dan). So, for Dan, what he chooses to talk about with Ben and when he chooses to talk about it "depends on the day. There are days when he could bring up somebody and we'll both completely know he's kidding and there's days when he's going to be feeling like crap… I'll make a comment or he'll make a comment and one of us it'll just hit the wrong way" (Dan). Dan's behavior typifies a common response to a partner's jealousy: walking on metaphorical eggshells. He treads lightly, using careful performances to protect his partner, whom he loves, and his partner's needs but also structuring these performances in such a way to protect and nurture his own needs within the relationship.

For much of my relationship with Sejohn, especially in the early days and months but even still today, I often approached Hannah's jealousy with a precarious performance akin to walking on eggshells. I saw it as a way of protecting her (or at least told myself that it was *her* I was protecting): I rationalized that if she doesn't want to know these things are happening, if knowing is what makes her sad, then I better be careful with what she knows and how she knows it. I contorted my own needs around hers, frequently denying them legitimacy in my own mind in favor of what I perceived as Hannah's "greater" need. This strategy is, however, a toxic one. Although treading lightly can help avoid a conflict in the moment, it results in one or both (or

all) partners feeling unheard and unimportant and simultaneously does not address the root cause of the jealousy. Because I sought to avoid conflict at all costs, Hannah's jealousy only deepened, and my own anger at not having my needs met grew. This steaming compost pile of circumstance became fertile soil in which discontent blossomed. Hannah was unhappy and I was unhappy, a situation that put strain on both my relationship with Hannah and my relationship with Sejohn; Hannah and Sejohn, meanwhile, had a relationship that was distant at best. It was only when we faced the jealousy issue head-on and began to communicate about the actual problem, difficult though that was, that small progress began. Over time, this communication has gone a long way toward strengthening all four relationships (mine and Hannah's, mine and Sejohn's, Sejohn and Hannah's, and all three of us). In his interview, Sejohn took note of this phenomenon too, saying,

> Not that our relationship was ever a bad one, but our relationship is markedly better since my relationship with Hannah has gotten better. Because we're not spending all of our time feeling guilty. We're not spending all of our time feeling like because things aren't right with Hannah we're not doing something right. Or we're not worried about her. Or we're not worried about each other. (Sejohn)

Facing the issue and communicating about jealousy, rather than choosing to ignore it or downplay it or to ignore or downplay the triggers and causes for jealousy, can result in an overall healthier and stronger relationship for all parties involved.

This strategy is, of course, easier said than done. As spouse-audience, Hannah's performances of jealousy are distressing for me as well as for her. From my perspective, I will say something in passing, perhaps as simple as Sejohn's name, or will do something that seems innocent enough, like stopping by Sejohn's place on my walk home from work because it is on

the way, and when I return home I find that my sweet, kind, mellow wife has been replaced with a stranger. Performing jealousy for Hannah entails screaming, crying, name-calling, slinging wild accusations until something sticks, and literally, at times, banging her head against the wall. In those moments, she is unrecognizable to me. It feels safer and easier for everyone, from my vantage point as spouse-audience, to try to change my own daily performances of polyamory. If I circumvented the trigger then, I reasoned, I could circumvent the entire performance of jealousy. The problem with this strategy was and is that it, ultimately, does not prevent Hannah's frightening outbursts it only forestalls them. Careful, compassionate communication, while key, is terrifying. It requires acknowledging, on my part, that this situation is ultimately my fault. That this has happened because of me and my choice to maintain this polyamorous relationship. Hannah's hurt and pain has come solely because of something that *I* wanted and something that *I* pursued, even after I knew how much it was hurting her. Just as Hannah has had to learn to cope with, manage, and control her jealousy, I have had to learn to perform love in new ways, ways that resonate with and comfort Hannah and that simultaneously acknowledge the realities of our nonmonogamous marriage.

After the fight at the party, things seem to get a little better.

The rest of that night and the whole next day, it sure doesn't seem better. Neither of you will say the word "divorce" but you are both miserable and can tell that the other is miserable, too.

But you stay.

And she stays.

You start going to therapy. You start trying to listen more. You start to try to make more sacrifices. Be more empathetic. You start to realize that, yeah, your wife has done and said some crazy stuff over the last few months but you are no saint in all of this.

She finishes grad school and gets a job. Her mom's health starts to improve. She gets out of town for a few weeks to teach at a summer camp. You and your boyfriend stop having sex for a few weeks to help ease her discomfort. You also stop spending the night at your boyfriend's place.

As your boyfriend's birthday approaches, you try to figure out a way to make the day special for him without making it upsetting for your wife. You make a plan to spend the night at his place, something you haven't done in months. You run it by your wife a couple weeks in advance, telling her you're just putting it on her radar and wanted to get her thoughts after she's had time to think it over. You don't tell your boyfriend about any of this because you don't want to have to cancel on him again *if it doesn't work out.*

It doesn't occur to you that this might be considered manipulative.

So the day of, you ask your wife again in the morning before you leave. She gives that grudging sigh that always accompanies anything to do with your boyfriend and agrees in a way akin to, "If you must."

You get in the car and excitedly ask your boyfriend if he'd like to spend the night together. He's taken aback and confused. But he agrees.

As the day goes on, the text messages you receive from your wife begin to increase in number and franticness. By the time you're supposed to be in class, they're coming in fast and heavy. It's a familiar pattern at this point: wild accusations of not loving her, of leaving her for

him, of being a bitch. As you sit in class, you hear your phone continue to buzz over and over and over again with more and more text messages.

Finally, you step out into the hall to call her. She's manic. The conversation doesn't go well. You slip into a side room to try and talk her down, hoping you can save your plans for tonight. But she keeps escalating and escalating until finally she issues an ultimatum: you must choose between your wife and your boyfriend – but she says that if you choose her then she will know that you only did it because you're married and you have to choose her, not because you love her.

Communication is the hallmark of nonmonogamy, specifically meta-communication about the relationship itself. It, by necessity, is so deeply embedded in the fabric of nonmonogamous relationships that extensive communication is even the punchline in several comic strips from *Kimchi Cuddles*, a webcomic about polyamory. In one such comic strip, one character asks what the difference between polyamory and swinging is, to which another character responds, "Well, swingers have sex and poly people mostly just talk about it," followed by a third character saying, "Hey, I need to reschedule our date tonight so I can talk to Lilly about my feelings about her dating Sherman" (Wolf 52). It follows, then, that one of the most common practices in nonmonogamy, meta-communication about the relationship, is the solution to one of the most common problems in nonmonogamous relationships, jealousy.

Bob identified meta-communication about the relationships as his primary method of handling jealousy, by saying that it was *always* important to talk about his jealous feelings. He said, "Usually I'm able to say, 'Hey I'm feeling this way and I know it's irrational, I just need to share that I'm feeling it'" (Bob). Sejohn, too, indicated that his method for dealing with jealousy

is to talk through it. He said that if he were approached with the idea of me dating "somebody else, guy or girl" that that would cause jealous feelings for him and there "would have to be a conversation" (Sejohn). Likewise, Rachel, speaking of her own tendency to be jealous, said: "I'm all about communication and honesty and as long as I can hear things and process them, I'm a lot better at understanding things" (Rachel). In each of these cases, jealousy is a cause for a frank – albeit typically uncomfortable – conversation between partners about their feelings and their relationship that would, ideally, help to alleviate that jealousy.

Milana spoke of meta-communication as a coping strategy for jealousy at length. She said that for her, the first step was to communicate with herself. Speaking of the first time her boyfriend had a girlfriend in addition to her, she said, "I definitely felt jealous and like time was getting cheated. And I had to sit down and be like, okay what am I feeling, why is it that I feel kind of jealous? I feel kind of shitty, awful and why is that? Are there ways I can help myself not feel this way?" (Milana). She said that "jealousy is an emotion that can teach you a lot about yourself" (Milana). It is important to her, too, that meta-communication specifically about jealousy occurs early and often in a relationship. She said that prior relationships have taught her that she should begin with a conversation between partners where they "talk about jealousy because it's going to happen. And you've got to have a plan, you've got to understand that it's okay to be jealous, but you've got to go into it with some sense of direction about it, otherwise it can get all-consuming and it can really just rip apart things" (Milana).

After these conversations, for Milana, part of the meta-communication process is to build trust. After communicating about jealousy, each party must follow through on their agreements. She says, "you have to be able to say, yes you can go and do this and you said you're going to go about it in this way so that we're both going to be comfortable and I'm not going to be there to

see you do it. I'm not going to know whether or not you did, I'm just going to have to take your word for it and be okay with that" (Milana). When communicating again later (because, as *Kimchi Cuddles* alludes to, the meta-communication really is never ending), the key is to "just be honest about what you want to know or be honest about what you don't want to know. Be honest when you start to feel something for somebody else for your first time and when you go on your first date… Be honest in your own feelings for your partner's experiences" (Milana). Communication and meta-communication that is built on a foundation of trust and honesty, performances of love that resonate for one's partner, can be a powerful remedy for jealousy.

     Healing is hard.

     Your boyfriend and your wife talk. They've been talking more over the last few months. But they clearly need to talk for real. So you leave and wander around Wal-Mart for two hours because you aren't sure what else to do with yourself. You know they're talking. You know it's important. You know that this conversation has huge potential to have an impact on the future of both of your relationships.

     When they text you and say to come back, you wonder what they talked about. But you don't ask. You've decided to try this new thing where you let the two of them handle their own relationship and you don't meddle in it. It's driving you crazy, but you are starting to see changes. Good ones. Yeah, they've bickered, argued, and fought more (because now those three things all feel different). But they are slowly starting to learn how to communicate with each other. Slowly.

     Their relationship is unique. They bicker often, but it's usually all in good fun. It can be hard to tell when the line has been crossed, though, until the line has long since been crossed.

They get along well for the most part, share many interests in common, and can even

occasionally be caught cuddling.

Sometimes you wonder what it could've been like if you hadn't meddled from the

beginning, if you hadn't continually tried to "smooth it over" and make everybody happy.

If jealousy is so universal in nonmonogamous relationships, why bother with

nonmonogamy? What makes the terrible feelings of jealousy, the guilt about feeling jealous, the

agreements made to mitigate jealousy, and the endless conversations about jealousy actually

worth it? The answer, of course, varies from person to person and relationship to relationship,

but for me it comes down to love. Hannah's jealousy was a refiner's fire for our marriage. We

came out on the other side stronger than before, armed with newly minted communication skills

and a deeper appreciation for one another. My young relationship with Sejohn grew by leaps and

bounds during that difficult transition as I observed the ways he handled painful, difficult

situations with grace. Now that the animosity is (mostly) gone, the joy that I feel when I see them

together is unmatched.

Compersion, a word invented by the polyamorous community, is sometimes defined as

the opposite of jealousy[10]. It is not quite an opposite; it is more like a sibling to jealousy.

Compersion is, simply, taking pleasure in seeing one's partner love or be loved by someone else.

Although on the surface this sensation may seem to be the opposite of jealousy, "One's

experience of compersion can take many forms, ranging from tolerance to strong pleasure, and

includes both non-sexual joy and sexual arousal" (Deri 30). Jealousy and compersion can, in

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[10] Deborah Anapol, in her book *Polyamory for the 21st Century: Love and Intimacy with Multiple Partners*, attributes the invention of the word "compersion" to the Kerista Community, a San Francisco based commune that existed in the late twentieth century (121).

fact, be experienced simultaneously. Together, they create a sort of Mobius strip of feelings that can be confusing and difficult, but can also be thrilling and fantastic.

Compersion happens, for me, while I watch my loves make dinner together. Compersion happens when I see them make each other gasp for air laughing. Compersion happens after I find out that they had been plotting together to plan me the perfect birthday celebration. Compersion happens when I notice them awkwardly flirt (while I, admittedly, still feel a twinge of jealousy). Compersion happens when I know that even when I am unavailable, my partners choose to spend time with one another. Compersion happens when I am able to zone out while they talk about hobbies they share for which I have absolutely no interest. Compersion happens when I see them care for one another when they are sick, or tired, or stressed, or sad, or just feeling a little down. While performances of jealousy are often negative, with actions such as screaming, crying, and manipulation, performances of compersion, for me at least, feel light-hearted and youthful: I giggle easily, smile often, and often give in to gushing phrases like, "You guys are so stupidly cute."

Yes, jealousy is a tricky animal. But alongside its sibling compersion and with the use of meta-communication as a tool to mitigate its influence, jealousy need not be the defining factor of a nonmonogamous relationship. Jealousy can be managed and even used as a way to learn more about one's deepest feelings. It is tricky, but it is not impossible.

You gave up everything for your wife.

Your family, your friends, your faith, your dream school, your plans. Your whole world.

She reminds you of that fact while you're having a hard talk one day. Lately there are more hard talks than fights. Fights are few and far between, and you and your wife often derail them before the get too bad. You do have hard talks though.

She points out that either you or she will have to be unhappy. That there is no other way for this to end at this point. That if you leave your boyfriend for her you will probably resent her. And if you leave your boyfriend for her, someday a new boyfriend will come along. And if no new boyfriend ever did come along, it would be because you would be suppressing a big and important part of yourself. And she says she can't ask you to do that.

You know she identifies as monogamous. You know what a huge struggle this relationship has been for her. You know the sense of loss she has experienced due to your boyfriend being a part of your lives. You know that she wishes that all of this had never happened, that there could be a reset button on this reality. You know that any dream you have about a future with both of them never has been and never will be a dream of hers.

You tell her that you can't make her do this. That you can't make her be miserable.

She says that you aren't making *her do anything. She says that you sacrificed everything for her. So if this is what will make you happy, and she can see that it does, then she will make this sacrifice for you.*

Your love for her, something that fills every fiber of your very being and is as natural to you as breathing, grows and deepens even more. How lucky you are to have her for a companion in life.

How lucky you are to have both *the companions that you do.*

You will struggle to tell this story. You will analyze every detail, every moment, in an attempt to figure out what went wrong. You will feel selfish when you tell this story, even though

you felt justified in your actions when they happened. You will try to take the blame without sounding like you did anything truly blame-worthy. You will cringe, hiding away from your own failures as a partner and as a person. You will struggle to tell this story.

So you won't tell it.

CONCLUSION

How do I write the conclusion to a story that is only beginning?

In the relatively short time that I have worked on this thesis, consensual nonmonogamy has virtually exploded in the public sphere. New and updated books in both the realms of academia and popular advice are being published seemingly weekly (cf. Hardy and Easton 2017, Mint 2017, Stockton, Winston). Articles from mainstream magazines and newspapers as well as in scholarly journals have appeared with greater frequency (cf. Brewster et al., Dominus, Haupert et al. 2017, van Tol, Weigel). The resultant cultural conversation about consensual nonmonogamy and polyamory is only beginning.

My relationships, my little family, are thriving. They are young. I am young. The early transition into polyamory was difficult and uncomfortable. We each changed, we each grew, we each compromised. It feels like so much time has passed, but it has been less than two years since Sejohn and I first kissed. We have reached a place that is stable, at least for now. A place that is happy. We, too, are only beginning.

Most nights I sit between Hannah and Sejohn to watch one of "our shows," an increasingly growing list. Or Sejohn sits between Hannah and me, or Hannah between Sejohn and me. I am no longer (as) afraid to express affection to each of them in front of the other, and they have developed their own rapport that is comfortable and even intimate, but not romantic or sexual for now. At the end of the day, nearly every day, we share a few hours together watching television, playing board games, cooking dinner, playing with the dog, or just talking and laughing. This is a familiar ritual by now, gathering at the end of the day. This simple restored behavior, one of the "habits, rituals, and routines of life," is a performance of consensual

nonmonogamy, of polyamory (Schechner 34). Like performances of impression management, polynormativity, and jealousy, our ritual is one aspect of the performativity of consensual nonmonogamous relationships.

Studying consensual nonmonogamy through the lens of performativity and performance allows me to examine the ways in which my relationship(s), and the relationships of thousands of other individuals, adhere to and reject cultural norms. In her essay "Choreographies of Gender," Susan Leigh Foster positions performance as a key tool for studying that which is both individual and societal phenomena; she focuses on gender, but for the purposes of this thesis I reframe her argument in terms of monogamy, which is likewise taken for granted as "natural" in Western society.

> Performance emphasizes the transformative moment when the individual
> instantiates prescribed, prearranged patterns of movement, speech, or display.
> *[Nonmonogamy] as performance focuses on the unmasking of these "natural"*
> *patterns as culture, or on the compulsory execution of these patterns.* Analysis of
> the score or script to be executed matters less than the individual's adaptation of
> those scripts. (Foster 174, emphasis added)

Through the use of performance as a lens of study, nonmonogamy can be studied for its consequences on both an individual and societal level.

Individuals in consensual nonmonogamous relationships, whether those relationships are polyamorous, swinging, open, or something that has no label (yet), engage continuously with their own adaptations of cultural scripts. In so doing, we participate in one way or another in impression management. On personal levels, we want to create "an idealized impression" of ourselves and our relationships, if we talk openly about multiple relationships at all, and we do

so "by accentuating certain facts and concealing others" (Goffman 65). We carefully select our words and actions, monitoring ourselves continuously and covering our blunders when they occur. We deliberately craft an inaccurate, but safe and controlled, outsider's view of consensual nonmonogamy for friends, family, and the dominant culture alike.

In my experience, and through the experiences of my study participants, it is through impression management, that we perform polynormativity. We supply the dominant culture with a narrative of "a phantom mainstream public of 'conventional' [nonmonogamous people] who represent the responsible center" (Duggan 179). This image is what is then reproduced in mainstream representations of nonmonogamous relationships. These representations are rapidly growing, with more nonmonogamous people and relationships appearing in television, movies, plays, magazines, and webcomics seemingly daily. When these representations are polynormative, they further marginalize and stigmatize the very individuals and identities that they claim to represent because they create a "right" or "good" way to be a polyamorous and a "wrong" or "bad" way to be polyamorous. Individuals who do not fit within the narrow confines of "right/good" are then further marginalized and negatively sanctioned by the larger society as well as potentially within nonmonogamous communities seeking to project a "positive" image.

In addition to the performances of polynormative performativity occurring in socio-cultural contexts, private contexts reveal how individuals in nonmonogamous relationships performatively enact behaviors such as jealousy. Ever-changing and highly individual, these are performances that are hidden from the general public and kept personal. While jealousy begins with thoughts and feelings, performances of jealousy characterize many nonmonogamous relationships because they often take the form of action toward or against one's partner or metamour.

Using performativity as a lens through which to study nonmonogamy allows personal problems to be understood as cultural problems while simultaneously showcasing the ways in which cultural problems are indeed personal. Performativity gives us the ability to understand one another more as individuals while simultaneously learning and understanding more as a culture.

Throughout this thesis, I have sought to shed light on a marginalized population. Individuals who practice consensual nonmonogamy and the unique culture and practices that come along with it are under-represented in both mainstream media and academic literature. In doing so, I have utilized traditional research methods such as conducting ethnographic interviews and reading previous research. I have also used non-traditional research methods such as autoethnography and performative writing. These research methods together allow for a fuller representation of consensual nonmonogamy. H. L. Goodall points out that this non-traditional type of writing, what he calls "new ethnography," is important because it communicates with readers in ways that traditional scholarship alone cannot. He says,

> [New ethnography] is writing that is untamed, and in some theoretical ways undisciplined. It overtly privileges the personal over the so-called objective, and if it is good, it dissolves any idea of distance, doesn't produce "findings," isn't generalizable, only has credibility when self-reflexive and authority when richly vulnerable. …ours is an ethic dedicated to the singular proposition that *close textual identification between consenting writers and readers is a very good thing*. … It is a good thing because when it is done well, we can learn *previously unspoken, unknown things about culture and communication* from it. (Goodall 191, emphasis original)

With my story along with those of my eight study participants, I use this thesis to communicate those "previously unspoken, unknown things." The purpose of this thesis is to tell these stories that would otherwise remain untold. Each individual came with a different perspective and experience and each contributed to a larger picture. While I identify as polyamorous and currently have two committed, long-term partners, Rachel viewed nonmonogamy as a step within a relationship process. Dan used nonmonogamy as a tool to cope with his long-distance relationship, Hannah used it as a means of exploring previously dormant aspects of her sexuality, and Bob most frequently practiced nonmonogamy in tandem with his partner for occasional fun. Andy happened upon nonmonogamy and would likely not attempt it again but Sejohn's accidental discovery of nonmonogamy led him toward news ways of self-identifying. Milana considered her nonmonogamy to be intrinsically romantic and kept her sex and romantic lives intertwined while Aaron separated sex from emotions entirely. Each story was unique. Each story was important.

This document and my research within it have limitations. There is substantial room for further research in the rapidly growing fields of performance studies and sexuality studies; within the subset of sexuality studies, research on consensual nonmonogamy has only just begun. My study is driven by ethnographic research methods, but my sample of participants is quite small with only eight individuals providing their experience through interviews. These eight people are largely homogenous in age (all but one are in their early to mid twenties), race (all are white-presenting), access to education (all held or were currently pursuing post-secondary degrees), ability (all were able-bodied), and gender identity (all were cis-gender). Future studies can and should be based on interviews with a larger, more diverse population. Furthermore, all participants currently resided in the Bowling Green/Toledo, Ohio, area. Regional diversity

among participants could result in a fuller picture of the ways in which region of origin and region of residence influence practices of consensual nonmonogamy. Additionally, in future research on this topic I would strive to create an interview process that involves multiple "check-ins" over a longer period of time. Each interview that I conducted captured only one moment in time, whereas if there had been multiple interviews over a sustained period of time there may have been different patterns and ideas that emerged. I would be curious to observe the ways in which individuals change over time and document how ideas and practices surrounding consensual nonmonogamy can very within one person, and the ways that those variances mirror one another across multiple individuals. In many ways, I feel that my work in this area has just begun.

Just over a year ago, my colleague described certain struggles as "happy problems." She indicated that these are good problems to have, and that if these are the problems plaguing a person, then that person's life must be going fairly well. I was struck by the idea of "happy problems." At that time, my relationship with Sejohn was only a few months old and the strain that the new relationship was putting on my relationship with Hannah was at its worst. I wasn't eating, wasn't sleeping, wasn't studying, and wasn't coping. My colleague's comment caused me to pause. Perhaps *my* problems were happy problems, I mused. The root of the problem was, after all, that there were multiple people in my life who loved me so ferociously that they were ready to fight for me. In spite of the storm that ensued *because* there were multiple people who loved me, these people nevertheless stuck with me when others may have given up. There were problems, bad ones, but if being loved was a problem, then perhaps it was a *happy* problem.

In spite of the current relative happiness that we now experience, there are, of course, still problems. Jealousy is still a struggle; it can be hard for Hannah to make friends with the man

who is sleeping with her wife. We still do not fit into society; we are still closeted to most of the world. We fight, in pairs and as a trio, and sometimes it gets ugly. There are no easy or fair solutions to our problems. Somebody, perhaps multiple somebodies, always gets the worst end of the bargain. The old saying, that a good compromise leaves everybody mad, is in full force in polyamorous relationships. Our lives are full of problems that seem to be without solutions.

They're happy problems, though.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Department of Theatre and Film
212 Wolfe Center
Bowling Green, OH 43403

My name is Tessa Vaschel. I am a Master's student in the Department of Theatre and Film at Bowling Green State University. My advisor is Dr. Lesa Lockford, Chair of the Department of Theatre and Film. This research is for my Master's thesis, which will study polyamorous and non-monogamous relationships.

The purpose of this research is to study polyamorous and non-monogamous relationships. You have been contacted because you have identified yourself as having experience with relationships of this kind. Although these types of relationships are becoming more popular, there is currently very little academic writing about them. My project will examine how individuals perform their nonmonogamy. It will include information about how and why individuals choose nonmonogamy, the benefits and drawbacks of this relationships style, and what everyday life in a nonmonogamous relationship is like. I will use what has already been written, my own experience, and your interview to help with this. While there are no direct benefits to you for your participation, many people find talking about their experiences personally rewarding. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this study.

Your role in this project is a one-on-one interview with me. The interview will take place in the Wolfe Center for the Arts room 231, a small, private conference room. It will take about 2 hours to complete. I will ask you to talk about your personal experiences with polyamory and/or non-monogamy. I will video record what you say.

You participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to skip any question or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your relationships with Bowling Green State University.

You responses may be quoted in my thesis and future work related to this topic. You will be able to decide if would like a pseudonym when you are quoted. The recording of your interview will be destroyed upon transcription. The transcript will be stored on my personal computer. Both will be password-protected and only I will have access to them. Your interview in full will never be released in any form. This informed consent document will be stored in a filing cabinet to which only I have a key. All documents and transcripts will be destroyed after five years.

The risk in participating in this research is no more than that experienced in daily life. Some questions will be about your sexuality as well as your sexual and romantic history. You may stop the interview for any reason at any time.

You may contact me at any time at 317-420-9536 or tessaw@bgsu.edu. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Lesa Lockford, at 419-372-9381 or lockflo@bgsu.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bsu.edu, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary, that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate, and that this interview will be video recorded. I agree to participate in this research.

_____	_____	_____
Participant Name (Please Print)	Participant Signature	Date

_____ I want to use my real name.

_____ I do not want my real name used. I would like a pseudonym.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following constitutes the planned questions for my interview process. They will be a starting place for a conversation so further questions will be asked based on the interviewee's responses. All interviews will begin with me introducing myself and my research study, going over the informed consent document, and demonstrating the audio-visual recording device that will be used to record the interview. I will then establish the interviewee's name, age, and preferred pronouns. The following questions might be asked in any order depending on the nature of the interview. The interviewee will be cautioned to use only first names when speaking about prior and current relationships.

- At what age did you first have multiple concurrent partners? Can you tell me the story of how that happened?
- Why did you choose nonmonogamy? Why have you stuck with it? OR Why did you stop?
- The Kinsey scale is a tool developed by Alfred Kinsey to aid in self-identifying your sexuality. The scale ranges from 0, which means exclusively heterosexual, to 6, which means exclusively homosexual. Where do you identify on the Kinsey scale? Do you view being inclined to nonmonogamy/polyamory as a sexual orientation?
- What words do you use to describe your nonmonogamy? (eg. swinger, polyamorous, open relationship)
- What is your current relationship status? How did you meet your partner(s)?
- What is your day-to-day life like with regard to your relationship(s)?
- What effect do your relationships have on each other? Can you give me an example of a time when they influenced each other?
- Can you tell me about an experience that has made you really happy to be nonmonogamous? What about one that made you unhappy with nonmonogamy?
- What would your ideal relationship be like?
- How do you deal with jealousy? How do(es) your partner(s)? Can you tell me about a time you or a partner experienced jealousy?
- Who are you "out" to? Who and where do you feel comfortable with your nonmonogamy being common knowledge? Can you tell me about an experience you've had coming out to someone?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you wanted to come out as nonmonogamous but didn't? What stopped you? Can you tell me more about this experience?
- Do you date or find hookups online? Do you think online dating is important in nonmonogamy?
- Do you feel that you personally have changed because of nomonogamy? If so, how have you changed? Has it changed your relationship(s)? If so, how?

At the end of the interview, I will ask the interviewee if they would like to add anything more. I will conclude by asking how they felt about the interview itself. I will thank them for their time and invite them to ask any questions they may have about the study itself.