



Blue House Monthly

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DBT: Mindfulness and
Coping Mechanisms

Trans Representation in
Pre-2000 Video Games
Continued

Artificial Intelligence
and Healthcare

A Primer on
Polyamory

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About the Cover

“Blue Ruins” by Lapis (@lapis_lazuli.)

For the cover I opted to do a mixed media piece. The base consists of a pencil and paper sketch I did that looks into one of the side courtyards of the Rock of Cashel in County Tipperary, Ireland- albeit with some stylistic tweaks. I digitized the drawing and colored the stonework with shades of blue and the plants and flowers with greens and yellows before finally adding a gradient photo of clouds as a background to provide a sort of surreal effect. I frankly spend too much of my time worrying about legacy. Something I really like about medieval ruins is the forgotten grandeur they seem to possess and how all too often the details of what exactly went on in them is lost to time. Eventually all institutions fail, roofs collapse, and stones crumble but that doesn't mean life around them stops. Plants find homes in crevices, birds nest in crooks and on a sunny afternoon a woman can find herself wandering amongst old pillars and courtyards for inspiration. Someday Blue House will be gone, but with any luck in the far future someone will find themselves reading a long defunct webzine in a forgotten nook of the internet and get inspired.

Community News for May 2024

- Blue House hit 100 boosts for the first time ever
- IICY got their bachelor's degree in computer science
- R4bbit's name change officially went through- congratulations, *Gwen*.
- Lapis got accepted into law school
- Krypt and Mae both had birthdays

About Next Issue

This month returned to the vertical style cover. After some deliberation it was decided that going forwards this will be the preferred cover art orientation in an effort to move BHM towards more conventional magazine formatting. As it becomes summer and Blue House members go on vacation and travel we highly encourage those with a knack for photography to take pictures on their trips and/or write about the places they visit to submit for the July issue. Transgender history submissions about topics from outside of the anglosphere are also highly encouraged.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy: Mindfulness & Coping Mechanisms

By Cat (@generic.catgirl)

Disclaimer: I am not a mental health professional in any capacity and if you need help I strongly encourage you to seek alternative, qualified sources in addition to reading this article.

Our emotions can be very difficult to manage, and often can end up controlling us instead. For people who suffer from a mental illness, this difficulty can be overwhelming. Through approaches such as medication or therapy these challenges can be made much more manageable, but these methods are not universal- and may prove ineffective. Luckily, there are alternative options that have been developed for those who experience more complex disorders.

In the late 1970s, American psychologist Marsha Linehan developed a new form of treatment through unsuccessful attempts to help extremely suicidal women with traditional cognitive therapy practices. Her new process came to be known as dialectical behavior therapy (DBT). (1) While based on cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which focuses on changing unhelpful actions and ways of thinking, DBT incorporates these principles, but focuses on accepting, validating, and minimizing extreme emotions.

Diverting from Linehan's initial goal, DBT has proven effective most notably for treatment of those with borderline personality disorder, (3) but it has proven to be effective in

¹ The painting behind the title is Mark Rothko's "Blue, Orange, and Red". (16) Today he is widely regarded as one of the most famous artists of the 20th century and a master of abstract art. According to Rothko his paintings were based on human emotions including tragedy, ecstasy, and doom. (17)

assisting with treatment for a vast array of conditions including suicidality, eating disorders, (4, 5) trauma disorders such as PTSD, (6) and the correction of sexual offenders. (7)

The “dialectical” in DBT refers to dialectics, in which two opposing things can often be true at once. Patients are validated in their emotional experience, but also are taught that change can be needed. This can be a little confusing, so good way to look at this would be to consider that dialectics seeks to explore the middle path, or the gray areas in “black or white thinking”. An example of this could be thinking in absolutes such as categorizing people as either rigidly good or bad, or thinking that anything but perfection is failure. It is important to try and overcome unhelpful ways of thinking such as these, as they can have a negative impact on a person’s emotional state of being, or development. Life often involves nuances and gray areas. Therefore, dialectical thinking which embraces these nuances, is more constructive.

WHY ACCEPT REALITY?

1. Rejecting reality does not change reality.
2. Changing reality requires first accepting reality.
3. Pain can't be avoided; it is nature's way of signaling that something is wrong.
4. Rejecting reality turns pain into suffering.
5. Refusing to accept reality can keep you stuck in unhappiness, bitterness, anger, sadness, shame, or other painful emotions.
6. Acceptance may lead to sadness, but deep calmness usually follows.
7. The path out of hell is through misery. By refusing to accept the misery that is part of climbing out of hell, you fall back into hell.

Treatment of DBT involves the development of specific positive behaviors and skills, while eliminating or decreasing the threshold of other unhelpful or harmful behaviors. It should be noted that DBT both assumes patients want to change, in addition having good reasons for feeling the way they do. (8)

Radical acceptance is a tenet of DBT, and while its name may imply endorsement or tacit approval of a situation, this is not the case. Radical acceptance focuses on accepting emotions as they occur in any given situation for what they are. Once a person can accept their reality, they can work towards improving it. (9) According to Linehan, “suppressing what you want is not the way to go, you have to radically accept that you want something you don’t have, and it's not a catastrophe.” (10) Through radical acceptance of the patient’s emotions, a rapport can be developed between therapist and patient and the two can go about setting and meeting goals as an initial step. From there, the two can work on decreasing the frequency and intensity of behaviors that would otherwise inhibit effective treatment such as suicidality. After this the therapist can begin working with the patient to further refine behavioral skills (10, 11) like mindfulness, emotional regulation, interpersonal effectiveness, and distress tolerance. (8) Several of these skills can be interwoven and will be used in the development of one another.



Mindfulness is defined by Linehan as “the act of consciously focusing the mind in the present moment, without judgment and without attachment to the moment.” is the core of dialectical behavior treatment, much of the following skills will involve incorporating this concept. (12) Mindfulness could be practiced by focusing intently on doing a task, such as paying attention to each bite of food at a meal.

Emotional regulation is learning how to understand and manage complex emotions so they have less control over a person’s behavior or actions. This is important especially for those with borderline personality disorder, where emotions can be extremely volatile. (13) Emotional regulation can be achieved through a number of methods, such as a person remaining mindful of their emotions, practicing distress tolerance skills, and through a skill therapists call “checking the facts” which entails a person:

- identifying what their current emotions are, and what prompted them
- identifying their thoughts about the present situation (did you assume a threat, or is there an actual tragedy?)
- deciding if their reaction fits the facts of the situation (15)

Through this kind of self examination, someone doing DBT can change their emotions by changing how they think about events as they happen.

Interpersonal effectiveness is the ability to get along with other people while still asserting and meeting one’s own needs. This can include setting boundaries such as saying “no”, without it jeopardizing relationships with others. (8) This social paradigm can be developed by setting goals or practicing methods like “FAST,” outlined by Linehan as:

- be **F**air – balancing one’s needs and wants, as well as those of others is vital for maintaining healthy relationships
- no **A**pologies – apologizing for genuine reasons is fine, but apologizing for making requests or having opinions is harmful, as it is the inherent assumption of having done something wrong
- **S**tick to values – sticking to one’s beliefs on what is right or moral without participating in contradictory behaviors in an effort to be popular

- be **Truthful** – truth is crucial to maintaining self-respect in relationships. (8)

Distress tolerance is developing skills to deal with conflict or crises as they arise without engaging in self-destructive or otherwise harmful behavior. It's a fact of life that distress cannot always be avoided; learning to cope with this is vital to prevent further suffering by reacting with undesirable impulsive behaviors. Distress tolerance is achieved by building upon mindfulness (see figure 1). (2, 8)

DBT isn't just about increasing the good. It's also about decreasing the bad. This includes behaviors that can meet the criteria for a diagnosis of BPD under the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM):

- **Interpersonal dysregulation**- fears of abandonment
- **Emotional dysregulation**- instability, or difficulty controlling emotions such as anger
- **Behavioral dysregulation**- impulsivity, suicidal or self-harming behaviors
- **Cognitive dysregulation**- dissociation or delusion
- **Self-dysregulation**- feeling of emptiness, poor self esteem (8, 11, 13)

After a year of dialectical behavior therapy, 77% of patients no longer met the criteria for borderline personality disorder. (3) Its through the development of these positive skills and reduction of the aforementioned negative ones that a patient can learn, then practice, then ultimately maintain dialectical thinking to improve their lives.

DBT may have originally been created to aid in the treatment of extreme mental health disorders but the core aspects of it can be helpful to anyone trying to navigate the emotional complexities of life from maintaining friendships to grieving the loss of a loved one. Wellness matters. 💧

Source material for this article can be found starting on page 91

Trans Representation in Pre-2000 Video Games Continued

By Daya (@dayasan)



Before reading this article it is recommended you read part 1, “Trans Representation in Pre-2000 Video Games”, which can be found in the previous issue of Blue House Monthly (volume 3 issue 3) and consists of a lengthy introduction, followed by an in-depth analysis of the first transgender character, Katherine aka Birdo.

Continuing from where I left off in the last installment, I will use part 2 to analyze the remaining confirmed and probable trans representation that can be found in video games prior to 2000, including the good, the forgettable, and the downright awful with subsections dedicated to each character and game.

Les Ripoux

In 1987, the same year that Katherine/Birdo came along, a French-language point-and-click game called “Les Ripoux” was released for the Amstrad, MSDOS, Thomson TO and Atari computer systems, and was based on the 1984 comedy film of the same name. In it a player takes the role of a police officer and roams around various parts of Paris, frequently stopping to talk to the many individuals present. One of these NPCs^{II} is Pedro Cunao, whose on-screen descriptive is ‘Travesti Breslien’. While only a very minor character, a contemporary magazine reviewer nonetheless found them charming. (1) ‘Travesti’ is the French term for ‘transvestite’, which is an outdated term for ‘cross-dresser’ which in turn, is an outdated catch-all for people that don’t conform to normative or stereotypically cisgender gender presentation, including transgender people. With no other information to go on (largely due to the character’s minor status), I’ve opted to include them here and will leave it up to you, the reader, to decide if Pedro Cunao is transgender. If they are transgender, this would be the first time a such a character was shown as such within the video game itself, and not just the manual like Katherine was.

Caper in the Castro

Perhaps one of the more unusual games to make this list, “Caper in the Castro” was a point-and-click graphic adventure game that was released in 1989 for Mac computers, being distributed for free as ‘charityware’, with the developer specifically requesting that if you play and enjoy the game, you should donate money to an AIDS^{III} charity. (2) The game was heavily LGBT focused and was set in the gay district of San Francisco, called Castro. In it the lesbian main character is looking for their kidnapped friend before soon stumbling across a plot to “...infect the alcohol at the game’s gay bar...with a fast acting, poisonous bacteria designed to wipe out the Castro’s gay population...” (3) The kidnap victim, Tessa, is described as a ‘drag queen’ in the games prologue, (4) however according to the game’s creator, Tessa is canonically transgender. (5) Today, the game is considered a historical milestone for its LGBT focus. (6)

Poison and Roxy

1989 also brought with it complicated pair of characters, Poison and Roxy, in the side-scrolling beat-em-up “Final Fight”, which was released in arcades both in Japan and overseas simultaneously.^{IV} Poison was a minor enemy depicted a scantily clad pink haired

^{II} “NPC” is a commonly used abbreviation for Non-player Character.

^{III} “HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a virus that attacks cells that help the body fight infection, making a person more vulnerable to other infections and diseases.” AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) is the advanced stage of HIV. (81) “The United States was the focal point of the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s. The disease was first noticed en masse by doctors who treated gay men in Southern California, San Francisco, and New York City in 1981... The prevalence of the disease among gay men in the U.S. in the 80’s and 90’s resulted in a stigma against homosexuals and a general fear and misunderstanding regarding how AIDS was spread.” (82)

^{IV} I will discuss slightly further down in the article but at this point it’s important to note that Poison was present the US arcade release of Final Fight, (7) along with Roxy who was seen on the rear of a promotional flyer for the US arcade release. (8)

woman, with a palette swap enemy called Roxy. Nothing is mentioned in the arcade game regarding their gender, and being an arcade game there was no public game manual to provide character background information. Interestingly, in 1990 the game was ported to the SNES within Japan, and while the game again makes no mention of their gender (due to having no dialogue), the included manual explicitly labels Poison's gender as 'ニューハーフ' (9) which translates to 'Newhalf', a Japanese slang term for transgender. (10) Roxy is not mentioned in the manual. This makes Poison the first *confirmed* transgender human video game character. Poison's existence shares a lot of similarities with Birdo. Their transgender status is first mentioned within the manual and not in the game directly; they are a minor enemy without dialogue, and like Birdo, their transgender status has been the topic of fierce, even toxic, debate.



Roxy and Poison from Final Fight in a fan made game (83)

In 1991, a strategy book was released within Japan called Final Fight Super Famicom Super Hint Book. Inside is artwork of the enemies alongside various notes about them. On the page with Poison and Roxy, again the 'newhalf' word is used, as well as a description that explicitly states "These 2 are men". (11) Whilst misgendered (once again, like Birdo) the strategy book doubles down on Poison's transgender status and advises that the enemy Roxy is the also transgender. In his book 'Game Over', David Sheff discusses the spread of Nintendo from

Japan to America. Sheff interviewed many high level video game figures for the book and he states that upon the game's localization to the North American market, Capcom USA had reservations regarding the ability of the player to beat up women, to which the Japanese designer (either Akira Nishitani or Akira Yasuda) cheekily responded by saying that there were no women in the game. When pressed regarding Roxy in particular, the designer simply said 'oh the transvestite', (12) confirming the transgender status of at least Roxy (though by implication, Poison as well, since there were 'no women' in the game). In what would grow to become a general pattern regarding the transgender status of these two characters, the language used is very clunky, implying that the two are not real women thus it is okay to beat up within a video game.

The game was localized for a North American SNES release in December 1991 but a few months prior, Final Fight was ported and localized to western audiences on home computers for the Amiga & ZX Spectrum in Europe, Amstrad CPC & Commodore 64 in the UK and Atari ST in the USA. The manual was a joint manual for all 5 versions. It is incredibly basic with no information on any enemies provided. (13) Poison and Roxy are in

all five home computer releases,^v despite them being rather different looking ports. Like the Arcade release there was no meaningful manual and their transgender status is entirely ignored, but their appearance at all is notable due to the North American SNES release a few months later.

When the SNES game itself was indeed localized to North America later in 1991, we again see over-zealous localization censors at work, even more than they did with Birdo. Instead of merely removing the transgender status from a manual, or all enemy entries at all, they instead removed the characters entirely. Poison and Roxy were replaced by two males called Billy and Sid, (19) with strategy guides at the time not mentioning the change when discussing the latter two (20) and the manual itself making no mention of either Poison & Roxy or the replacements, due to having no enemies discussed within it. (21) The reasoning behind their removal itself is its own debate, with Nintendo being blamed for having “...particularly strict censorship for any games made by [a] third-party”. (19) In reality Capcom themselves made the decision due to concerns about violence against women, citing the “...social and cultural climate regarding transgender...in the United States.” (19) Deconstructing the phrasing, this means that unlike in Japan, Poison & Roxy were seen as women with transgender status not being considered relevant and thus were removed from the game entirely. Ironically in retrospective, their removal in localization seems to have been more progressive than their inclusion. The release the following year in Europe was identical in this, with Billy & Sid replacing Poison & Roxy.^{vi}

July 1992 bought about a new Japanese SNES release for the game in Japan, with the re-inclusion of a character previously removed upon conversion from arcade to console, Guy, creating the aptly named Final Fight Guy. The manual for this one is almost identical as the prior Japanese one, including the same terminology when it describes Poison as a ‘newhalf’. (23) While slightly out of chronological order for this article it makes sense to include that this game was localized to North America in 1994, with the US manual following the American localization trend by having no mention of minor enemies and thus Poison’s transgender status also not being present. (24) A few months after Final Fight Guy was released in Japan, Final Fight itself was ported again to the Sharp X68000 home computer. The manual was completely rewritten but Poison still retained her ‘newhalf’ status. (25) Early 1993 had the home computer version within Europe & North America re-released in a bundle with two other games, the included manual again had no information one way or the other regarding Poison. (26)

Later in 1993, the game was released for the Sega CD, near simultaneously in Japan, USA and Europe. Japan’s manual slightly tweaked Poison’s entry but still confirmed her transgender status. (27) Notably on this occasion, Poison and Roxy were finally moved over to console outside Japan with one of them being present in a screenshot within the US

^v One of them (unnamed but visible by sprite) can be seen in magazine reviews for the Amstrad (14) and Atari. (15) Roxy can be seen by name in a magazine review for the ZX Spectrum, (16) similarly Poison can be seen in one for the Amiga. (17) Both are mentioned as present by name in a retrospective review online for the Commodore 64. (18)

^{vi} Just like the North American manual, the European one does not mention minor enemies at all, however you can see a screenshot within it showing Sid. (22)

manual (28) and their image likewise used in the European manual, (29). The only visual difference in the west was that their clothes were made slightly less revealing than the Japanese version. (30) Sadly the western manuals again have no mention of Poison by name, following the previously mentioned American localization pattern leaving Poison's transgender status unknown. Roxy being a palette swap is rarely mentioned by name in reviews or manuals, however their transgender status is presumed to be the same as Poison, especially since they were indeed confirmed transgender in Sheff's book referenced previously.

Later that year an entirely new game was released, a spinoff of the original (for some reason on the aging Famicom aka Nintendo Entertainment System) called "Mighty Final Fight". It is a comical remake of the original with the characters replaced with the heavily deformed 'chibi' artstyle. Poison & Roxy do not make an appearance here themselves, however a new enemy does, called 'Poison Kiss'. The Japanese manual explicitly labels their gender as female and states that her "...two older brothers were newhalves". (31) Due to the fact they have a very similar appearance to Poison, and that the text specifically mentions two 'newhalf' older brothers, I feel it would be safe to assume that Poison Kiss is the younger cis-female sister of Poison and Roxy. Similar to previous games, the American manual has no mention of minor enemies at all, so the above information is not present in the western release. (32, 33)

The last appearance of Poison or Roxy pre-2000 was in the new arcade game exclusive to Japan, "Final Fight Revenge", which was a game in the mold of Tekken as opposed to a side scroller as in previous Final Fights. Poison is a playable character (34) but of course, an arcade title has no manual, so no acknowledged transgender status present. Breaking my pre-2000 rule I will note that this game was soon ported to the Sega Saturn, within Japan only, in early 2000. The manual refrained from mentioning the transgender status (35) but Poison is still referred to as such within a magazine review,^{VII} indicating the fact she was trans was known enough within gaming media to be mentioned without any prompt from the game or its manual.

While this ends Poison and Roxy's appearance in pre-2000 video games, the debate had not even started. It was all possibly triggered by the release of a bundle game for the Playstation 2 and XBOX in 2005, Capcom Classics Collection Vol.1, which included Final Fight. As a bonus each game had various character profiles and concept art as a bonus for completing certain parts of the game. Upon unlocking the concept art for Final Fight there is artwork for Poison and Roxy, presumably drawn before the game had even been started on. Underneath the sketches of the two are the same Japanese kana mentioned previously, the ones meaning 'newhalf', I confirmed this myself by playing the game and unlocking this artwork. Poison and Roxy were clearly intended to be transgender before the game had even been properly started. An interview with one of the designers of Final Fight in 2007 indicates that the decision to make Poison & Roxy transgender was to avoid being "...sued

^{VII} The article is in Japanese and notes '...ポイズンは男です.' (36) which quite literally means '...Poison is a man.' Hardly a progressive statement but it does make it the first time I can find where a gaming magazine mentions Poison as not being a cis-female.

by a feminist group if we beat up women in the game” (37) however this does not really reconcile with the concept art having them as transgender from the beginning. Additionally in this bundle release, character profiles were included that again required unlocking. Poison’s specifically notes her as transgender, Roxy’s gender was not noted specifically but the profile does note her disapproval at Poisons ‘cross-dressing’, implying Roxy was being retrospectively changed to be a cisgender person and a rather judgmental one at that.

From then on the debate regarding Poison’s gender, rather than Roxy’s, went global with gaming media putting forward various theories, substantiated or otherwise. The official Nintendo Magazine in Brazil claimed that Poison in the Japanese games was a transvestite, but was post-op transgender in the Western release. (38) The British Retro Gamer repeated the story about the localization changes being made to avoid getting into trouble for “beating up women” (30) though I struggle to agree with this considering Poison and Roxy were present in arcade releases within Japan before its console release, with no mention of transgender status, making it seemingly okay to beat them up as cisgender women, seeing as the player would not know. An artbook contains another interview with a developer of Final Fight, whose opinion is that the sibling duo are transgender in the West but cis-females in Japan (39) though this seems to be entirely the opposite information to that given in the game manuals. Further debate has ensued ever since and is even referenced in a gamer’s edition of the Guinness World Records (40) and is present within media as wide ranging as Argentina, (41) Indonesia, (42) and China. (43)

Poison and Roxy are, all further debate aside, the first transgender human character(s) in video games. Given the concept artwork released, the 1993 statement referenced in David Sheff’s book by a Final Fight developer confirming the transgender status, and the repeated statements within the game manuals in Japan, Poison and Roxy are definitively transgender characters. Subsequent statements from developers may have created a very bitter ongoing debate but their statements still conflict with previously released information.

Due to the character’s transgender status not being within the game itself, not being of any significance outside a line in a manual, I do not consider them especially pioneering, and subsequent appearances in video games have continued to ensure Poison’s transgender status remains a topic of very heated debate. Still this saga shows the importance of transgender inclusion being developer led and having a clear reason for the representation. Instead, their representation boils down to a line in a manual, just like Birdo.

Rise of the Dragon

A very brief entry, as 1990 bought another point-and-click adventure for home computers, this one called “Rise of the Dragon”. In it a character called Darcelle briefly appears playing a game of cards, and the game advising she is ‘a woman, posing as a man, posing as a woman’(44). With no other information I can’t really figure out what this was trying to imply, on occasion since being called an example of early transgender representation but it seems a stretch, consider we only have that rather nonsensical line.

Circuit's Edge

So far transgender representation within video games has been either lines in manuals, with nothing in the game itself confirming transgender status, or when an in game mention occurs it being for incredibly minor background roles. This changed in 1990 with the release of "Circuit's Edge", another point-and-click adventure released for the PC. It takes place within a multi-book story by George Effinger, chronologically just after 'When Gravity Fails', which was published 3 years prior. Effinger assisted in the game itself as well. The box of the game describes its setting as a "crime ghetto" and "a district of vice and corruption in a decadent 23rd-century Arabic culture." (45) The first indications, as per previous parts of the article, regarding transgender inclusion is the manual, and instead of one, we find multiple references. I will briefly go over them in order of appearance. There is Abdul-Hassan, whose lengthy entry includes 'the rumor is that...[he] was not born a boy.' (46) After Abdul is Blanca. Her entry calls her a "sexchange" dancer, (46) which is a term used to describe most transgender characters in the game and seems to not be intended in any derogatory manner. Honey Pilar is then also called a "sex-moddy" (46) though the next entry when framed with the trans ones is somewhat more problematic. Indihar is another dancer, but this time called "a real girl" (46) so presumably not a transgender one. There is Jamila, "...a pre-operation transsexual who never intends to get the operation", (46) with the following entry, Janelle, similar to Indihar, being called "a real black girl". (46) The juxtaposition of 'real girl' vs 'sexchange' does not to me, have the intention of being offensive, since as this is the first video game to include 'proper' transgender characters the language should be expected to be clunky. Two more dancer's are advised as being transgender, Kandy "a pre-op deb" and Lily "a rather pretty sex-change". (46)

Continuing the character profiles is Mahmoud, the only transgender character who is not (currently) an erotic dancer, "formerly a slim-hipped doe-eyed dancing girl in the clubs... Now he's short, broad, and mean...he runs the organized prostitution in the Budayeen". (46) The last entry is Yasmin, the player's ex-girlfriend. She is implied to be post-op; "a sexchange...fully modified both inside and out. She has a perfect body, but her long, straight, black hair is natural, and her best asset. She has big hands and feet." (46) The reference to the word "deb" used earlier in Kandy's profile is explained later on in the manual as a term for "pre-op transvestite." (46) The language in this manual has not aged well, but referring back to part one of this article, this game took place during a time where transgender representation (Birdo, Poison and Roxy) were transgender in manual only, a single line. A time when gaming media treated transgendered individuals as a bit of a joke, a slur to call someone for a cheap laugh, Circuit's Edge is treating them as real characters, with a backstory. The words used in the manual here, such as 'real girl' and 'big hands and feet' seem outdated or outright offensive now but I do not in any way feel this was intended as such. Additionally, the fact the transgender characters are all current or former erotic dancers, with Mahmoud now being a pimp, is also not intended to cause offense. Almost all other characters in the game are described as being full-on criminals or corrupt officials, and this game is set in a walled ghetto after all.

With the manual introducing multiple transgender characters, most of which are only a line, two stand out with more significant mentions of their transgender status, Mahmoud and

Yasmin. When you turn on the game it goes through the introduction slides. By the third slide we have the first mention of a character's transgender status within the game itself. The slides introducing associates of the player, including Yasmin, the game stating "she hadn't been born female". At this point I began playing this game myself to see how the characters are dealt with. Despite the introduction slide, Yasmin serves as a background character within the game, with her and the current erotic dancers serving as ways to obtain information within the game.

The fact that Mahmoud has a place within the game's story while being a female-to-male transgender person is notable. He is also the first character whose transgender status is referenced in a video game and who has proper dialogue and involvement in the story. Abdul-Hassan, already referenced as being rumoured to be female-to-male also, works in Mahmoud's shop, however he is kidnapped within the story. Mahmoud being distraught with worry and begs you to save him, offering some kind of reward for doing so. The rescue of Abdul-Hassan is part of the game's storyline and when rescued, Mahmoud is greatly relieved and gives you two items most useful within the game going forward. Mahmoud's character, despite being said to run the prostitution within the ghetto, is to me a positive inclusion. He shows immense worry for the safety of Abdul-Hassan and is overjoyed when you save him, being one of the few characters who is portrayed in a positive light.



The player learns Abdul-Hassan was kidnapped (84)

In an interview the same year of release, George Effinger was asked if there was "a social agenda in depicting characters with switches in sexual identity" (implying transsexual) to which he replied "I was trying to create a world where people could not pigeonhole others based on sexual identity". (47) The same interview also states that mentions of both drugs

and condoms did not make the leap from book to video game, presumably due to morality issues, making the inclusion of not just one but multiple transgender characters, especially one shown in a positive way somewhat impressive. It seems Effinger included transgender characters sympathetically for a reason. When discussing the book which spawned this game, he says “the main story...was based on a transvestite dancer I knew that was murdered. The police in the real city didn’t do anything about the crime. They didn’t care about those people and felt like they had gotten what was coming to them.” (47)

Circuit’s Edge had the first transgender characters whose status was confirmed in-game outside of Japan, and the first where they have backstory and dialogue... but how did the gaming media (ever fond of transvestite jokes) react? A few of the articles at the time mentioned people in the game by name and did not reference their transgender status^{VIII} indicating that there is no outrage here despite the gender status being prominent and frequently noted (every time you talk to a character, the game repeats a condensed form of the characters manual entry, so repeated mentions of ‘sexchanges’). Some of the articles did mention this inclusion, for example the French publication Joystick mentions your ex-girlfriend Yasmin as ‘transexuelle’ when discussing various characters (51) but otherwise nothing else and this was merely mentioned in a factual manner with no jokes or any negative discussion. Greek publication Joystick says that the ghetto consists of various groups including many ‘χορεύτριες (πρώην άντρες κυρίως)’, meaning “female dancers (mostly-ex men)” (52) but again, otherwise little else. The notoriously laddish gaming media, finally had a game with transgender characters featuring prominently to criticise, but there was no jokes nor anger. Thanks to the game portraying them sympathetically, as fully fleshed characters (specifically Mahmoud), and gendering correctly (unlike Birdo from the first part of this article) the third party publications treated them appropriately, as Effinger intended with their inclusion at the outset.

I believe this game is far more pioneering regarding transgender inclusion, even if the confirmed transgender characters are all erotic dancers with the exception of Mahmoud, who controls the organized prostitution. Honestly these roles seem par for course in the setting of the story where all characters in the game are similar or far worse. Mahmoud being the first transgender video game character with a real part in the story of a video game, manual entry side, he comes across positively, helping the main character and showing concern over the kidnapping plot. Circuit’s Edge is often ignored when discussing transgender representation in early video games, due to the ongoing debates regarding Birdo and Poison, but both were minor enemies within their respective games. Though getting praise for having explicitly homosexual characters (not included in this article) of which this is considered one of the earliest, (19) its revolutionary inclusion of transgender characters are often ignored, only showing up in some university dissertations. (53) Even some LGBT video game focused websites are often not aware of its importance, simply saying “Yasmin, his ex-girlfriend, is a trans woman...A full cataloging of the game is

^{VIII} For example in a 1990 edition of Computer Gaming World, the kidnapping plot is discussed, Mahmoud (erroneously referred to as Muhammed) is mentioned but transgender status not considered important or outrageous enough to mention. (48) The same year a strategy guide for multiple adventure games did the same, (49) and Game Player’s Encyclopedia of PC Games in 1991 followed suit. (50)

required to assess their role in the game”. (54) I ended up playing through this game and can say that personally, I found the transgender characters to be well represented. They were gendered correctly and mentioned in the game itself, not just a line in the manual, being fully fleshed characters, with story impact. The inclusion is brave, the first of its kind, and for this I would much prefer this be what people consider the first transgender characters in video games, not a pink egg-spitting dinosaur nor a minor enemy in a fighting game.

Weakness Strategy II

This game was released in early 1991 for the PC-8801 home computer with Japan. Information on it is incredibly scarce and it seems to have been made on a ‘to-order’ basis. It is another point and click game, this time a comedy. The rear of the game’s box identifies the player character, Rie, as a lesbian. (55) In the only real mention of this game I can source, a gaming magazine in Japan calls Rie transgender on repeated occasions. (56) I can find a screenshot of the game indicating transgender status (57) but as a comedy game, this may not have not been intended seriously. Another example of where the character could be transgender, but it is impossible to be sure. Further investigation made difficult by the scarcity of information about the game.

Police Quest 4

Another year, another point and click home computer release, this time Police Quest 4, a game considerably heavy on the simulation side of police work. The manual for it evening including a condensed version of the LA Police manual. (58) The story begins with your partner, who was working undercover, found tortured and brutally murdered. Your job of course is to find the killer. Throughout the game you learn a little more about your player and it is implied your partner may have been transgender. (59) Additionally the killer turns out to be a cross-dresser (or potentially transgender) with a severed head in their fridge. You then torture them to death with a DIY blowtorch and get a medal of bravery in return. (60) To put it quite simply, this is the worst form of representation possible.

Madam Ginko

In 1995 Atlus made a spin-off of the successful Shin Megami Tensai series, Shin Megami Tensai: Devil Summoner for the Sega Saturn (this spin-off spawning its own series). Within the game is a female character called Madam Ginko. They are a relatively minor character with no back-story relevant to this article. Two years later came the second within the series, Devil Summoner: Soul Hackers, for the Sega Saturn (ported in early 1999 for the Playstation also). Here Madam Ginko made a re-appearance, again as a regular female character within the game with a slightly more prominent role but nothing of importance here. Her inclusion here is purely due to a book released in 2000, All About Devil Summoner: Soul Hackers, where one of the artists for the game mentions Madam Ginko ‘used to be a male’, (61) with the obvious transgender implication. However, with no other confirmation anywhere, lack of any indication in the game, the manual, or from any other member of Atlus staff, there is nothing to confirm either way. Potentially transgender, or

possibly (in my opinion probably) an occurrence of a staff member getting confused or otherwise giving incorrect information.

Amon



Amon Walker from Albert Odyssey (85)

The last proper transgender character to be covered is Amon, from the Sega Saturn RPG called *Albert Odyssey: Legend of Eldean*, released first in Japan in 1996. As I have for previous characters, the manual is the first place to check for information. We have Amon, whose character is half-human half-bird, confirmed with the same language as Poison was in *Final Fight*, ‘ニューハーフ’ (62) again translating to ‘newhalf’. Similarly to Circuit’s Edge, I test played this (in Japanese) to see how Amon’s dialogue comes across.

The first time you see Amon in the game they tell you about story related events, afterwards Eka, an established member of your team, whispers to you and says that Amon looks like a ‘beautiful man’.^{IX} Within the game itself there is no further dialogue of note regarding their gender, however there is one scene where the party as a whole go to an inn with gendered sleeping arrangements, with the men Pike and Gryzz going left, and Eka and Leos going right, with Amon joining the latter, to the female designated room. The men then march back and pull Amon out and into the male room. Given Amon’s transgender status it is presumed this is why they went into the female room and outside of the above, nothing further is mentioned about Amon’s gender. The soundtrack released shortly after had a small booklet with information about the music/composer but also the game itself, re-confirming Amon’s ‘newhalf’ status. (63)

Gaming media in Japan were well aware of Amon’s ‘newhalf’ status and repeated this aspect of their gender and with no joking nor complaints, such as Saturn Fan mentioning it in both June 1996 (64) and again in August. (65) *Sega Saturn Magazine* interestingly confirmed Amon’s gender status in the November 1995 preview months before the game’s release, (66) and repeated it on two other occasions^X as a merely factual note without any issue taken. In the July issue however Amon’s gender is actually mentioned outside of a simple character profile included with a hand-drawn fan comic being published. (69) Gryzz, a dragon-man in the party, asks the main character “is Amon a man or a woman” with the next panel having Amon grabbing the main characters arm and replying “Lets Play♥”. Gryzz

^{IX} The text says ‘...こんなにきれいなのに男の人みたいよ’ which roughly translated means “Even though they are so beautiful, they look like a man”

^X They repeated the gender status in a character profile in August 1996 (67) and again in September, (68) both using the same ‘newhalf’ phrasing

goes on to remark “Okama...maybe”.^{x1} The comic itself is drawn in a way this is not intended to be in any way offensive, but is noted here purely because it shows that the readers themselves were well aware of Amon’s gender.

In early 1997 the game was localised for the Korean market by Wooyoung System. In both parts of this article so far, localization has often removed or watered-down transgender status (or entirely removed the character). The manual itself uses a term for Amon lacking a clear meaning I can find, ‘여장남자’ (71), translated to yeojangnamja, which seems to mean “man dressed as woman”. (72) Alternatively the first part ‘여장’ also seems to be used to describe drag, (73) however a Wikipedia entry does advise yeojangnamja is an early term for transgender. (74) Amon then, is possibly referred to as transgender in the Korean version, but seemingly more likely, is now possibly a cross-dresser. This localization has an almost word for word translation of the scene mentioned above, where Eka whispers the words ‘이렇게 예쁜데 남자인가봐...’ which roughly translate to the same as the Japanese version. A Korean gaming magazine used the exact same terminology (75) with no other discussion of their gender, not helping the above analysis but indicating that regardless if transgender or cross-dresser, Amon’s inclusion did not warrant jokes or outrage within Korean gaming media.

Later in 1997 the game was localized to the American market by Working Designs, a concerning development considering “if Working Designs is famous for anything, it’s the Americanization of dialogue and text of an RPG to make a game more involving and humorous” (76) which I will describe a little later. Amon’s manual entry now merely describes them as having ‘...a flamboyant streak that sometimes masks his gender.’(77, p.5), the transgender reference removed and replaced with that. This of course means the dialogue would most likely change to accompany this, and indeed it did, Eka now whispering “This birdman is so different from the others, Pike. He’s so...confident.’. This change also making the gendered bedroom sequence later on make Amon seem like a sleazy male, instead of transgender.

I played this American version as well as the Japanese (albeit only up to the gendered bathroom sequences as I found the dialogue reprehensibly awful), and the dialogue is amended rather heavily. To prove my point, here are some examples. “Early in the game a guard threatens to open a can of whup-ass on your party.” (78) The dialogue now includes “wisecracks about sexism...old age, political correctness, ‘yo’ mama...” (79) The removal of Amon’s transgender status is disappointing, but also expected when Working Designs complete their usual grotesque butchering of what was previously quite a good game in order to suit a different demographic and to be frank, Amon’s gender change was the least of their crimes against video games here.

^{x1} Okama is a word with a complex history of which I won’t go into here, but the common meaning nowadays is usually slightly derogatory, for either a transwoman, or a cross dressing homosexual male who does not identify as female, (70) the latter of which is often portrayed in a stereotypical way, either flamboyant or grotesque.

Amon is the last major transgender character to be introduced in pre-2000 video games (of course the last appearance of any major inclusion was Poison in the 1999 arcade Final Fight Revenge). The Japanese release makes it clear they are transgender and they are a well-rounded character with a proper backstory who becomes one of your main party members. This makes it the first time a transgender character is playable in a video game, insofar as they join your party group. The removal of transgender status yet again in American localization is disappointing but as mentioned above, would not really suit a Working Designs game, and perhaps their removal is for the best as they would most likely have been a source of childish humor had they remained transgender in that release.

Persona 2: Innocent Sin

Just squeezing within the article parameters, "Persona 2: Innocent Sin" was released on the Playstation within Japan in 1999. I will say beforehand, I love the Persona series, they look and sound amazing, with interesting story and always fun, just like most games that the developer (Atlus) creates. However, this comes with a flip side. They are notorious for homophobic depictions of 2 separate transgender NPCs, one male-to-female and one female-to-male, both of which are dealt with as light comic relief with their transgender status being the butt of the joke. (80) Not the greatest end to transgender representation pre-2000, it is however the beginning of Atlus's problematic relationship with LGBT characters.

Conclusion

So over the two Blue House Monthly articles, there are four main examples of transgender representation in pre-2000 video games. First is Katherine/Birdo in the Super Mario Bros series- the first transgender character in a video game. Then there is Poison & Roxy in the Final Fight series who have created a long running debate. After them comes Mahmoud, Yasmin & Others in Circuit's Edge, the first examples with backstory, dialogue and an involvement in the story. Finally, there is Amon in Albert Odyssey: Legend of Eldean, the first transgender character who is playable/controllable in a video game (albeit not the main character but does join your party). There was slightly more representation than I expected even when the 'maybe transgendered' characters are removed from the list. The overall quality of inclusion is about what I expected, ranging from badly handled, to genuine inclusion, to outright hostile.

Birdo was not a good start to transgender inclusion with hiding the mention within the manual and there being no mention of it within the game. The Japanese entry more or less remained the same going forward. Localization watered the reference down and then repeatedly misgendered the character in official channels, taking 8 years before using female pronouns for them. As mentioned in the last article, Birdo remains a topic of heated debate, but at least now they are routinely gendered correctly by Nintendo with their transgender status either hinted at within games, or even part of the plot. I consider it unlikely Birdo really had any impact on transgender representation as a whole, only really noteworthy due to being the first.

Poison & Roxy followed Birdo's tragic example. Their transgender status exists as a line in a manual, with no mention in the game. Localization removed the character(s) entirely on consoles until the Sega CD release when the character's entries were not in the western manuals anyway. In all games Poison & Roxy are in, they are transgender in the Japanese manuals and the western manuals do not mention them at all (except the SNES release where they got cut entirely) thus western players would not know of their transgender status. Overall, a rather muted inclusion.

Circuit's Edge highly impressed me. A good portion of its characters were transgender. Forgive the somewhat clunky language used at times, the transgender characters are utilized well, their transgender status wasn't as a punchline nor a throwaway mention. Mahmoud was the highlight as they were important to the story and exist as the first transgender character to make a 'proper' appearance and have dialogue. As I stated previously, I would have preferred this been the first inclusion instead of Birdo and Poison/Roxy. Circuit's Edge was a very positive step forward with real transgender characters, real emotions and backstory.

Amon in Albert Odyssey: Legend of Eldean as the last of the big four is a slight regression from Mahmoud due to their transgender status being removed in the atrociously poor localization. They were described as trans in the Japanese manual, hinted at in the game and widely known as such by players. The Japanese inclusion to me was rather positive and it's the first time players have control over a transgender character in a video game due to Amon joining the party. The American version was obviously a step back but I do not believe it to have been due to censors, more that a transgender character does not fit with Working Design's preference for squeezing in as many unfunny jokes as possible.

Transgender representation in video games has come a long way since the 1980s and 1990s, but even back then you can see shoots of genuine inclusion, paving the way for the post-2000 examples, much greater in number and quality. 💧

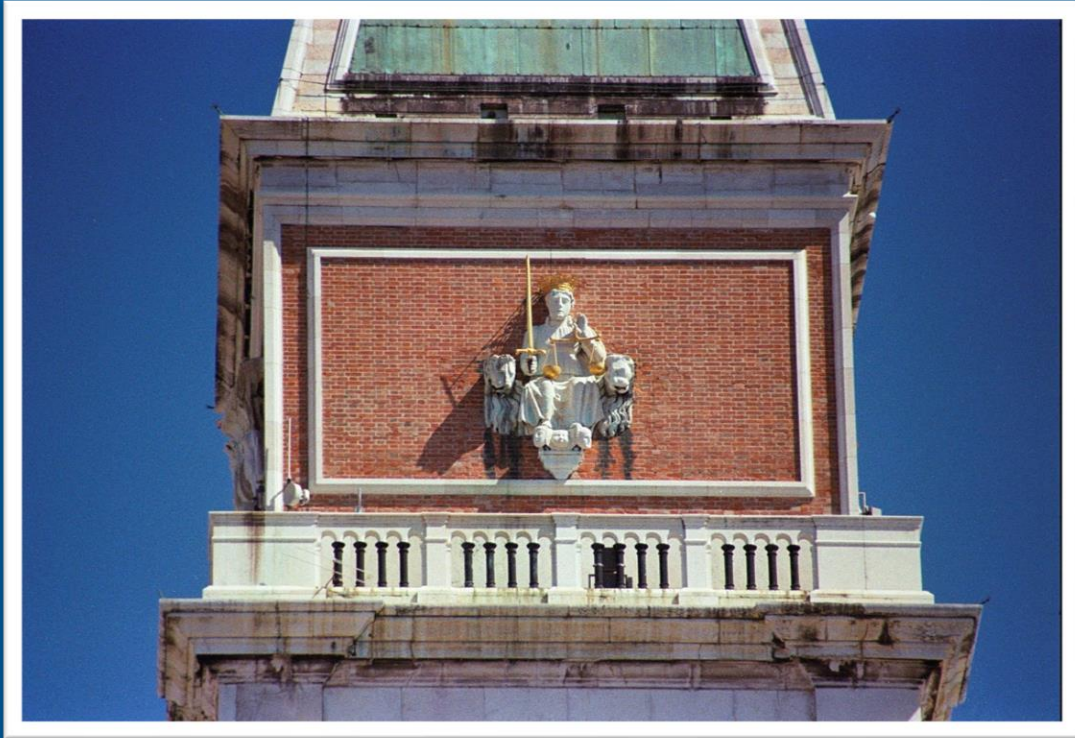
Source material for this article can be found starting on page 92

Venice in Analog

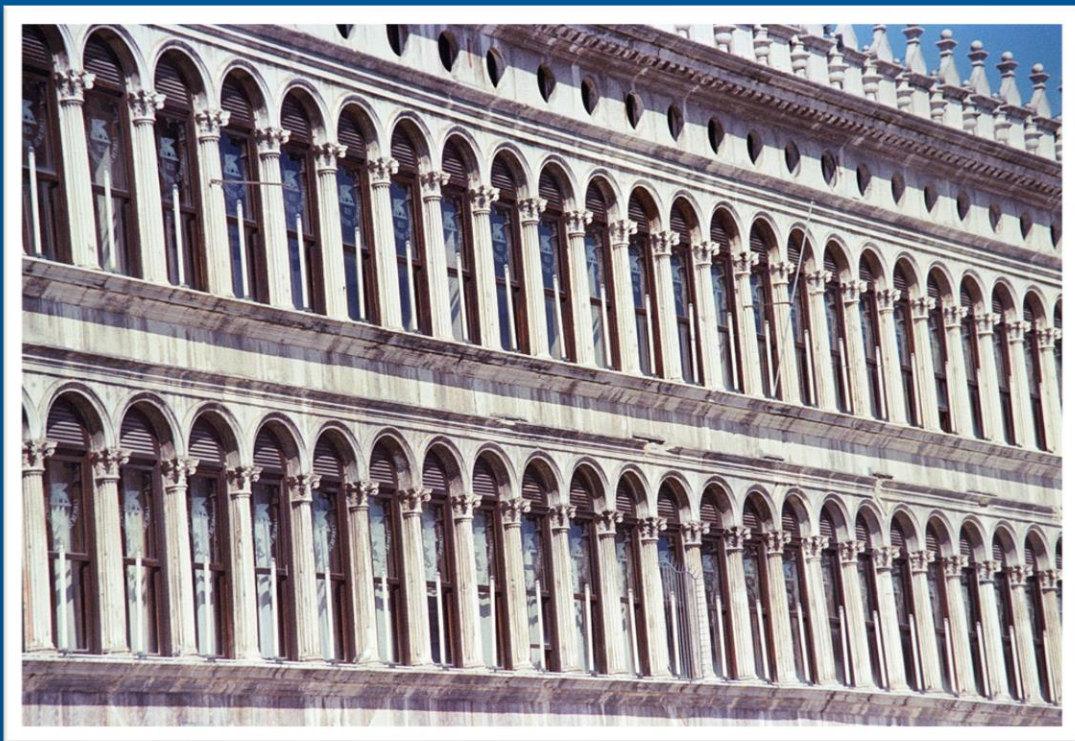
Shot with a Nikon 570 28-300 Sigma Lens on Fujifilm 400
by Mexichan (@lamexichana)



Santa Maria della Salute can be seen from the Ponte dell'Academia



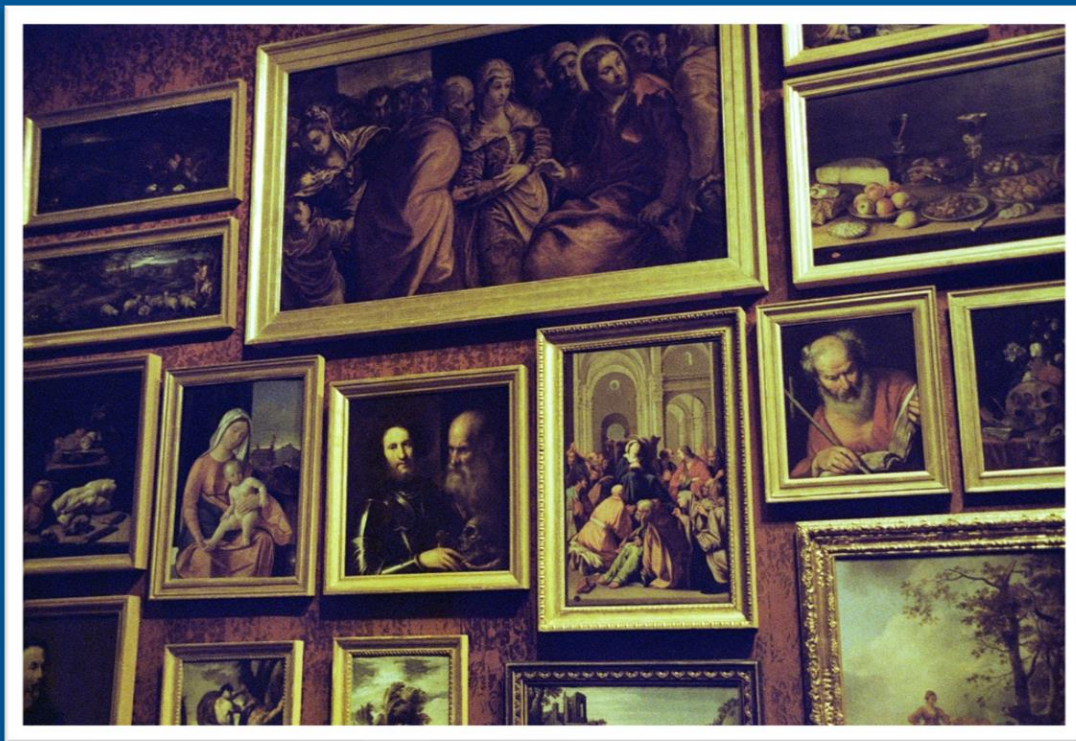
The figure of Venezia gazes down on the city from atop the campanile of San Marco



Limestone Corinthian columns line the Procuratie of Piazza San Marco



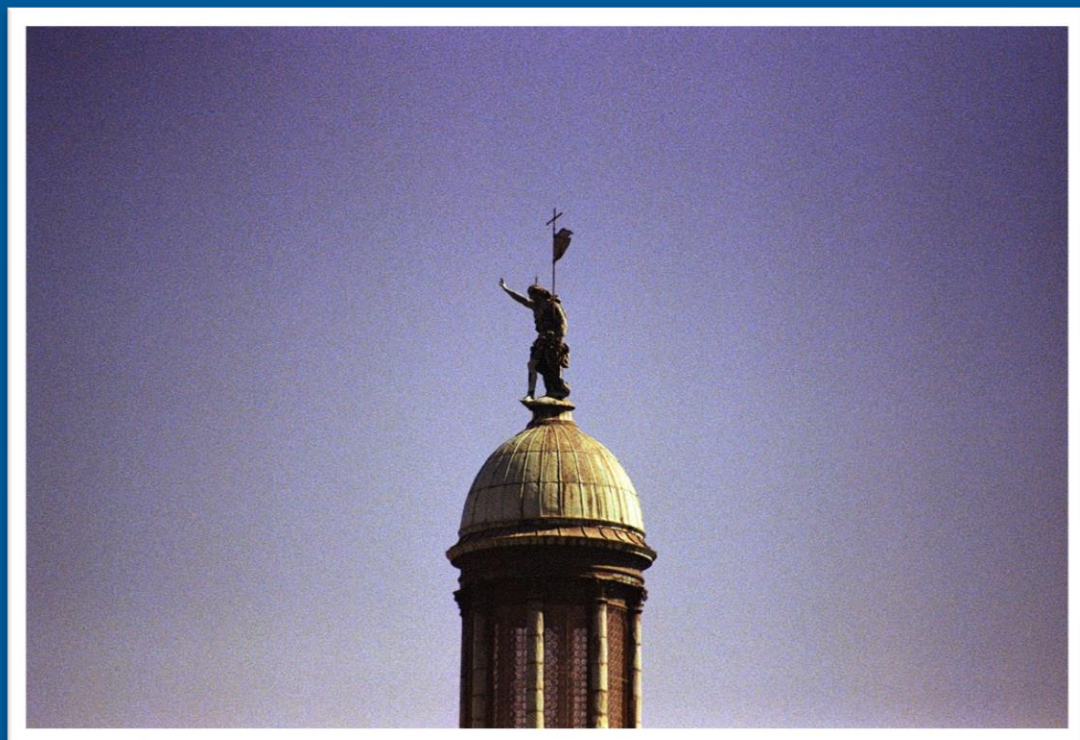
Venetian Carnival Masks plaster the wall at the famous Ca Macana mask shop



paintings within the Galleria dell'Accademia



A small yard beside the Rio Fuseri

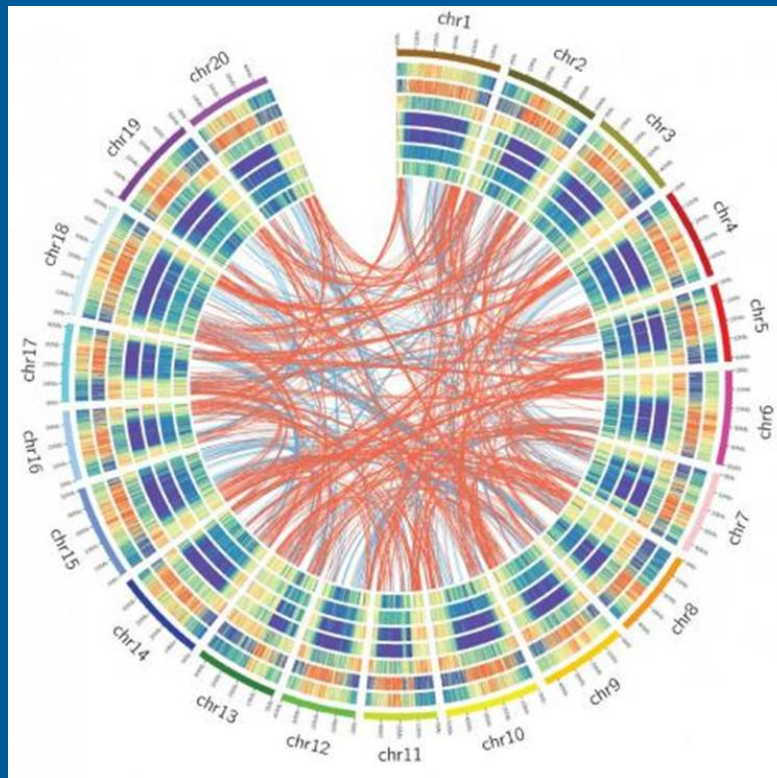


The resurrected Christ atop the dome of San Simeon Piccolo



Shooting analog film is always an uncertain endeavor. All your equipment is so old, there's never a guarantee that any of your gear is going to make it to the next stop. This was the reality for me on a country hopping trip across western Europe and North Africa. I had made it through Spain, Morocco, and France before arriving at Treviso Airport just outside of Venice. My first night there, I zoomed out the lens on my little point-and-shoot Nikon from the 90s, and the camera refused to retract it back in, or fire the shutter. Not wanting to waste any time, I found my way to the mainland city of Marghera the following morning. There, I found a camera shop run by a kind old Italian man and his wife. He sold me a 90s futuristic beast of camera with a massive 28-300 millimeter zoom lens. I missed my little Nikon dearly, but this was a blessing in disguise as the absurd 300 millimeters of zoom allowed me to capture just how gorgeously detailed Venice truly is. 💧

^{xii} If you like Mexi's photography you can also find her on Instagram @the.mayale



Artificial Intelligence and Healthcare

by Poliwhirl (@poliwhirl61)

Machine learning, known colloquially as AI, has been a regular frontrunner in internet discourse for nearly two years now. The public discourse around AI tools has usually centered around large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT, and image generators such as Stable Diffusion or Midjourney. However, flying under the radar for several years has been the slow but accelerated adoption of AI tools in healthcare.

^{XIII} Article title picture: a “genomic wheel,” which hilights connections between genomic features across many chromosomes. (35)

FINE FOCUS

Much has been written on AI in healthcare. This article cannot compete with their scope. Instead, this article will provide a more granular overview of AI applications in a small subset of healthcare – the clinical laboratory. This is an area in which I have a few decades of experience and can weave together many disparate developments to paint a clearer picture of what is happening. By looking at AI developments in healthcare as particular case studies I can paint a truer picture of what has happened in the past few decades, what is happening now, and what may happen in the future.

PROFIT PROBLEM

The big player in the AI business is OpenAI. Its flagship product, and accompanying subscription services to support it, is ChatGPT. While OpenAI managed to earn 2 billion dollars in revenue in 2023, the company has never made a profit. (1) The computational costs are simply far too high. According to them, they are so high that the surest bet for profitability for this business model is limitless energy by way of fusion technology. (2) I wouldn't advise anyone to hold their breath for that. I'm certain their investors won't either. So far, OpenAI seems to have been able to pay the cost of development and operations through their subscriptions and investments. As experience shows with other industries, that will not last forever.

The company 23andMe was in a similar situation. It was founded in 2006, and its flagship product was direct-to-consumer whole genome sequencing. Like OpenAI, 23andMe could not turn this product into a profitable enterprise. While they raised billions of dollars in revenue by sales and investment among fanfare and hype, they also have never earned a profit in the entire history of their company. Their once 6 billion dollar company is now estimated to be worth around 125 million dollars. (3) The stock price has plummeted to less than one dollar since 2022 and has stayed down ever since. (4)

Much like the proverbial tale of the American Gold Rush, the people raking in the highest and most consistent profit are making equipment sales. In this realm, that's largely the manufacturer of the graphical processing units (GPUs) that bear the heavy computational burden of fundamentally all AI projects, Nvidia. Sales of their GPUs have propelled Nvidia to contend for the second most valuable company on the planet. (5)

These very revealing patterns of (un)profitability strongly suggest that AI itself is a poor product to peddle. While AI tools have sky high potential, they also have sky high overhead costs which undermine the very efficiencies that these tools promise to provide. The winning strategy appears not to build your business on AI itself, but to use AI as part of an already successful business model, and leverage economies of scale already present.

That leads us to healthcare. In America, and elsewhere, there is no better business around than healthcare. For the past fifteen years, the USA has regularly spent around 17% of its GDP on healthcare. In 2022 that amounted to roughly 4.5 trillion dollars.(6) (7) This is a

business model that benefits both from high-volume-low-complexity services such as routine physicals and screening tests as well as low-volume-high-complexity services such as intensive surgeries and highly specialized diagnostic testing.

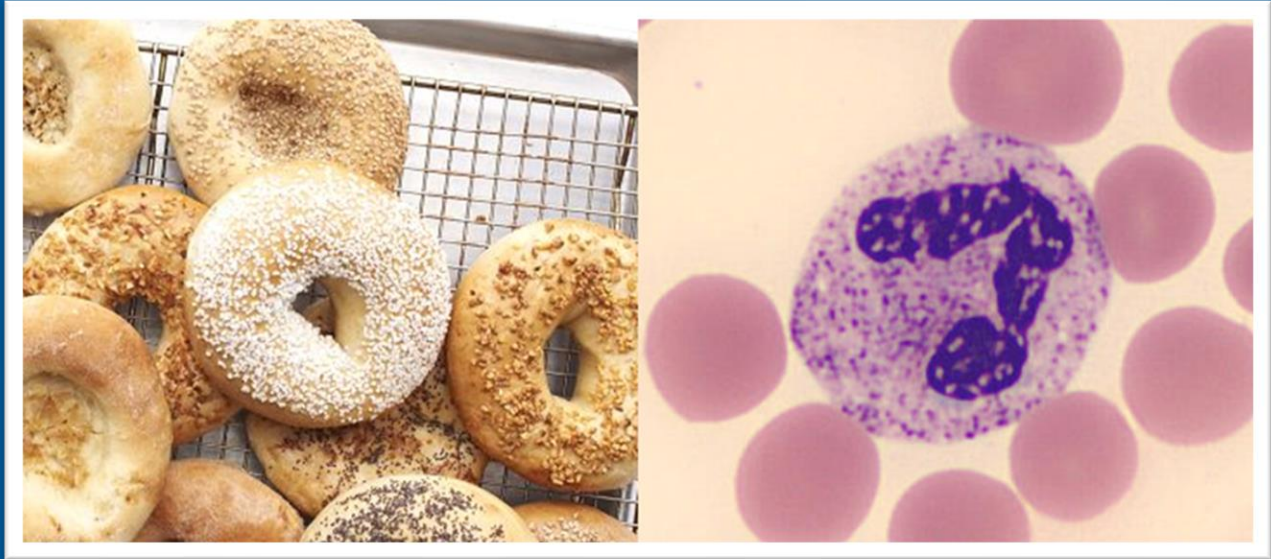
SHORT OF HELP

Over the decades, laboratory automation has drastically increased technical and financial efficiencies – better equipment and testing methods produce more accurate results at a faster pace while using less sample from the patient while also costing less per test. However, those increased efficiencies have not kept pace with the shortage of medical laboratory scientists (MLSs), who are the professionals responsible for performing and evaluating clinical laboratory testing. (8) There has been a decades-long shortage of MLSs, with current vacancies across the USA and Canada ranging from 7% to as high as 25%. Meanwhile, MLS training programs are closing, and the need for more MLSs is not predicted to go away any time soon. (9)

This workforce shortage phenomenon has been riding tandem with the global trend in consolidation of clinical laboratory services. (10) This follows a general pattern where a central laboratory, typically attached to a large central hospital, takes on the higher-cost, lower-volume, and lower clinical priority testing. The smaller laboratories – typically in clinics and smaller hospitals – then retain only the testing services that are needed immediately for patient care. For example, the smaller laboratories may retain tests that take less than 10 minutes to perform that immediate clinical utility, such as a Comprehensive Metabolic Panel (11), a Complete Blood Count (12), and the like. Then, these smaller laboratories can collect samples for less critically urgent tests – such as hormone or lipid testing – and send them to the larger laboratory, generally called a reference laboratory. The larger hospital laboratory itself often sends out testing for even more specialized testing, such as genetic testing.

All of this sets an almost ideal stage for implementing AI tools into highly complex, labor-intensive, and high volume testing at large reference laboratories. For certain tests, there are often only a handful of laboratories that perform them in the entire USA. These reference laboratories are almost always large commercial reference laboratories like LabCorp (13), or laboratories connected to enormous hospitals or universities, such as the Mayo Clinic. (14)

Source material for this article can be found starting on page 92



Left to right: a bagel (36) and a segmented neutrophil surrounded by red blood cells. (37)

A BAKER'S DATASET

One example that has become the go-to example of AI in healthcare is an image-recognition tool that was designed to differentiate unlabeled bakery goods – such as donuts and bagels – and automatically ring them up without barcodes. Then, a physician researcher asked the company to adapt their tool to differentiate cancer cells, and it did so with surprising accuracy of 99%, (15) after which it was re-dubbed Cyto-AiSCAN. (16) However, half a decade later, and there are very few mentions of this tool outside of popular science types of articles, with almost zero scholarly mentions. (17) Similar to the woes of AI-based companies previously, any AI product without a supportive ecosystem around it seems to either underperform or never see the light of day.

On the other hand, we have an alternative AI use case that has had astounding success in the clinical laboratory and has been used for decades: CellaVision. This is both an AI software package and physical automated instrument for reviewing a slide of blood cells during a Complete Blood Count far more scalable and efficient. (18)

CellaVision works by taking in a prepared and stained slide of patient blood. Then, it places the blood slide onto an onboard automated microscope that combs across the slide. As the microscope camera passes over the slide, image recognition software identifies white blood cells, platelet abnormalities, and notable sub-cellular features, takes photographs and places them into categories. Once it has photographed enough features, it sends these images and their prospective category to a desktop application for the MLS to review.

Theoretically, of course, the AI image recognition and categorization software works perfectly. In practice, that never really happens. In my experience, the automated cell categorization software requires manual correction 95% of the time, and 25% of the time that cell categorization is so completely wrong that it would be funny were it not so routine.

It's almost universal laboratory policy that any slide fed through CellaVision requires a some manual review under the microscope before verification. In some cases, the discrepancy between the automated review and our manual review is so wide that we must do one from scratch. In some cases due to the patient's underlying illness, the condition of the cells are so bad that CellaVision is useless and it's not worth feeding the slide into it.

Regardless of its shortcomings, CellaVision is a wonder piece of instrumentation and software that makes working in a hematology laboratory ten times as easy. While I'm performing a manual review on a particularly difficult case, the CellaVision can review a queue of 20 not terribly abnormal cases. Once I'm finished with the manual review, I can review and recategorize each of the mostly normal cases in a minute or two each rather than the 5-10 minutes that it would take normally. This even includes double-checking the slide and correlating what I see with the automated results.

What's more interesting is that this is not just one company cornering the market into a product silo. CellaVision is a Swedish-owned company that is distributed in North America by Beckman Coulter, (19) an American company which has been a giant presence in the laboratory instrumentation for decades. All of which integrates seamlessly with the most widely use hematology instruments made by Sysmex, a Japanese company. (20) This runs contrary to the environment mentioned in the less than profitable AI and scientific ventures. Here, we have an AI implementation nested in an already sustainable business model that provides a direct benefit for healthcare workers and patients. Even stripped of its AI features, this entire pipeline of instrumentation would still have a welcome place in a clinical laboratory.

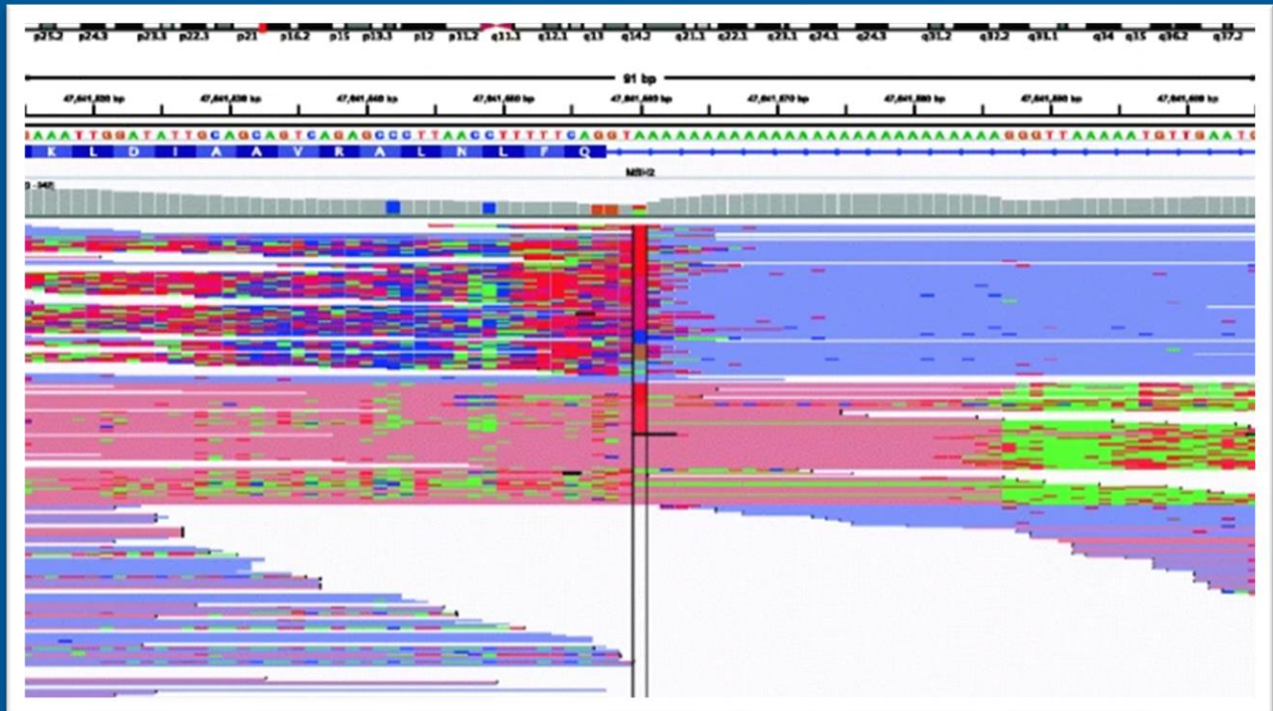
CellaVision was founded in 1994 and came out with the first version of their AI-assisted cell categorization instruments in 2011. They have anticipated the increased demand for laboratory testing, the decreased MLS labor pool, and further consolidation of clinical laboratories to deliver useful and profitable AI product far before whispers of the bakery-born Cyto-AiSCAN tool. (21) They will doubtless continue to improve on their previous success.

IN OTHER NEWS

Other microscopy based testing has had AI-driven automation come into play. Particularly for what is called ova and parasite (O&P) testing. (22) O&P testing is used where the patient is experiencing gastrointestinal symptoms, and the physician suspects a parasitic infection or needs to rule out a parasitic infection. The patient provides a stool sample, and the sample is prepared in a way to concentrate any potential microscopic eggs (ova) or free living parasites in the patient's sample. Then, the concentrated sample is spread very thin on slides and treated with a variety of stains to highlight any potential ova or parasites. Finally, the entire contents of the slide must be checked at high magnification for any ova or parasites. This can be quite time consuming, as fecal samples by nature have a lot of fully and partially digested food, bacteria, and foreign objects such as microscopic fibers making the proverbial "needle in a haystack" an apt analogy.

In 2019, a company called TechCyte has come up with an AI-fueled solution to make O&P screening far more efficient. (23) Much like the CellaVision, the instrument is fed a prepared slide and scans through it to identify potential pathological features. However, unlike CellaVision, its primary use is to identify negative cases. Often the most parasite-afflicted patients are the easiest to diagnose, as their samples are literally swimming with ova or parasites. In these cases, almost an untrained person can view any random field of view on a slide and see egg- or worm-like objects. The negative cases, and the marginally positive cases, are the more difficult ones, however. A negative case simply takes a long time to review and relies on the reviewer to understand that the object they're looking at is not a worm but partially digested vegetable matter, or even fibers from the patient's clothing. And a marginally positive case only takes a single microscopic egg. That single cell could be missed by just a bit too far and skipping over it.

This company has both plans and existing products to cover a variety of other clinical laboratory testing, to include directly competing with CellaVision for automated blood cell differentials, cervical cytological examinations, among many other applications. (24)



A visualization of NGS genomic reads aligned to a reference genome. (38)

HUSH HUSH

All of that is mildly outdated. I recently attended a seminar in which current laboratory informatics professionals went over their recent and ongoing projects that used AI. I believe that much of this information is either proprietary information or too technical for a general audience. However, I can and will gloss over some general developments, and why they are happening and why they are succeeding.

Back in December 2017, Google released a free tool called DeepVariant. (25) This is a completely open-source tool that, broadly speaking, identifies mutations in large-scale next-generation sequencing (NGS) genomic data. What this group did was take in-house NGS data on several dozen whole genomes sequenced by NGS, and used that to train a more modern LLM. Since LLMs fundamentally take a text prompt and return a text output, that's very similar to a variant caller taking the preceding X-number of genomic bases (A, T, C, or G). Then using that to predict what the next X-number of genomic bases should be based on the preceding bases – the input – and a standard reference genome. Then, it can compare the expected output with the actual sequenced data and make a statistical call on whether a true variant exists in that region of the genome or not. While that itself is impressive, the in-house built LLM-based variant caller largely outperformed DeepVariant in almost every metric, and with narrower distributions as well.

These suspected variants called by the homebrewed variant caller would then be flagged for a clinical variant scientist for review, who makes the final judgement call on whether the highlighted variant is a true variant to report to the physician or not. However, the downside of this is that, according to the presenter, this has no value outside of the organization. According to them, “no one is buying variant callers ... because you can't beat free.” So although this is a good in-house tool to increase the sensitivity, specificity, and speed of genomic variant calling, the LLM itself is not a good product alone. It's more of a performance-enhancing for the product that is genomic reference laboratory services.

REGULATORY RUMBLES

Over a decade ago, the now-famous Theranos and its founder Elizabeth Holmes ruined the clinical laboratory industry when they marketed substandard and deceptive laboratory services by exploiting a regulatory loophole. (26) This loophole focused on the until-then abused regulatory gap that if a certified clinical laboratory develops a test and does not sell the test as a physical product but instead sells it as a laboratory service, then this laboratory developed test (LDT) does not need to go through full FDA approval process. Theranos did so not only in an unprecedented scale, but in a manner deceptive to both investors and to patients. Those facts have played out in numerous civil and criminal court cases. (27) (28) While there is no evidence that any of Theranos' laboratory services used AI or any type of machine learning, the regulatory ripples have touched on the ever-urgent need to properly regulate AI in clinical laboratory testing.

Spurred by the mess that Theranos made in the industry, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has released an updated regulatory framework for LDTs, adding one small line to current regulations: "IVDs [in vitro diagnostics, of which lab tests are an example] are devices under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (FD&C Act) including when the manufacturer of the IVD is a laboratory." (29) There is now a full several year rollout program, prioritizing LDTs for FDA review based on the level of risk and clinical need. (30) Notably, if a laboratory implements a machine learning or AI feature that was not already part of the FDA authorization, that lab test is now considered an LDT and must go through FDA review. (31)

Overall, I've had negative to mixed feelings about the new FDA LDT regulation. However, the inclusion of AI or machine learning as an LDT feature requiring additional regulatory oversight is an excellent move. I think this will keep the innovation in the laboratory testing field safe and trustworthy for patients and physicians. The healthcare field already has a law called HIPAA – one of the more stringent privacy regulations in the US. (32) This safeguard against flagrantly using some of the most private information will help ensure that any information used in creating these AI tools remains respectful about some of the most intimate details of our lives.

SUMMARY REPORT

There's a famous slide from 1979, which the tech company IBM published internally. It read: "A computer can never be held accountable, therefore a computer must never make a management decision." (33) Throughout this article, we have seen case after case in which this principle has been strongly adhered to. Whether in reviewing a routine blood count, identifying parasites, or deciding whether a patient has a genetic variation or not, it has always been up to a trained and qualified human to make that judgement call – never an algorithm. In fact, some of the worst cases of fraud and mismanagement by Theranos involved no AI at all.

The past, current, and planned uses of AI in laboratory healthcare are playing directly into the decades-long trends of consolidation of laboratory services. This has been exacerbated by the ever-increasing shortage of qualified professionals to do this essential work. And in truth, the increased oversight of LDTs will likely increase laboratory consolidation. (34)

Given the ever-evident shortfalls for AI to be a product on its own, I believe that we will see AI in niche, high-volume, specialized laboratories and nowhere else. The future with AI will be complicated, but the future will be in good – human – hands. 💧

FURTHER READING

If you would like a description on how clinical blood testing works, I recommend a previous article that I wrote the article *How Are Hormones Measured?* here:

<https://bluehouse.lgbt/featured-articles/f/how-are-hormones-measured>

If you would like to read about blood products for transfusion, which touches on the AI-assisted platelet management tool, read the article *Homosexuality and Blood Donations* here:

<https://bluehouse.lgbt/featured-articles/f/homosexuality-and-blood-donationsupdating-an-outdated-system>

Source material for this article can be found starting on page 97

A Primer on Polyamory

by PomegranatePrincess (@pomegranate.princess)

The following article is intended as an introduction to polyamory that serves to illustrate some of the many ways in which polyamorous people can view relationships and how polyamorous behavior and identity emerge from those perspectives. The article provides a few examples of various polyamorous relationship structures, the differences between those structures, why those differences are significant, and the diversity in the practices and approaches that exist within the polyamorous community. It also seeks to provide additional information that's key to achieving a broader understanding of the polyamorous community beyond intimate relationships themselves.

This article will also discuss how polyamory and polyamorous approaches to relationships compare with monogamy and monogamous practices as well as with other forms of non-monogamy and non-monogamous practices (polyamory is not the only paradigm that falls under such a heading, nor is it synonymous with non-monogamy, as will later be explained). While monogamy makes for a useful point of reference by which to understand other approaches to relationships due to the fact that people generally have a working understanding of it already, this article and any comparisons, assertions, or statements therein are in no way intended to say that either polyamory or monogamy is by any means or metric 'better' than the other. Ideas of 'better' and 'worse' are inevitably subjective, contextual, and impossible to account for in every case and for every person, even if attempting to do so would be useful, and in this case, I do not believe it would be. On the contrary, I believe that attempting to bring ideas of 'better' and 'worse' into a conversation about the diversity of healthy ways in which people approach love and how to relate to one another is highly detrimental to creating an effective understanding of the subject matter at hand. In short, this article is in no way intended to be confrontational, and I refute the idea that a confrontational framing is an appropriate or useful way to approach discussions and comparisons of polyamory and monogamy.

Ultimately, this article is about relationships and how different people go about participating in them, understanding them, and organizing them. As such, anyone who has ever been in a relationship or has some sort of connection to the concept of relationships has a stake in this discussion and therefore a biased perspective. That being said, I believe it's appropriate to mention that I myself am polyamorous and that I will inevitably be bringing my perspective to this article as I have no other perspective to bring. I will be drawing on my own observations and experiences within the polyamorous community and of the discourse within said community as well as my experiences of being in polyamorous relationships to inform this article. Much of what follows will be original thoughts and ideas

based on those observations and experiences with references to other sources as needed along with their associated citations.

I hope that by the end of this piece, readers will have a better understanding of polyamory and the full breadth of what that term can refer to in addition to some of the many ideas and world views about love and relationships that affect how both polyamorous and monogamous relationships take form. At the very least, I hope to create a foundation for empathy and understanding between polyamorous and monogamous people and to foster a deeper appreciation for the beautiful multitude of ways in which we go about loving and cherishing each other as we accompany and support one another on the tumultuous and fascinating journey that is the human experience and do our best to make that journey worthwhile.

A Framework for Considering Relationships

In order to understand polyamorous or monogamous relationships, one must first have some notion of a relationship. Therefore, it is helpful to begin by articulating a framework for understanding relationships and their components in a more general sense that will be conducive to further discussion. While any given person may define a relationship in a way that differs from how others may define it without any particular definition being right or wrong, for the purposes of this discussion, a relationship can be thought of as a social object that exists between any two people, including people who have no social ties to one another. This object represents the association between the involved parties.

A relationship, like any other object, can be described in terms of its attributes. These attributes are often determined by the participants in the relationship but can also be determined by cultural influences within the broader society in which the relationship takes place or by other circumstances to which the relationship or its parties are subject. These attributes/descriptors of the relationship convey information about it in a manner that is independent of any particular label that gets applied to the relationship itself (e.g. a marriage) or to its participants (e.g. partner, spouse). This is much like how one can describe an object as being red, juicy, sweet, and a fruit without referring to the object as an apple. The same set of descriptors is also not unique to an apple and could be used to describe a strawberry or raspberry as well, hence a particular set of attributes that describes an object and the label applied to the object may exhibit independence and need not always be paired with one another in a one-to-one manner. A relationship can have the attribute of being romantic, sexual, platonic, involving cohabitation, being formed around common interests, common social circles, or other common circumstances. These are by no means the only attributes a relationship can have, and constructing an exhaustive list of such attributes is impossible.

Under this framework, any two people, regardless of their history with each other, always have a relationship. Consider a relationship between two people who have never met each other before and are passing each other on the street. Despite having never articulated any expectations as to the behaviors of the other within the context of the relationship, which is

to say having never chosen to attach any particular attributes to their relationship, they will still tend to agree on many of the attributes that their relationship has due to the existence of the social contract^{XIV}: an unwritten set of norms and cultural conventions that govern how people treat each other in daily life, especially when no other script applies or overrides the general social contract (39). As such, a relationship between strangers still comes with attributes, often in the form of expectations that each party to the relationship has of the other party's behavior, and the violation of such expectations can feel shocking or uncomfortable. For example, it is typically considered impolite to stare at strangers in public or to ask a stranger about personal details such as their income or politics.

For another example of this idea, consider a relationship between people who know each other well and have discussed their relationship and agreed on what attributes it has. In this case, the parties agree that each is expected to make time for the other such that neither feels ignored, that each shares significant events in their life with the other (particularly if such events have a direct impact on the other party or the relationship itself), that each regards the other lovingly and expresses this sentiment by some means and with sufficient regularity such that the other is aware of the feeling and its persistence, that the relationship involves a sexual component, that each party should be reasonably available to provide support of various kinds to the other as needed, and that each party will respect the boundaries and limitations asserted by the other. In light of these attributes, each party might refer to the other as a boyfriend/girlfriend, partner, spouse, or some other term or label entirely that they feel succinctly conveys an approximate understanding of the nature of the relationship to others in their communities.

It's important to emphasize that the language used to describe a relationship, like all language, is an abstraction. Everyone conceives of the same words, even common words, as meaning slightly different things, and as such, there will never be a way to convey an exact understanding of anything via language. What matters is conveying enough information such that people can consider it and act on it in appropriate and useful ways. However, succinct and reasonably accurate terms do not exist to describe all forms of relationship.

While society has a broadly understood set of social scripts outlining common archetypes of romantic and sexual relationships, friendships, working relationships, or other forms of relationships in addition to labels associated with relationships that conform to those scripts and archetypes, when a relationship has a particular blend of attributes that fall outside of the archetypes described by those social scripts, finding appropriate language can become difficult. Consider two people who have a platonic relationship but cohabitate, adopt children together, share the responsibility for raising said children, and share material resources with one another and distribute domestic labor in a similar fashion to how many households headed by individuals in a romantic relationship might. If one party were to refer to the other as a friend, it might do a good job of reflecting the feelings one has for the

^{XIV} "Social contract theory says that people live together in society in accordance with an agreement that establishes moral and political rules of behavior.... Social contracts can be explicit, such as laws, or implicit, such as raising one's hand in class to speak" (39).

other and the absence of romantic and sexual components to the relationship, but it would do little to describe the level of cooperation, interdependence, and commitment the relationship entails. Adequately describing the relationship to a new person may require a more in-depth explanation of the relationship in which its attributes, or at least the ones that are contextually relevant, are explicitly enumerated whereas if a succinct label for the relationship existed from which the relevant attributes could be inferred, it would almost certainly be more convenient to use it instead.

Ultimately, the language used to describe a relationship and communicate about it to other people can be whatever the participants in the relationship agree to, regardless of the relationship's attributes or how society might normally be inclined to describe such a relationship, and the language used can even vary with context. For example, even though relationships that have the attributes of being sexual and involving feelings of friendship and an absence of romantic feelings or intentions are often described as friends with benefits relationships, the participants may choose not to describe it with such language for whatever reason. One such reason might be that both participants view sex in a more casual manner and not as something that needs to be seen as atypical within the context of a friendship, and consequently they wish to normalize the idea that friends can approach each other sexually without interfering with the underlying dynamic of the friendship. In such a case, choosing to refer to their sexual friendship as simply a friendship and never as a friends with benefits relationship has the effect of treating the sexual element as unremarkable in much the same way that friends who play tennis together may not feel the need to use special language to refer to their relationship in light of that attribute.

Participants in a relationship, regardless of the attributes of that relationship, may also choose to leave it unlabeled and deliberately not attach any particular language to it. Avoiding labels may be done for any number of reasons. Perhaps the participants of an unlabeled relationship wish to avoid the expectations that come from applying loaded language to describe their relationship because any label, regardless of how accurately it may convey information about some of the attributes of the relationship, may still cause people who hear it to develop expectations and ideas about the relationship that are not applicable. The parties to the relationship may then have to respond to these expectations by providing clarifications, correcting misconceptions, or otherwise engaging in discussions related to their relationship that they'd rather avoid. For example, many people in relationships labeled as boyfriend/girlfriend relationships or partner relationships may not wish to move in together for various reasons, but many people, upon hearing the boyfriend/girlfriend/partner language, may view cohabitation as part of the natural progression of such a relationship and ask questions such as, "when are you moving in together," that the parties to the relationship may experience as awkward or intrusive or see as necessitating some sort of explanation or response^{xv} (59).

^{xv} "The relationship escalator is a term coined by Amy Gahran. It refers to the collection of expected behaviors and choices and that must be followed in order for a relationship to be seen as legitimate.... The relationship escalator expects "valid" relationships to follow this order: 1. dating, 2. becoming sexually and emotionally monogamous, 3. defining the relationship, 4. moving in together, 5. getting married, 6. combining income/purchasing property, 7. having children..." (59).

It's also possible that participants in a labeled relationship may feel external pressure, either real or imagined, to 'perform' the roles expected of someone in a relationship bearing a particular label and to act in a manner that is generally in line with the social scripts that are associated with that particular label despite not wanting to (59). Leaving a relationship unlabeled may be the preferred solution to such a problem, such as in relationships where, even though some attributes may be significant enough in some manner so as to meaningfully distinguish that relationship from others in the lives of the participants, the relationship is still taking form as the parties explore each other and their dynamic further.

A Framework for Considering Needs

In any relationship, whether it be romantic, platonic, close, or distant, it's important to consider the concept of needs and how they factor into the dynamic of a relationship. All parties to a relationship will have their own individual needs, which for the purposes of this discussion will be defined as conditions that must be satisfied in order for something else to be true. When discussing needs in the context of relationships, the needs in question are generally implied to be the conditions that must be satisfied in order for it to be true that a particular party feels that the relationship is healthy or for the relationship to actually be healthy according to some definition of 'healthy' (it's very important to be aware that these two sets of conditions are not necessarily the same). However, these are not the only needs that can be discussed. It's possible to talk about the needs that a party to a relationship has with respect to whether or not a different condition is true as well, such as what one party to a relationship needs in order for it to be true that they wish to cohabitate with the other party. Throughout this article, the barest set of needs that a party requires in order for the relationship to be healthy will be referred to as the healthy minimum of that party, and a relationship in which both parties have all of the needs compromising their healthy minimums satisfied will be referred to as a healthy relationship.

Understanding the existence of different sets of needs and the differences between them is important for understanding different kinds of relationship dynamics using this model, including both healthy and abusive dynamics. For example, a party's healthy minimum is not necessarily identical to the set of needs that must be met in order for that same party to feel that the relationship is worth continuing, nor is that set of needs necessarily identical to the set of needs that must be met in order for the party to feel safe terminating or redefining a relationship. As such, if the party in question has an unmet healthy minimum, but the set of needs that must be met in order for that party to wish to remain in the relationship is satisfied, or if the set of needs required for the party to feel safe ending the relationship is unsatisfied, then the party may remain trapped in the unhealthy relationship, knowingly or otherwise. Therefore, this framework for needs is able to account for situations in which a party remains in an unhealthy relationship in addition to a wide range of other scenarios.

Needs, as defined herein, can encompass the idea of limitations and boundaries, or to put it another way, limitations and boundaries can be seen as types of needs. One party may

need the other party to avoid making sudden loud noises in order for it to be true that they feel safe sharing space with them, or a party may express boundaries regarding the kinds of language that can be used to refer to them (e.g. pronouns) in order for it to be true that they feel respected in the relationship.

Freedoms within a relationship can sometimes be considered needs under this framework as well, although not always. A key trait of freedoms is that they grant an individual the right to exercise a particular form of power, or put another way, they give an individual the option to do something. More specifically, a freedom will herein be defined as an attribute of a relationship that allows a particular party to that relationship to exercise some form of power (e.g. the power to request emotional support) with the understanding that doing so is within the parameters of the relationship and its attributes as agreed to by the involved parties and that to consider such an exercise of power to be a violation of a boundary, a failure to fulfill a need, or to consider it as being transgressive against the terms of the relationship in some other way for no reason other than the fact that such a power was exercised would be unjustified.

Consider a relationship in which the parties each need the freedom to voluntarily associate with individuals outside of the relationship as part of their healthy minimums (an example of a freedom as a need). To rephrase in terms of power, this would mean that each party requires the power to spend time with people outside the relationship in order for the relationship to be healthy. In such a relationship, either party would be permitted to spend time with someone else, perhaps by meeting a friend for dinner over the weekend, without the mere fact that time is being spent with someone outside of the relationship constituting a violation of any boundary or a failure to fulfill a need. However, if a party to such a relationship spends all of their time freely associating with individuals outside of the relationship, then this can constitute a failure to meet needs if, for example, the other party requires that a certain amount of quality time be spent with them in order for their healthy minimum to be fulfilled and this is not happening.

The concept of freedoms as articulated above diverges from the concept of needs in that it is possible for a party to a relationship to have the freedom to do something without feeling that their having such a freedom is required in any way as a component of their healthy minimum or any other relevant set of needs. It may be possible that a party to a relationship has the freedom to call the other party's immediate relatives, a freedom that may be useful in case of emergency or when planning events, but such a freedom may not be something that party requires in order for the relationship to be healthy.

Another important observation is that the needs of both parties to a particular relationship don't have to be symmetrical: the needs of one party may vary meaningfully from the needs of the other in any number of ways. A common example of this is in roommate relationships wherein people have different schedules. One party may need the other party to be quiet on Wednesday nights before an early morning event in order to feel that the roommate relationship is healthy while the other party may require quiet on Monday nights for the same reason. Another common example in the context of romantic relationships is asymmetry with regards to how affection is given and received. One party to a romantic

relationship may require a lot of touch in order to feel loved while the other party requires frequent words of affirmation in order to experience the same. While asymmetry with regards to needs is normal in healthy relationships, an asymmetry of freedoms can often be a red flag: a sign of abuse or injustice that requires careful scrutiny and potentially some form of redress.

Needs play heavily into the differences between monogamous relationship paradigms and polyamorous paradigms. Even though people engage in monogamous or polyamorous relationship patterns for vastly different reasons^{xvi} (47, 28) and under vastly different circumstances, the relationship pattern one engages in is often emergent from needs (28). This is important to point out as some people believe that the reverse is almost universally true: that people are either monogamous or polyamorous in a manner somewhat akin to how people may be gay or straight or of some other orientation^{xvii} (51), and as a result of being that way, they have certain needs within their relationships. While relationship paradigms may be emergent from needs or vice-versa, investigating the frequency with which one emerges from the other or why it happens that way is beyond the scope of this article, and ultimately it's unimportant either way. A different and more useful way of framing the situation that is agnostic concerning the order of emergence of needs and relationship paradigms would be that some kinds of needs tend to correspond to individuals involved in monogamous relationship paradigms, other kinds of needs tend to correspond to individuals involved in polyamorous relationship structures, and various other kinds of needs tend to correspond to people involved in various other types of non-monogamous relationship structures aside from polyamory.

At this point, it's worth repeating that 'polyamory' and 'non-monogamy' are two different things entirely, and that while polyamory has been referenced with greater frequency than non-monogamy, that is only because polyamory rather than non-monogamy is the subject of this piece. It therefore makes sense to focus on how the concepts mentioned so far relate to polyamory specifically. As for precisely how the two concepts differ....

Defining Polyamory and Clarifying its Nature,

As with many terms discussed in this article, the exact definition of polyamory may vary significantly from one person to another. The same is true for the definition of monogamy or any other term that refers to a particular relationship paradigm. While the definitions presented herein are by no means the only ones, they represent the working definitions

^{xvi} “The concept of ‘naturalness’ in relationships is complex and multifaceted, often intertwined with cultural, biological, and psychological factors. While some argue that humans are naturally inclined towards either monogamy or polyamory, the debate is far from settled” (47). “Based on our theoretical analysis of existing studies, we identified eight possible sources of motivations for polyamory.... However, we hypothesize that there may be additional motivations that we have not addressed in our paper” (28).

^{xvii} “The debate over whether human beings are naturally monogamous or polyamorous is complex and influenced by various cultural factors” (51).

that will be used throughout the rest of this article. That being said, it's important to introduce some other terms and ideas before attempting to define polyamory.

Given that monogamy (from the Greek roots *monos* meaning 'single', and *gamos* meaning 'marriage') (42) is quite possibly the most well-understood relationship model in many contemporary societies, or at least the one assumed to be the default, it makes sense to start there. Even so, as one paper speaking on the matter put it, "the construct of monogamy lacks a consistent definition" (10). Various definitions of monogamy may refer to it as a purely sexual arrangement with no mention of romance^{xviii} while other definitions may refer to a romantic component alone, other definitions may feature both romantic and sexual components^{xix}, or even talk about it purely with respect to the institution of marriage while making reference to neither sex nor romance^{xx}. Throughout this article, the word monogamous will be used to refer specifically to a romantic relationship (which may also be sexual in nature) wherein the parties to said relationship agree that they are not to form romantic or sexual relationships with anyone else and that the only romantic or sexual relationship that either party may partake in is the one that the parties in question share together. The fact that a monogamous person will never have more than one romantic partner at a time and the fact that a monogamous person may only have multiple sexual partners when they have no romantic partner are necessarily implied by the chosen definition.

Any relationship structure or practice that falls outside of the definition of monogamy/monogamous may be referred to as non-monogamy/non-monogamous. Two closely-related terms are ethical non-monogamy and consensual non-monogamy, which are synonymous and refer to non-monogamous relationship paradigms that are engaged in with the knowledge and freely-given consent of all parties (23), although when the term non-monogamy is used without 'ethical' in front of it, the idea that the arrangement is ethical is often implicitly understood based on context, such as in conversations between two ethically non-monogamous people. While the scope of what non-monogamy, and by extension ethical non-monogamy, can mean is vast and the terms themselves lacks a clear definition for the same reasons that monogamy does, this article will use the term ethical non-monogamy to mean any relationship paradigm, practice, or structure wherein the parties are permitted to engage in multiple romantic and/or sexual relationships at a time with the knowledge and consent of all involved parties^{xxi} (26). This means that non-monogamy is an umbrella term that encompasses many different kinds of relationships. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

^{xviii} "...we will use this definition of monogamy, thus specifically addressing sexual monogamy—under the assumption that when most people discuss monogamy in our culture, they are referencing sexual commitments" (10).

^{xix} "Monogamy is the practice of exclusively bonding in romantic, sexual, emotional, or all of these relationships with only one person at once" (35).

^{xx} "having or permitted to have but one living and undivorced wife or husband at a time" (42).

^{xxi} "Ethical non-monogamy is a relationship framework where individuals engage in more than one romantic or sexual connection at a time, with everyone involved agreeing to this arrangement. It's a practice built on the principles of consent, open communication and honesty" (26).

Open relationships: “...in which a primary couple pursues outside relationships, which are generally expected to be only about sex” (9).

Swinging: “...in which a couple may have other sexual partners, generally at social events designed for this purpose” (9). While this may not seem to differ significantly from open relationships, the implication is often that a couple is participating in the swinger lifestyle together as opposed to pursuing outside relationships more independently.

Relationship anarchy: “...a relationship style and approach that rejects pre-defined relationship structures and, specifically, hierarchies, allowing individuals to define their connections on their own terms” (40). Relationship anarchists are likely to opt out of labeling relationships or to use labels far less rigidly. They reject the idea that some forms of relationship are inherently more valuable or important than others (e.g. a romantic relationship is not necessarily more important than a friendship), or that a party to a particular relationship is more valuable or important than a party to another relationship on account of who those people are or the respective natures of the relationships that they are parties to. They also eschew the use of hierarchical language when discussing relationships (29). Additionally, such people may feel that accepting the restrictions required by monogamy is not in keeping with their personal values such that they would not wish to use the label to describe themselves, even if it may appear to be applicable to them or their relationship situation.

and of course...

Polyamory: From the Greek root poly meaning ‘many’ (49), and the Latin root amor meaning ‘love or affection’ (1), the term refers to relationship structures and paradigms wherein the participants are permitted to engage in “...multiple romantic relationships simultaneously, with the knowledge and consent of everyone involved” (27), or alternatively, an ethically non-monogamous paradigm^{xxii} “...in which people are free to maintain multiple loving or committed relationships” (9), or according to Oxford Languages, “the practice of engaging in multiple romantic (and typically sexual) relationships, with the consent of all the people involved^{xxiii}” (24). Definitions of polyamory, while not always making reference to multiple sexual relationships, at the very least never preclude the possibility. Throughout this article, polyamory will be defined as a relationship paradigm wherein all involved parties are free to engage in multiple simultaneous romantic and/or

^{xxii} “CNM can take many different forms, including... polyamory” (9).

^{xxiii} This definition was supplied automatically by Google search when using the search term, 'definition of polyamory' (date of access: May 24, 2024). Google stated that the definition was sourced from Oxford Languages. Attempting to retrieve the definition from Oxford Languages directly revealed that the service requires payment.

sexual relationships with the consent of everyone involved. This closely mirrors the first definition provided while clarifying that multiple sexual relationships are also permissible. This is also most reflective of how the word is used within the polyamorous community as well as within literature on the subject of polyamory. Regardless, it is crucial to take note of the fact that the idea of multiple romantic relationships being permissible is essential to the definition of polyamory and that many other non-monogamous paradigms that are inclusive of multiple sexual relationships but not multiple romantic ones (such as open relationships and swinging) fall outside of the definition of polyamory on this basis.

Something that warrants emphasis for linguistic and cultural reasons which will become apparent is that polyamory, in its etymological construction and day-to-day use within the polyamorous community, makes no reference whatsoever to the institution of marriage and is totally unrelated to the concept. This is in contrast to the construction (and sometimes the usage) of the term monogamy, although as stated above, modern definitions of monogamy are not exclusively about marriage^{XXIV} and the operating definition of monogamy in this article makes no reference to it. This is also a distinguishing factor between polyamory and polygamy, which is generally construed as solely referring to marriage arrangements. Some definitions of polygamy as provided by various sources are, “the fact or custom of being married to more than one person at a time” (52), “the practice or condition of having more than one spouse, especially wife, at one time” (14), or “the state or practice of being married to more than one person at the same time” (53).

While it may seem strange to provide so many iterations of similar definitions, it’s necessary in order to demonstrate the consistency with which the term polygamy refers to marriage specifically, but also the consistency with which definitions of the term make no reference whatsoever to romance or love. This does not mean that polygamous relationships and marriages cannot be loving or that they tend not to be loving. These definitions should in no way be used to make inferences about the quality of polygamous relationships, the contexts in which such relationships occur, the reasons why people are polygamous or use that particular term to describe themselves, or the values of any particular polygamous community or of polygamous people in a more global sense. The only appropriate inferences to make are ones that follow immediately from the specific

^{XXIV} ‘Monogamy’ is an old word, which according to one source, dates back to the 1610s (42). This is in contrast to the word ‘Polyamory’ which is far more recent, and according to one source, dates back to the latter half of the 20th century: “The word polyamory has a rich background. People involved in multiple-partner relationships in the 1960s, 70s, and early 80s sought words to express their ideas, found Standard English lacking, and began to create their own words” (55). As such, the general understanding of relationships, particularly with respect to ideas of love, romance, and marriage, were very different when each term was coined, which may help to explain why the modern usage of monogamy, which tends to refer largely to romantic and/or sexual exclusivity rather than marriage, differs from its etymology. While a discussion of the history of the terms ‘polyamory’ and ‘monogamy’ is beyond the scope of this article, it’s important to point out that uses of the word monogamy in the modern day are not unconcerned with ideas of love and sex, and the absence of such concepts in definitions of monogamy are likely due to its history.

definitions provided: polygamy is fundamentally about marriage and makes no reference to romantic relationships, sexual relationships, or love.

Marriage itself, a legal or ceremonial arrangement^{xxv} (37, 36, 13), does not need to involve love or romance, and its definition likewise makes no reference to the concepts. In many historical (and present) situations, it has nothing to do with love in practice, although loving marriages certainly do exist. On the contrary, marriage has often blatantly been about other things such as managing political ties, continuing bloodlines/producing offspring, financial reasons, complying with a particular tradition, or conforming to social/cultural pressures or expectations. Marriage has also been used throughout much of history (and continues to be used to this day) as a means of social control, particularly over women, and by extension, their bodies and labor, and it has been instrumental in chaining women to the domestic sphere and to subservience to men^{xxvi} (58 p. 506).

Consider this context alongside the fact that polyamory is, by definition, about romantic relationships and not related in any way to marriage. Also consider that individual autonomy is a core value of the polyamorous community, especially in the forms of bodily autonomy and freedom of association, in addition to being a significant motivating factor that drives many individuals to be polyamorous, and that such forms of autonomy are even referenced in definitions of polyamory via words like ‘free’ (9) or via invoking the concept of consent (27, 24), which requires the autonomy to give or withhold consent in order for said consent to be valid, and that marriage as an institution has often served to undermine those values (58 p. 506). With these considerations in mind, it should be understandable that members of the polyamorous community generally see it as a misrepresentation of their beliefs, identities, values, or practices to conflate polyamory and polygamy.

Before continuing on, it’s important to be very clear about something: there is nothing offensive about polygamy, either conceptually or practically, provided that such a practice is done in a healthy manner for all parties involved, although this is true of all relationship paradigms including monogamy and polyamory. Abusive and unhealthy relationships are problematic owing to the damage they do to people and communities, but no particular relationship structure or paradigm is itself problematic for the mere fact of it being the paradigm that it is. Nevertheless, the conflation of polyamory and polygamy, aside from

^{xxv} “any of the diverse forms of interpersonal union established in various parts of the world to form a familial bond that is recognized legally, religiously, or socially, granting the participating partners mutual conjugal rights and responsibilities and including, for example, opposite-sex marriage, same-sex marriage, plural marriage, and arranged marriage” (13). “the relationship that exists between two people who are united as spouses : the state of being married” (37). “a legally accepted relationship between two people in which they live together, or the official ceremony that results in this” (36).

^{xxvi} “She follows him where his work calls him: where he works essentially determines where they live; she breaks with her past more or less brutally, she is annexed to her husband’s universe; she gives him her person: she owes him her virginity and strict fidelity. She loses part of the legal rights of the unmarried woman. Roman law placed the woman in the hands of her husband *loco filiae*; at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Bonald declared that the woman is to her husband what the child is to the mother; until the 1942 law, French law demanded a wife’s obedience to her husband; law and customs still confer great authority on him: it is suggested by her very situation within the conjugal society” (58 p. 506).

being definitionally incorrect^{xxvii}, is very likely to be experienced as shocking or offensive by a polyamorous person, especially if that person is referred to as polygamous. Even though many such instances of offense are on account of the misrepresentation alone, there is additional context to consider.

It's imperative to emphasize the fact that healthy polygamous practices can and do exist, but within the cultural context of North America in particular, the word 'polygamy' has become tightly associated with the specific forms of polygamy practiced by the Mormon Church (54) and especially its offshoot, the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints^{xxviii} (7), and many of the practices of these institutions in relation to polygamy have been troubling. The history^{xxix} of polygamy as practiced by those institutions features multiple cases of abuse perpetrated by their members in which polygamy was an inextricable aspect of said abuse^{xxx} (21). Many of these cases became high-profile, some have involved high-ranking members within those communities (46), some have involved child marriage and the sexual exploitation of minors (60), and media coverage of such cases has often emphasized the perpetrators as being polygamous more than it has emphasized them as being members of their respective institutions or as being adherents to the ideologies of those institutions^{xxxi}, . This has had the effect of associating abuse, particularly sexual abuse against women and minors, with the concept of polygamy in the North American public consciousness. This association created between abuse and polygamy, no matter how unfair it may be to those who practice polygamy in a healthy manner, is arguably stronger than the association created between abuse and the

^{xxvii} While polyamory and polygamy can overlap, it is far from the norm as many polygamous practices involve the parties to such relationships being restricted in certain ways so as to definitionally exclude those practices from being considered polyamorous, such as cases wherein only one partner is permitted to pursue multiple relationships.

^{xxviii} "...fundamentalist Mormons broke off from the LDS Church in the early 20th century to continue their open practice of polygamy..." (7).

^{xxix} "Polygamy – or more correctly polygyny, the marriage of more than one woman to the same man – was an important part of the teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for a half-century" (54).

^{xxx} "It is 'not an artifact in a museum. It is alive and unwell, a ghost that has a dark life of its own... hiding in the recesses of the Mormon psyche, inflicting profound pain and fear, assuring women that we are still objects, damaging or destroying marriages, bringing chaos to family relationships'" (21).

^{xxxi} *Article 1 title*: "Polygamist Leader Convicted of Child Sex Abuse". Excerpt: "A Texas jury has convicted polygamist leader Warren Jeffs of child sexual assault charges in a case stemming from two young followers he took as brides... The 55-year-old head of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints stood stone-faced as the verdict was read" (46). Note that the perpetrator is twice referred to as a 'polygamous leader' in the same sentence as he is referred to as a child sex abuser, including in the title of the article. This is before the church that he led, the institution whose doctrine informed these practices and behaviors, was ever named. *Article 2 title*: "Indictment of FLDS polygamist leader, 10 others details sex crimes against young girls". Excerpt: "Lurid new details have emerged from a new 55-felony-count federal indictment against an Arizona-based polygamist fundamentalist cult and its leader, Samuel Bateman" (60). The title, while immediately making reference to the FLDS Church, proceeds to describe the perpetrator as a 'polygamist leader', which can be read as implying that the perpetrator is a member of the FLDS community who is a leader in the 'polygamist' community as opposed to being polygamous and a leader within the FLDS community. The excerpt, which is the opening sentence of the article, refers to a 'polygamist fundamentalist cult' and its 'leader', and makes no reference to the FLDS community, once again lending itself to the same interpretation.

institutions and communities that participated in that abuse, or for that matter, the ideologies of those same institutions and communities that informed and permitted the abuse. In either case, the association is often inescapable when the term polygamy is used, and therefore it needs to be addressed.

There is also the issue of the inherently sexist nature of the definition and practice of polygamy by those institutions given that they only permit men to pursue multiple marriages (54), which is antithetical to polyamory since only relationships in which all parties enjoy the freedom to pursue additional relationships can qualify as polyamorous under the definition. Given these considerations, many polyamorous people are quick to distance themselves from polygamy for reasons other than feeling misrepresented by the label.

In the interest of accurately representing polyamorous views on the institution of marriage, it should be said that there are many different stances and opinions on the subject in the polyamorous community, including views that are favorable towards marriage. There are even many members of the polyamorous community who advocate for allowing people to legally and/or ceremonially marry multiple times in jurisdictions and communities that currently prohibit such a thing, including members who would not opt to marry themselves, which is very much aligned with the interests of the polygamous community. However, many popular attitudes and opinions on the institution of marriage within the polyamorous community are highly critical, often asserting that marriage is unnecessary for a healthy committed relationship, incompatible with certain polyamorous philosophies, paradigms, and practices (categories of critiques of marriage that are specific to polyamorous individuals and subcommunities), that it contributes to and/or has historical ties to the commodification of women and romantic partners more broadly, or is only worth considering on account of any legal and financial advantages the arrangement may offer. On the other hand, given that polygamy is definitionally about marriage, acceptance of the institution of marriage itself is much less controversial in such communities, and would even seem to be required. Therefore, not only are conflation between polygamy and polyamory poorly received by polyamorous people on account of their definitional inaccuracy, but because they effectively ignore and erase the attitudes and beliefs of a significant portion of the polyamorous community in regards to an important issue. Such misrepresentations are especially egregious when they happen in a social context wherein someone, invariably a person who does not already have a solid grasp on what polyamory is in practice or what the term itself means, ends up 'learning' from the misrepresentation and acquiring an incorrect understanding of polyamory and polyamorous people.

In this manner, acts of misrepresentation can have the effect of propagating misconceptions against which the members of the misrepresented community will have to fight in order to be accurately seen and understood by people, potentially even by people they know and associate with, or by society at large. Misconceptions, should they spread too far, can effectively deny groups and their members the opportunity to articulate their identities for themselves on their own terms, especially to the public, while other ideas become popular mythology and entrench false notions of what that group is in the consciousness of that same public. The misconceptions that abound concerning the

polyamorous community and the false narratives against which polyamorous people struggle to define themselves go far beyond conflations with a separate label under the non-monogamous umbrella, they go beyond misleading or reductive portrayals of polyamorous thoughts on marriage, and they go beyond misunderstandings of the definition of what polyamory is. Many of the more pernicious misconceptions are concerned with the quality, character, and impact of polyamorous relationships and people, and they range in tone and motivation from uncharitable portrayals repeated out of ignorance to downright cruel and grotesque caricatures born of malevolent feelings or intentions. Attempting to enumerate and address as many such misconceptions as possible would be an exercise in futility (though some of them will be discussed later in this article), but they each take a toll in various ways on members of the polyamorous community.

It's not difficult for a society's prevailing ideas about a minority group to be or to become inaccurate ones. History is littered with such cases and they are often unpleasant for the groups that are misrepresented and the members of such groups who deal with the consequences of being misunderstood in their day to day lives. The queer community (which is distinct from the polyamorous community) is particularly full of such cases of misrepresentation and their consequences. Having to act in opposition to misrepresentations or persist silently in spite of them can be exhausting and denigrating in addition to feeling frustrating and unfair. This is true regardless of if those misrepresentations concern polyamory or something else entirely. Such situations can be painful or isolating, even having the potential to go so far as to be corrosive to the mental health and well-being of those made to experience them, particularly if one is made to experience such situations repeatedly.

As such, accurate representations and definitions matter, and care should be taken to avoid propagating misconceptions. An excellent way to do this is through a willingness to admit to a lack of understanding or an imperfect understanding regarding a community rather than accepting information about that community without bothering to verify it with sources from said community. It's also important to avoid over-generalizations or under-generalizations relating to communities and to use language that is inclusive of the diversity that communities invariably contain. Such diversity may be in reference to approaches, definitions, beliefs, practices, or anything else regarding communities and their members. Where appropriate, it is also prudent to state exactly what one means when using a term and to acknowledge that the usages of other people may vary in certain ways. The aim in presenting the definitions in this article has been to adhere to this advice in the hope of preventing this article itself from becoming a vehicle for spreading misconceptions. To that end, qualifiers have been provided where necessary, words have been chosen carefully, and effort has been expended to highlight that no group is a monolith. Hopefully any errors made have been minimal. Regardless, it's advised that the reader bare these things in mind going forward, both with respect to the rest of this article as well as to one's conduct more broadly. Words matter.

Multiple Approaches to Multiple Romances

In addition to the terms already defined, there are several more that warrant introduction and explanation as they are relevant to understanding the polyamorous community in more depth as opposed to simply noting how polyamory differs from monogamy and various forms of non-monogamy in the broadest possible sense. Many of these terms refer to specific styles of polyamory or tendencies in thought or practice that exist within the polyamorous community.

Broadly speaking, polyamorous approaches to relationships can be classified into one of two categories: hierarchical polyamory and non-hierarchical polyamory. Hierarchical polyamory encompasses all forms of polyamory wherein an individual has clear ideas about the relative importance/priority of their relationships and/or the parties to those relationships. This implies that a hierarchical polyamorist believes it is possible for particular relationships to be meaningfully compared in terms of importance or priority in the first place or that it is useful to do so. Hierarchical polyamorists typically afford different levels of power to different partners, including with respect to the types of attributes that certain partners are allowed to attach to a relationship, thereby making the hierarchy significant in a functional sense. Some specific definitions of hierarchical polyamory taken from various sources that illustrate these features are the following:

“Hierarchical polyamory refers to a form of polyamory where there is an explicit structure to relationships that establishes different levels of importance or priority among partners” (64).

“Hierarchical polyamory is simply polyamory where one or more relationships are central in importance versus other relationships or sexual encounters” (29).

“People who practice hierarchical polyamory place more importance on some relationships over others, kind of like a ‘ranking’ system” (32).

The language used by hierarchical polyamorists to refer to their relationships and partners typically reflects the hierarchical nature of their perspectives. The partner or partners who are considered to be of the highest priority are often referred to as primary partners or simply primaries with relationships to primary partners being referred to as primary partnerships or primary relationships, although there is often only a single partner/relationship occupying the position. Partners who are considered less important or of lower priority may be referred to as secondaries or secondary partners and relationships with such partners are frequently referred to as secondary partnerships or secondary relationships. While it’s less common to use distinct terms to denote levels of priority below secondary, tertiaries and tertiary partners may also be referenced, although secondary relationships with different attributes and different levels of priority may all be referred to

as secondary without implying that all secondaries are equal or granted the same powers/freedoms (64).

Hierarchical polyamorists often allow higher priority partners to express boundaries and terms concerning the ways in which the hierarchical polyamorist is allowed to interact with secondaries and tertiaries (from now on, when making reference to secondaries, unless otherwise specified, it can be understood that lower tiers of partner are included, such that 'secondary' is used to mean any relationship that is below primary in terms of priority). These terms may take the form of needs/boundaries that are attached to the primary relationship as attributes that may have the effect of necessitating that the hierarchical polyamorist attaches certain attributes to their secondary relationships in order to satisfy one or more needs within their primary partner's healthy minimum. So long as these terms still permit the parties to the primary relationship(s) and the parties to any secondary relationships to engage in multiple romantic relationships, then the dynamic can still qualify as polyamory under the definition. Some examples of rules that may be found in hierarchical polyamorous dynamics are the following (16):

- Primaries may have the option to veto each others' secondary relationships.
- Primaries may prohibit certain sexual activities from being engaged in with secondaries, such as unprotected sex.
- Primaries may necessitate that the scheduling of dates, outings, trips, or other plans with secondaries be subject to their approval.
- Primaries may limit the degree of commitment that is permissible within each others' secondary relationships.

The granting of different levels of power to primary and secondary partners has the effect of creating a power differential between the tiers of partners whereby a primary partner can affect the attributes of a secondary relationship but a secondary partner does not have a comparable ability to do the same to the primary relationship, thereby creating a hierarchical power structure^{xxxii} (22). It's worth highlighting the fact that the term 'hierarchy' in the context of polyamory, although it can refer to differences in importance (something that may be purely sentimental as opposed to practical) as outlined above, is especially meaningful when used to reference priority or power differentials.

It's not unheard of for polyamorists to use the 'primary' label to describe relationships or partners that have naturally taken on a character over time that they consider to be more central to their lives, such as relationships with partners they live with, but to do so without such partners granting each other the power to attach attributes to each others' secondary relationships (absence of hierarchical power structures), or for them to see one partner as

^{xxxii} "In the hierarchical polyamorous relationship configuration, people tend to prioritize one or more partners (designated as primary) over others (often designated secondary or tertiary). This predetermined arrangement between a couple explicitly shapes the nature of their other intimate involvements (Labriola, 2003)" (22).

being a priority over another in terms of responding to needs, allocating emotional labor, or anything else. In other words, such a polyamorist would not prioritize a primary partner over a secondary partner simply on account of one being referred to as primary and another as secondary. For example, if both a primary partner and a secondary partner of such a polyamorist wished to spend more time with said polyamorist, the wishes of the primary would not automatically be privileged, and such a polyamorist would be free to decide how to respond to the situation on whatever basis they see fit. While such a polyamorist may still be referred to as hierarchical on account of conceiving of one relationship as warranting the title of primary while another does not, or on account of a general willingness to use hierarchical language^{xxxiii} (22), the degree and nature of hierarchy at play in this case are significantly different.

For any particular person with multiple relationships, each of those relationships will inevitably be different, but ‘different’ does not necessarily mean they can be ordered or ranked (except perhaps contextually given a specific criterion that naturally lends itself to such rankings, e.g. according to how long each relationship has been around, but such a ranking need not influence how a relationship is treated or considered and in this case, would be nothing more than a historical and mathematical fact). Meaningful differences between relationships can often occur coincidentally as opposed to intentionally, which is to say that someone may, for example, spend more time with a particular person they’re in a relationship with as opposed to others that they’re in relationships with but not as the result of an explicit feeling that the person in question is of higher priority or as the result of any intention to treat them that way. On the other hand, granting more powers, freedoms, or rights to people in some relationships as opposed to people in other relationships, such as may be done with primary partners, is the result of intent^{xxxiv} (22). The existence of differences between relationships in a polyamorous context does not automatically qualify the paradigm as hierarchical polyamory.

While definitions of hierarchical polyamory tend to focus on the idea of relationships or partners themselves being prioritized or ranked, the definition is often extended to include the prioritization or ranking of different types of relationships as well. This is usually attached to the definition by way of contrast with relationship anarchy or practices and perspectives that are common within non-hierarchical polyamory^{xxxv} (22). Typically, romantic relationships and sexual relationships tend to be ranked above platonic relationships. Within a particular category of relationships, such as within the category of

^{xxxiii} “Non-hierarchical polyamory is a polyamory style where there are multiple simultaneous relationships but no hierarchies exist in those relationships. No one relationship is primary and terms like secondary partners or tertiary relationships are not used” (29). Under such a definition, the use of hierarchical terms would preclude someone from being considered a non-hierarchical polyamorist, necessarily implying that they would be a hierarchical polyamorist.

^{xxxiv} “Although primary partners may have influence over their partner’s relationships with other partners, typically non-hierarchical partners do not have the power to influence decisions regarding partnerships that do not include them (Labriola, 2006). However, even when non-hierarchical partners are not explicit prioritized over others, differences in marital or cohabitation status, financial, or other forms of interdependence may still exist across partnerships” (22).

^{xxxv} “...it may reflect a philosophy that rejects hierarchy among their intimate partnerships or, going a step further, among any relationships (relationship anarchy; Kale, 2016)” (22).

romantic relationships specifically, partners with which one cohabitates may be prioritized in a hierarchical fashion above other partners, or relationships with specific individuals that don't necessarily differ in their attributes in any obvious way from other relationships that a hierarchical polyamorist is involved in may be prioritized due to who those individuals are or for any other reason. There are no consistent or absolute lines along which hierarchically polyamorous people organize their hierarchies, and the reasoning used to determine the nature or order of a hierarchy may differ substantially from one person to another.

While hierarchical polyamory seeks to create or, at the very least, embrace the existence of hierarchies, non-hierarchical polyamory follows very different practices and logic. Non-hierarchical polyamory can be defined as a form of polyamory wherein relationships are not ranked in terms of importance or priority and no special powers are afforded to those in one particular relationship as opposed to another, which is to say that all partners and relationships enjoy the same freedoms and privileges as one another and may be subject to the same restrictions (22). Some definitions of non-hierarchical polyamory from various sources are as follows:

“Non-hierarchical polyamory is a form of polyamory where no partner has inherent priority over others. In these relationships, you treat each connection independently without a ranking system, which stands in contrast to hierarchical polyamory where a ‘primary’ partner often takes precedence” (45).

“Non-hierarchical polyamory is a polyamory style where there are multiple simultaneous relationships but no hierarchies exist in those relationships. No one relationship is primary and terms like secondary partners or tertiary relationships are not used” (29).

“When all poly relationships are considered equivalent rather than primary, secondary, tertiary, and casual, this is often referred to as non-hierarchical or egalitarian polyamory. No specific relationship or person is considered more or less important than another” (31).

While the above definitions place emphasis on the practices involved in non-hierarchical polyamory, such as the absence of priority or ranking, they have little to say about the perspectives that often inform such dynamics. For example, a non-hierarchical polyamorist may not believe that meaningfully ranking relationships is even possible; instead, such a person will conceive of their relationships as being different from one another without such differences implying particular ranks or levels of priority relative to other relationships. To such a person, non-hierarchical polyamory wouldn't simply be about refraining from ranking relationships in practice, rather an absence of rankings would be the natural result of a worldview that sees assigning them as impossible or nonsensical.

It should be emphasized that this does not mean that all relationships in a non-hierarchical polyamorous paradigm are strictly equal. As has already been mentioned, some partners will inevitably end up spending more time together than others or engaging in different activities together than others, but these differences alone do not constitute a hierarchy, which is not to say that they aren't meaningful^{xxxvi} (22). Rather, it's like comparing apples to oranges: there is no obvious or objective way to argue that one is 'better' than the other, although each may be treated differently. One may be preferred when making a pie while the other may be preferred as a source of vitamin C.

While meaningful differences between relationships will exist, even in non-hierarchical paradigms, these differences are never codified in such dynamics, which is to say that there is no restriction placed on how relationships within non-hierarchical polyamorous paradigms are allowed to develop^{xxxvii} (45). This contrasts with how hierarchical polyamorists may restrict the manner in which secondary relationships are allowed to develop by, for example, stipulating that secondaries may never be invited to cohabit with the parties to the primary relationship. As such, there is equal opportunity for all relationships under a non-hierarchical polyamorous paradigm to develop any given attribute.

In articulating the differences in their relationships or when referring to different partners, the language used by non-hierarchical polyamorists is reflective of a non-hierarchical perspective and tends to refer to the attributes of those relationships rather than attempting to assign them relative importance and label them accordingly. While such terms are used mainly by non-hierarchical polyamorists, people engaged in other forms of polyamory may opt to use them to describe their relationships as well. Some of the more common terms are as follows:

Nesting partner: *A partner with whom one cohabitates (31).*

Anchor partner: *A partner that one may rely on more for support or with whom one may experience a heightened sense of stability or security (31).*

Comet partner: *A partner whose presence may be relatively infrequent or one with whom contact is relatively sparse, but with whom a great sense of closeness, as is normal for a romantic partnership, is experienced nevertheless (31).*

^{xxxvi} “However, even when non-hierarchical partners are not explicit prioritized over others, differences in marital or cohabitation status, financial, or other forms of interdependence may still exist across partnerships” (22).

^{xxxvii} “Equal potential among relationships, with boundaries agreed upon by all parties” (45).

While many may assume that these terms do in fact carry hierarchical implications, particularly the terms ‘nesting partner’ and ‘anchor partner’, a non-hierarchical polyamorist does not see them that way. Such an implication would have to be predicated on the notion that there is something inherently more important, better, or more significant about, for example, a nesting partner as opposed to some other kind of partner: an assertion with which a non-hierarchical polyamorist would disagree.

Consider a non-hierarchical polyamorist with a nesting partner with whom they are able to cohabitate successfully and carry out the tasks required to maintain a functional household, but who considers a different partner with whom they’re in a long distance relationship to be their anchor partner, perhaps because they’ve been together longer and as such have cultivated a sense of stability from having successfully navigated many ups and downs together over the course of a longer relationship. How can one be said to be more important than the other or more worthy of a greater rank within a hierarchy? As has previously been stated, it may be possible to assign ranks or relative importance to partners or relationships on a contextual basis. For instance, if a decision is to be made about what dishware to purchase for a household, then it may intuitively seem that a nesting partner and their respective opinions and preferences should be prioritized when making that decision, but this isn’t necessarily the case. It may indeed be more important to consult the anchor partner when choosing dishes if the nesting partner has stated that they feel unskilled at interior decorating and would rather their partner handle it whereas the anchor partner is a professional interior decorator who has expressed great enthusiasm at the prospect of helping the nesting partners decorate their place. Alternatively, the nesting partner may live with multiple partners in separate domiciles, splitting their time between them as they see fit, and as a result, an agreement was made long ago that all decisions about home decor and a variety of other housing-related matters belong exclusively to the person who lives there full-time and said person believes that the anchor partner can provide better advice regarding the dishes.

As another example, consider a non-hierarchical polyamorist who has an anchor partner that is also a nesting partner in addition to having a comet partner. Many might be inclined to assume that the anchor/nesting partner is obviously more important, but with any designation of relative importance or rank, there must necessarily be a basis on which such a determination is made, and the choice of basis will always be arbitrary in some manner. Perhaps the anchor partner in this scenario has many views and ideas in common with the non-hierarchical polyamorist in question, and as such, the two partners understand each other well and are able to do a good job predicting how the other might feel or react in particular situations such that they rarely disagree or challenge each other over anything, hence there’s a high degree of stability characteristic of an anchor partnership. By contrast, perhaps the comet partner sees the world a bit differently, and as a result, confrontation and disagreement is more common in that relationship, but both partners handle such situations well when they arise and utilize effective communication skills to navigate them resulting in each learning from the other, even to the point where the non-hierarchical polyamorist feels that they grow and develop far more as a person through their interactions with their comet partner than with their anchor partner in spite of their relative

infrequency. Which relationship warrants being ranked ahead of the other and by what metric? Is a sense of stability categorically more important than personal growth such that an anchor partner deserves the title of primary? If one considers it to be a moral good to learn and grow and experience new ideas and perspectives, and if doing so brings tremendous joy and richness to one's experience of the world beyond what was previously possible, should the comet be referred to as primary? Does either deserve the power to attach attributes to the relationship of the other due to the respective attributes of their relationships or who they are as people? Again, answers to any of these questions can only be provided after choosing a basis for evaluating them, and the decision of which basis to choose is inescapably arbitrary. Consequently, a non-hierarchical polyamorist considers providing such answers in an objective sense to be impossible or attempting to provide them at all on some arbitrary basis to be pointless, instead preferring to take each situation as it comes and make whatever decision feels appropriate to them according to whatever reasoning aligns with their values and circumstances.

The issue of whether or not differences in cohabitation status, relationship length, or other significant attributes between relationships have similar effects on relationship satisfaction as hierarchical relationship paradigms has been commented on in scientific literature. One particular paper that analyzed relationship satisfaction and attachment security in polyamorous relationships with respect to hierarchical or non-hierarchical status had the following to say:

“Hierarchical status was a stronger predictor^{xxxviii} of relationship satisfaction and attachment security than any of the relationship characteristics, including relationship length, co-habitation status, and co-parenting status. Even when the relationship characteristics were added to the model, hierarchical status contributed uniquely to the outcome variables. These findings shed light on the choice to use these variables as proxies for hierarchical labels. More specifically, if one was to construct some notion of hierarchy only using variables such as relationship length, cohabitation, or co-parenting status to explain attachment and relationship satisfaction, our model shows there would still be significant aspects of the outcomes that would remain unexplained” (22).

In other words, observed differences in relationship satisfaction and attachment security between people in hierarchical polyamorous relationships and non-hierarchical polyamorous relationships could not be explained by differences in cohabitation status, coparenting status, or relationship length, indicating that differences between such attributes across relationships do not have the same effect as differences in hierarchical and non-hierarchical paradigms. Or to put it more succinctly, differences in cohabitation, coparenting status, and relationship length are not the same as a hierarchical dynamic.

While qualifying for the non-hierarchical polyamory label only requires that an individual refrain from assigning ranks to their romantic relationships, giving some partners more

^{xxxviii} The quote in questions notably doesn't mention if it was a positive or negative predictor of such things.

power than others, or categorically prioritizing some relationships or partners over others, many non-hierarchical polyamorists are also relationship anarchists, and as such, they extend this treatment to their non-romantic relationships as well. For example, a non-hierarchical polyamorous person who is also a relationship anarchist would not inherently consider a romantic relationship or a friendship to be more important than the other, or for a romantic partner or a friend to be a more important kind of person than the other. A relationship anarchist would see no need to prioritize the wishes of a romantic partner over those of a friend by default, such as in matters of scheduling or distributing their time and attention. Instead, a relationship anarchist would make whatever decision they feel is best for them based on the unique circumstances at hand, including the natures of their relationships. So long as the necessary minimums of all relationships are satisfied, including the necessary minimum required for a healthy friendship, then the dynamic is a healthy one.

This reasoning conflicts with societal expectations regarding relationships, which generally assert that romantic and sexual relationships are supposed to be prioritized. As a result, many find relationship anarchy can be a counter-intuitive concept to understand. It's entirely possible for someone who does not observe relationship hierarchies to consider friendships with people who have greatly influenced them, supported them, or enriched their lives as being every bit as valuable as romantic and sexual relationships, or perhaps to consider the two types of relationships to be valuable in their own right but ultimately incomparable in any meaningful or worthwhile sense.

Consider a relationship anarchist with a nesting partner with whom they have a healthy relationship and maintain a functional household and a close friend whom they turn to for a sense of stability or even guidance and advice when facing difficult decisions, much as would be expected with an anchor partner. As with attempting to answer questions of importance or priority with respect to the scenarios outlined above, any basis on which to do so would have to be arbitrarily decided (e.g. romantic partners are more important just because they are), and it will always be possible to articulate a scenario in which it may make more sense (again, according to some arbitrarily selected basis) to consider one relationship or person over another for a particular reason. In all cases, for the relationship anarchist, it's apples to oranges.

While non-hierarchical polyamorists do not set the same kinds of rules or boundaries for their relationships as hierarchical polyamorists, that does not mean that rules and boundaries are absent in non-hierarchical polyamorous paradigms. Clear communication, including about rules and boundaries, is key to the success and health of any kind of relationship. In setting boundaries, non-hierarchical polyamorists will avoid privileging one relationship over another, limiting the ways in which their partners are free to engage in their other relationships, or in any way effecting the way a partner may conduct themselves outside of the relationship that they are in with the polyamorist in question. Rules that grant a particular partner veto power over other relationships, prohibit engaging in certain kinds of relationships with others, or in any way dictate the terms on which other relationships can be engaged in are strictly disallowed. In general, any rules or agreements within non-hierarchical polyamorous paradigms will be maximally respectful of the values of freedom

of association and bodily autonomy and apply only to the relationship they are in with the person they are communicating the rule or boundary to.

Often times, rules that effect non-hierarchical polyamorous relationships will be individual/personal in nature and reflective of a need that a person has in any intimate relationship they may be in. For example, a non-hierarchical polyamorist may have a rule that they will not have unprotected sex with a person (including a partner) who has had unprotected sex with someone else unless that person obtains a negative STI test and has not engaged in sexual activities with anyone else since receiving it. To put it another way, a component of their healthy minimum may be that if one of their partners has sex with someone outside of the relationship, they need to say so before attempting to engage with them sexually. In this case, the rule does not restrict any relationships that the non-hierarchical polyamorist in question is not a part of, nor does it prohibit anyone in a relationship with that polyamorist from engaging in whatever activities they wish with whomever they wish, but it does constitute a rule or restriction that must be respected in order for the relationship to be healthy. Furthermore, maintaining such a rule is an exercise of the non-hierarchical polyamorist's own bodily autonomy and can even be said to be in the interest of maximizing that autonomy given that in order to provide truly informed consent to sexual activities with any of their partners, they may require information about their partners' sexual activities for the sake of being able to more accurately evaluate the risk that sex might have to their own health and welfare.

While the categories outlined above explain how various polyamorists go about managing and thinking about their partnerships in a very broad sense, the dynamics of polyamory extend well beyond them, and polyamorous relationship paradigms can be discussed in a variety of more specific and nuanced ways. The dynamics of polyamory also go beyond partner relationships themselves. To see how, it will be helpful for further discussion to introduce some additional vocabulary:

Solo polyamory: *A way of engaging with polyamory wherein one maintains something resembling a single or independent lifestyle (63). This is almost always construed as meaning that a solo polyamorist lives without any nesting partners, but it may include other conditions as well, such as declining to engage in shared financial or legal arrangements. Solo polyamory may be done for any number of reasons such as not wanting to deal with the level of compromise that shared arrangements may require or if a non-hierarchical polyamorist wishes to avoid having nesting partners or shared finances due to the level of difference such arrangements may create between their various relationships (even though such differences do not conflict with the non-hierarchical label, particularly given the equal potential condition implied by the definition non-hierarchical polyamory^{xxxix}) (45).*

^{xxxix} Such a condition is relevant to point out because even if, for example, a non-hierarchical polyamorist already has a nesting partner, other partners who are not currently nesting partners may become nesting partners as well in a variety of ways. Additional partners may come to live in the same space, provided the original nesting partner is also okay with it (which does not constitute having power over an outside relationship, rather it's an exercise of autonomy in managing one's own associations and living arrangements) or if the polyamorist in question decides to split their time between multiple separate domiciles each with a

Metamour: “...term for a person who’s the partner of your partner” (43). The set of all such people relative to a particular polyamorist consists of all of the partners of their partners (except for that polyamorist themselves). For example, if someone has a girlfriend and that girlfriend has a boyfriend, then that someone and the boyfriend are each others’ metamours. In addition to vocabulary to refer to the nature of one’s immediate partnerships, the polyamorous lexicon contains many terms to describe the nature of interactions with metamours. It’s important to communicate about metamour dynamics with partners and ensure that expectations and boundaries around such interactions are clear and healthy. Metamours are not required to have any particular kind of relationship with each other, although some metamours may become friends, engage in sexual interactions, be indifferent to one another, or even dislike each other. Metamours may even become partners should they wish to do so. The nature of the dynamic will vary between any given pair of metamours.

Polycule: The definition of a polycule is vague and varies from one polyamorous person to another as well as from polycule to polycule. A broad definition that encompasses a significant range of what a polycule might be considered to be is the following: “an umbrella term which describes a connected network of people and relationships, all of who are in some way involved emotionally, sexually, or romantically with at least one other person within the polycule” (44). In common usage, the scope tends to be narrower, often referring to the immediate romantic associations of a single polyamorous person or set of polyamorous people who are romantically or sexually engaged with one another, although the term is far more commonly used to describe romantic associations. Being in a purely sexual relationship with someone in a polycule is much less likely to be considered as qualifying someone as being in that polycule. The word ‘polycule’ is an umbrella term because it applies to a wide variety of relationship configurations. It can describe a set of three people wherein two of them are partnered to the third, a set of four people each of whom is partnered to the other three, a set of four people wherein the first is partnered to the second, the second to the third, and the third to the fourth, as well as an infinite number of other configurations. Variations in the usage of the word ‘polycule’ often revolve around how far out the chain of metamours considered to be a part of the polycule extends. While ‘polycule’ often refers to a particular polyamorist and their immediate partners, it can also include the partners of those partners (the metamours of the original polyamorist), and even the partners of those partners as well. The meaning is usually clear from the context.

Mono-poly relationship: “...a poly relationship where there is someone who is monogamous and someone who is polyamorous” (31). Such relationships are not uncommon within the poly community, and they may occur for any number of reasons. Perhaps a monogamous person falls in love with a polyamorous person and feels that their healthy minimum is satisfied in that relationship regardless of their partner’s polyamory, even if that person has additional partners or is actively pursuing them. Such a dynamic can also develop if two people in a monogamous relationship discuss polyamory and one of them is interested in pursuing multiple romantic relationships and the other is aware and okay with this (recall that polyamory requires the consent and knowledge of all involved; if this is not the case, then the dynamic in question would just be cheating in the context of a monogamous relationship) and continues to feel that their healthy

different partner or set of partners. Similar reasoning may be applied to legal arrangements, financial arrangements, and a variety of other circumstances.

minimum is satisfied in the relationship. While a monogamous person in such a dynamic is still monogamous, they can properly be referred to as being in a polycule or as the metamour of any of their partner's partners.

Parallel polyamory: *A dynamic wherein metamours don't interact with each other very much or at all (43), hence one relationship is 'parallel' to the other on account of the fact that the two do not intersect. This may be incidental, perhaps because a person has a partner they live close to and see regularly in addition to a long-distance partner and the two partners never meet or talk online, but it may also be deliberate such as if its the preferred dynamic for a particular polycule.*

Kitchen table polyamory: *A dynamic wherein metamours are comfortable spending time together and sharing space together, such as by sitting down and enjoying a meal with each other at a kitchen table (43). The definition is intentionally vague and the degree of closeness between metamours or the degree to which they must share space and time together in order for the dynamic to qualify as kitchen table polyamory is arbitrary. The term is useful for indicating that one is open to spending time with or getting to know their metamours. For example, if a particular polyamorist tells one of their partners that they are open to kitchen table polyamory, then regardless of whether the dynamic proceeds to reflect kitchen table polyamory according to some particular conception of the term, the partner in question now has an understanding that they can introduce the polyamorist to their other partners.*

Polysaturated: *A term that is used to describe polyamorists who "...have as many relationships as they can handle..." (57). The term is most commonly used to refer to someone who lacks either the time or the emotional bandwidth for an additional partner, although any other reason for not being able to handle an additional partner, such as a lack of material resources with which to go on more dates, may apply as well. There is no specific number of partners at which a particular polyamorist becomes polysaturated, and the number of healthy partnerships one is able to simultaneously maintain can vary over time or with changing circumstances. For example, a polyamorist might have a larger number of more casual romantic partnerships each of which demands relatively little time and attention, or that same polyamorist may have a lesser number of more demanding relationships each of which entails significant commitments.*

These terms are by no means exhaustive, and other vocabulary for describing particular styles of polyamory, metamour dynamics, or types of relationships exist. The primary purpose in presenting these terms, aside from being able to use them throughout the rest of this article, is to show the degree to which the polyamorous community is about more than immediate relationships and is in fact its own form of culture with different ideas, values, words, customs, social scripts, and expectations regarding a wide variety of interactions that many outside the community may never even have considered. Those forms of interaction, such as interactions between one polycule and another or between metamours (often shortened to 'metas' in much the same manner that 'polyamory' is often shortened to 'poly^{XL}'), are every bit as much a part of the polyamorous community and its culture as polyamorous partnerships themselves. While life in the polyamorous community may

^{XL} Even though the term 'poly' is used frequently in day-to-day speech by polyamorous and non-polyamorous people to reference polyamory, it is not used in this article so as to avoid any ambiguity between terms like 'polygamy', 'polygyny', 'polyandry', and 'polyamory'.

involve significant cultural differences and a wide variety of unique considerations, there are a few things that all people, polyamorous, monogamous, or otherwise, have in common....

Jealousy: One Problem, Multiple Approaches

Before getting into this section, it should be emphasized that the only inherently problematic relationship is an unhealthy relationship. It should also be said that statistics mean nothing to the individual, meaning that just because the behaviors or attributes of a group trend in a certain direction, or certain effects related to the group are detected on a population level, such a thing by no means indicates that a particular individual or set of individuals from that group will follow the trend. When encountering data or evidence that, on first glance, appears to lend itself naturally to a certain interpretation, it often helps to pause for a moment and think of as many plausible stories or ideas as possible that could potentially explain why the data or evidence looks the way it does. While no story produced this way will necessarily be an accurate explanation for such evidence and discerning whether or not a particular story is accurate may not even be possible, in the act of producing multiple plausible stories, something important becomes obvious: that multiple plausible explanations exist and therefore no certain conclusions can be drawn. Furthermore, each story or explanation produced this way may serve as a new avenue for inquiry that has the potential to produce worthwhile incites.

Regardless, one should at all times remember: healthy, loving, and fulfilling relationships of all kinds can and do exist, both monogamous and non-monogamous. Examples of both abound and are easily seen if people have a willingness to see them. No particular individual, relationship, or relationship paradigm should ever be categorically condemned on the basis of statistics or trends alone, and as a matter of respect, good faith, and rational curiosity, one should keep an open mind, particularly to the possibility of any goodness, love, and health that may potentially exist in such things. Bare this in mind when proceeding....

It seems to be common for people outside of the polyamorous community to wonder about how jealousy plays into polyamorous relationships. As one author writes:

“Do you resent your partner’s partner?’ ‘Don’t you feel insecure if your partner is with another partner or lover?’ When I tell monogamous people that I’m polyamorous, one of the first questions they ask is – unsurprisingly – about jealousy. Do I feel jealous? How do I deal? What if my partner feels jealous” (19)?

While many questions that monogamous people may have about jealousy in polyamorous relationships are perfectly innocent, such as how polyamorous people go about coping with jealousy when they experience it in the course of their relationships, other questions are

indicative of troubling myths about polyamory, monogamy, and their relationship to the concept of jealousy itself. In particular, when people wonder if polyamorous people even feel jealousy in the first place, it can feel dehumanizing on account of the fact that jealousy is a human emotion that anyone can experience, and polyamorous people are human too. However, when considered alongside the fact that a significant number of people see jealousy as a sign of love, or even as proof of it, the question can seem to carry the implication that polyamorous people feel less love for their partners and therefore experience less jealousy. The following quote does a good job summarizing this myth: “In monogamous society, jealousy is often cast as evidence of true love. If you didn’t love that person, you wouldn’t be so jealous of other people around them, right” (56)? Naturally, the ability to experience jealousy is something that unites people who participate in all forms of relationship paradigms.

Even the reasons why monogamous and polyamorous people experience jealousy in relationships are similar. In particular, partners spending time with other people, even in a non-romantic way, would seem to be a significant jealousy trigger for both groups:

“In monogamous relationships... jealousy can creep in when one experiences insecurity in the relationship during day-to-day occurrences... An example might be when one’s partner is spending a lot of time with someone outside the relationship—perhaps a friend, co-worker, ex-partner, or one’s own child—or an activity, such as work, hobbies, clubs, or volunteer work. In these cases, the primary fear is related to losing one’s partner to this outside interest and feeling less significant” (12).

“In polyamorous relationships, jealousy can be triggered by various factors such as fear of losing a partner to someone else, feeling left out, or comparing oneself to other partners... In my polyamorous relationships, I have found that my personal triggers for jealous feelings often stem from a fear of abandonment or not feeling valued. Specific situations or behaviors that have led to these feelings include my partner spending more time with another partner, showing affection to someone else in front of me, or expressing interest in someone new” (34).

While the existence of jealous feelings and the reasons behind them may be similar for both polyamorous and monogamous people, the differences between the groups with regards to how they each handle their feelings of jealousy are vast, as are the differences in the ways that each group tends to think about jealousy^{XLI} (25).

For monogamous people, their chosen relationship paradigm is often seen as a way to prevent or avoid jealousy. In an article for Time Magazine, a couples therapist speaking on the matter said that, “...she’s observed monogamous couples avoid addressing jealousy

^{XLI} “Depending on the type of relationship structure the participants practiced, they held different norms and beliefs concerning jealousy. These norms and beliefs set the stage for the meaning participants made of their jealous experiences” (25).

altogether” (11), which would seem to substantiate the notion that avoidance of jealousy is important in monogamous dynamics. An academic paper investigating the perceived benefits of monogamy also seems to support this notion. The investigators who published the paper had the following to say:

“Our four studies on perceptions of monogamy demonstrated that a major perceived benefit of monogamy is the avoidance of jealousy. That is, participants frequently mentioned that “no jealousy issues,” “prevents jealousy,” and “no jealousy/competition” were benefits of monogamy (Conley, Moors, et al., 2012a, 2012b)” (10).

Intuitively, this makes sense. If the most common trigger of jealousy is a partner spending time with other people, and the underlying fear is of losing that partner as a result of them preferring to be with someone else, then a relationship paradigm wherein each partner, as a component of their healthy minimum, requires that the other be precluded from engaging in romantic or sexual relationships aside from the one they share with each other would seem to minimize the opportunities for jealousy to occur. But does this approach work?

Naturally, regardless of attempts to avoid jealousy, it inevitably occurs, and monogamous people acknowledge this^{XLII}, (25, 10). Regardless, so long as jealousy is minimized within monogamous relationship paradigms, either in terms of the frequency with which it is experienced or the intensity with which it is experienced, then the monogamous strategy can be said to be effective in some sense. A separate study investigating a variety of measures of both monogamous and polyamorous relationships, including relationship satisfaction and jealousy, provides some incite.

The study in question measured jealousy in two ways. The first measure was selected to assess the magnitude of jealous feelings and utilized something called the ‘Anticipated Sexual Jealousy Scale’, a survey containing questions about how strongly, on a scale from one to nine, a person would react to their partner engaging in a variety of different sexual activities with someone else. The second measure was selected to assess the frequency of jealous behaviors via the ‘Behavioral Jealousy subscale of the Multidimensional Jealousy Scale’, which listed a variety of jealous behaviors, such as how often an individual questioned their partner about their phone calls, and asked them to respond via a scale from one to seven. The investigators then analyzed the data using appropriate statistical methods to determine the significance of any observed differences between the responses of four groups: monogamists, swingers, people in open relationships, and polyamorists. The results were then tabulated showing the scores of each group on each measure, the sample sizes associated with those measures, the probability that the differences observed between groups were due to chance, and an indicator of how significant in magnitude such

^{XLII} “There was universal agreement among participants that jealousy is a normal part of the human experience, albeit a challenging one” (25). “The baseline pervasiveness of jealousy in monogamous relationships reveals that monogamy does not entirely prevent the emotion of jealousy (as was commonly assumed by participants; Conley, Moors, et al., 2012a)” (10).

differences were. In addition to the four groups mentioned, the researchers also examined the results of the monogamous group versus the combined results of all of the non-monogamous groups, a category referred to as CNM, an abbreviation for ‘Consensual Non-Monogamy’ (as previously stated, this term is synonymous with ethical non-monogamy). In the paper’s own words:

“...the wider societal presumption has been that monogamy prevents or inhibits jealousy (as expressed by participants in Conley, Moors, et al., 2013). Likewise, relationship counselors may assume that CNM relationships are infeasible because of jealousy (see Moors & Schechinger, 2014; Perel, 2006). Contradicting these perceptions, monogamous individuals scored substantially higher on anticipated jealousy (and this was a very large effect). The fact that individuals engaged in CNM scored lower on this measure of jealousy suggests that for those who choose CNM relationships, jealousy can be controlled and managed at least as effectively as it is in monogamous relationships (e.g., Ritchie & Barker, 2006; Sheff, 2014; Visser & McDonald, 2007). The second measure of jealousy focused on jealous behaviors, such as those represented by such items as ‘I look through my partner’s drawers, bags, and/or pockets.’ The means on this measure were quite low, suggesting that neither CNM nor monogamous people engaged in these behaviors frequently, but monogamous individuals did report more jealous behaviors than CNM individuals” (9).

However, this article is not about ethical non-monogamy more broadly, but rather about polyamory in particular. It’s possible that swingers and people in open relationships, paradigms featuring a core couple that only engages in sexual relationships outside of their partnership with no romantic attachments being formed, account for the differences between the CNM group and the monogamous group. Regardless, given that the core of polyamory is the freedom to engage in multiple romantic relationships simultaneously, the ways in which such a paradigm effects experiences of jealousy may well differ in significant ways from any of the other paradigms. The findings in the paper seem to substantiate this. With regards to swingers, the authors state that they, “...largely reported similar relationship outcomes to those in monogamous relationships. Swingers reported significantly fewer jealous cognitions than monogamous individuals.” With regards to those in open relationships the authors state, “people in open relationships generally reported somewhat poorer relational functioning than monogamous individuals,” but they also state that, “They reported fewer jealous cognitions than monogamous people and also scored marginally lower on the index of behavioral jealousy than monogamous individuals” (9). For polyamory, the situation was quite different:

“Overall, polyamorous people reported more positive outcomes than monogamous people on measures of relationship adjustment. Compared with monogamous people, polyamorous people were significantly more satisfied, more committed, and more trusting of their partners. They also had lower levels of jealous cognitions and behaviors than did their monogamous counterparts.

Passionate love was also higher among polyamorous individuals than monogamous individuals” (9).

While this paints a clear picture as to the direction in which polyamorous and monogamous results differed, it doesn't quite capture the significance of the difference. The numerical data demonstrates this better.

There are many forms of statistical analyses that are utilized to make sense of data and whether or not certain results are significant. The two that are of greatest consequence in this case are p values, and d values. A p value is a measure of statistical significance, and it represents the probability that an observed difference between two groups was due to pure chance. In order for a difference to be considered statistically significant, p must be less than 0.05 indicating a less than 5% chance of the effect occurring coincidentally (4). Typically, observed effects are more likely to be statistically significant when using large sample sizes, as in the study, regardless of the magnitude of such an effect. On the other hand, a d value is a measure of practical significance, which is concerned with determining whether or not the magnitude of the observed difference is large enough to matter with a d value of 0.2 being considered a small effect, a value of 0.5 a medium effect, and a value of 0.8 a large effect (5). The d value says nothing about the probability that the observed effect is due to chance, so for low sample sizes in particular, large magnitudes of effect may be more likely to be observed, albeit without the odds that such effects were caused by something other than chance reaching the level of statistical significance. Combined, the p and d values provide a more comprehensive picture of whether or not a difference is coincidental and if that difference is even large enough to matter.

The polyamorous group was the only group for which differences in all outcomes compared to the monogamous group were statistically significant. Additionally, the degrees to which the effects associated with all measures were statistically significant was greater than for any other group. While $p < 0.05$ constitutes statistical significance, with respect to the difference in the scores used to represent the magnitude of jealous feelings for the monogamous and polyamorous groups, the statistical significance of the effect was such that $p < 7.2 \times 10^{-12}$. This had to be calculated manually from the values provided in the table as the column in which the p value was reported did not have enough digits to represent this value (this was true for all but one measure, which was still statistically significant). Part of this is due to the robust sample size used for comparing the polyamorous and monogamous measures, with each comparison being based on over 314 degrees of freedom (akin to samples or data points) on the low end and up to 670 degrees of freedom on the high end. The practical significance is similarly massive, with a d score of 3.56 being reported for the same measure, which corresponds to the magnitude of the difference in scores observed being 3.56 pooled standard deviations over the mean, a value significantly higher than the 0.8 required to qualify as large (9).

The difference with respect to the measure representing the frequency of jealous behaviors between the two groups, though not as striking, was still significant with the p value

likewise requiring too many zeroes after the decimal point to be represented in the table and a *d* value of 0.68 constituting a medium practical significance (5).

In commenting on the study to Time Magazine, one of the investigators had this to say: “People in monogamous relationships were really off the charts high on jealousy. They were more likely to check their partners’ phones, go through their emails, their handbags,’ Moors says. ‘But people in consensual non-monogamous relationships were really low on this’” (11).

The reasons for such stark differences existing between the two groups are less clear, and the study mentions several possibilities. With respect to the differences observed on the measure of jealous feelings, one suggestion was that this outcome should be expected given that people in ethically non-monogamous relationships opt for those relationship styles knowing what they entail, and therefore would be less inclined to be the kinds of people who feel intense jealousy at the thought of a partner being romantically or sexually involved with another person. However, immediately after this observation, the study states: “the finding is still consequential; the wider societal presumption has been that monogamy prevents or inhibits jealousy (as expressed by participants in Conley, Moors, et al., 2013)” (9).

Another theory proposed was that because people in ethically non-monogamous relationship dynamics experience their partners spending time with others in intimate ways more and more, they acquire confidence that such experiences will not disrupt their relationships. One paper that considered the idea said the following:

“...when individuals acquire greater experience with a partner expressing or engaging in extradyadic^{XLIII} relations, and especially when the outcome was positive, individuals may adjust their appraisals of future reactions accounting for their past experience and rendering their future anticipated responses to be more nuanced, including less negative reactions, and more positive ones. This may be especially true if the experience brought about positive changes in the relationship. So, for example, if an individual had prior experiences with a partner expressing extradyadic interests, but the couple is still together, we might assume that the couple successfully navigated and worked through their partner’s engagement or interest in extradyadic relations, and doing this may have brought the couple closer together and reaffirmed the relationship security. The only interaction between relationship type and personal experience that was evident was for positive affective reactions, such that the positive impact of personal experience was evident for both monogamous and polyamorous participants, but even more so for monogamous participants” (3).

^{XLIII} The term ‘extradyadic’ refers to something that exists outside of a dyadic relationship, meaning a partnership between two people, and ‘extradyadic relations’ refers to relations that occur outside of a particular partnership.

While the paper goes on to clarify that monogamous individuals likely experienced greater increases in the degree to which they expected to react positively to a partner's engagements with people outside of their relationship as a result of having very low outlooks on such a thing in the first place whereas polyamorous people tended to already have very positive outlooks on it, the principle remains unchanged. Regardless of relationship configuration, experiencing a partner engaging in relations outside of one's relationship with them and seeing everything turn out fine was associated with people anticipating a more positive emotional response from themselves should similar events play out in the future. As the authors go on to say, "This is important because nearly all of the research on jealousy and people's reactions to partner's extradyadic relations has assumed that responses almost exclusively involve jealousy and other negatively valenced emotions, and that experiences of jealousy are immutable (Mint, 2004; Stohlman-Vanderveen, 2019; Tucker, 2013)" (3).

On the other hand, people in monogamous relationships may not get this experience and levels of jealousy for them won't decrease over time as a result and they will continue to view other partnerships as threats. In assessing the potential validity of this logic, the paper states, "we would expect a relatively stable pattern of jealousy in monogamous relationships, consistent with research that jealousy remains a source of conflict and stress among middle-aged couples and older partners (Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993)" (9).

Regardless of the causes, the fact remains: studies, including many more than the ones cited above, have observed that there are substantially more jealous feelings and jealous behaviors in monogamous relationships as opposed to polyamorous relationships or ethically non-monogamous relationships more broadly. As stated in a separate paper dating to 2012: "Although only a few studies have examined jealousy in CNM relationships, their results indicate that jealousy is more manageable in these relationships than in monogamous relationships (Bringle & Buunk, 1991; de Visser & McDonald, 2007) and is experienced less noxiously (Ritchie & Barker, 2006)... research has shown that levels of jealousy were actually lower for those in CNM relationships than in a monogamous sample (Jenks, 1985; Pines & Aronson, 1981, as cited in Pines & Aronson, 1983)" (10). Furthermore, the paper states that these differences may be due to the ways in which ethically non-monogamous people go about conceiving of and managing jealousy, noting again how the apparent ability of ethically non-monogamous people to manage jealousy as opposed to falling victim to it flies in the face of the expectations of mainstream society^{XLIV} (10).

So what are these means by which ethically non-monogamous people manage jealousy? How do they differ from monogamous strategies in thought and practice? If the monogamous strategy can be said to be about avoiding jealousy, then the polyamorous

^{XLIV} "...the fact that jealousy was managed by individuals in CNM relationships, rather than overwhelming them, is inconsistent with presumptions about monogamy conveyed by participants in our research (Conley, Moors, et al., 2012a)" (10).

strategy can be said to be about accepting it^{XLV} (56). After all, if some amount of jealousy in relationships is unavoidable, why try to avoid it altogether? Instead, emphasis is placed on mitigating and managing it. To some degree, hierarchical polyamory may involve rules that restrict the actions of partners when engaging in relationships with others, similar to how monogamy does, but in order to still qualify as polyamory, these restrictions must remain permissive of those partners forming additional romantic attachments, so even in the hierarchical case, jealousy isn't even avoidable in theory (and if it were, it would still encounter the same issue as monogamy in practice). Ultimately, jealousy has to be confronted at some point.

Approaches to handling jealousy are unique, both with respect to individuals, the particular relationships in which they are experiencing jealousy, and the nature of their support systems. Regardless, polyamorous approaches to handling jealousy are multi-pronged and utilize a variety of different tactics. In general, these tactics constitute "...a different set of tools – one that focuses on self-soothing, making choices about what kind of narrative you tell yourself, and working collaboratively with your partner to check in and challenge negative assumptions" (33).

Since jealousy usually isn't a problem until it's being experienced, at which point, it may already be quite painful, the first tools used tend to be self-soothing techniques, and the first of these used tends to be simply accepting that jealousy is being experienced and not judging oneself harshly for it (or at least trying not to; practice in this matter may be necessary for success). Jealousy is in no way a form of failure or a character flaw, nor does experiencing it make someone a 'jealous person', it only makes them a person who is experiencing jealousy, and that's very different^{XLVI} (33). It's an emotion, and emotions are not voluntary. "Emotions come. That's okay. You can't stop them by fighting them. Feeling jealousy does not mean there's something wrong with you, your relationship, or your partner^{XLVII}. It's just that an emotion is arising, and that's okay" (33). In this way, emotions are akin to the weather: Sometimes it rains, but it's not anyone's fault that it does so, and

^{XLV} "My best advice about jealousy to anyone in an open relationship is: expect it, accept it, and learn to manage it without murder or mayhem" (56).

^{XLVI} "Jealousy is not an identity. You may feel jealous, but that doesn't make you a jealous person. It's an important distinction. If you say 'I am a jealous person,' you may find it hard to think about letting go of jealousy; it feels like letting go of something that makes you who you are. On the other hand, if you say 'I am a person who sometimes feels jealous,' that gives space to your other emotions. 'I am a person who sometimes feels jealous, and sometimes feels happy, and sometimes feels sad, excited, afraid, angry or confused.' Such a statement reinforces to yourself that jealousy is not who you are" (33).

^{XLVII} It's particularly important to be mindful of the fact that partners are not at fault for jealous feelings when they arise, barring exceptional (and likely unhealthy) circumstances. It's up to everyone to process and manage their own emotions, but a good partner will care about those emotions and the person experiencing them and want to do what they can to help, within reason, particularly if assisting a partner who is struggling is something that pleases them. This is not the same as such a partner having any particular obligation to do so, especially not to the extent that they are responsible for such emotions, but whether or not such a partner takes the time to communicate in a healthy way regarding the situation and takes reasonable measures to provide reassurance or support even in the absence of such an obligation may be an indicator of their worthiness as a partner. From an interview contained in a study: "Madeline described how the absence of reassurance caused significant distress leading to a breakup, stating, "I have a lot of close, platonic friends too. The difference here is that, um, like he wasn't able to reassure me, you know, that we were okay" (25)

attempting to stop the rain from falling is as futile as ordering a rising tide to recede back into the sea. Instead, one should take stock of the rain and wear a jacket, and if no jacket is available, then efforts should be made to acquire one before it rains again, as someday it inevitably will.

The next step, maybe after some more self-soothing^{XLVIII} or even stepping back and taking some time to oneself to calm down, is to examine the jealousy and what's causing it. The surface-level cause may appear to be a physical inciting incident, such as a partner leaving to go on a date with someone else, although it's necessary to dig deeper than that. All emotions come from within, and ultimately, the cause of the jealousy resides within as well. The goal is to identify the thoughts and ideas that trigger the jealousy and occur along with the feeling so that they can be addressed. An example of this process is the following:

“When you feel jealous, think deeply about the feelings and actions you associate with it. Does jealousy cause you to feel angry, miserable, teary, or insecure? Maybe jealousy causes you to feel vengeful or irritable. Take note of when you feel these feelings. From there, you can consider what triggers those feelings. This will help you realize where it stems from. Personally, jealousy makes me feel angry, and I become very passive-aggressive. I noted that when I was jealous, it felt like I had a lump in my throat and like I was on the verge of tears. I had these exact same sensations when I felt like I had failed, especially in terms of my academics or career. Realizing this helped me acknowledge that I’m particularly jealous when my partner is interested in someone who’s more successful than I am, because I equate my success to my worth” (19).

In the passage above, the author identifies the root of her jealousy as being insecurities tied to a particular idea of success along with unfavorable comparisons that she was making along those lines between herself and people her partner took an interest in. Armed with this information, the author was then able to proceed to the next step. This is where help from a partner and clear, open, honest, and frankly vulnerable (maybe even uncomfortably vulnerable) communication is necessary (19).

As the author proceeds to note: “Negative feelings usually arise from a need. When we’re jealous, we usually need attention and affirmation” (19). Often, it can be helpful to think about what needs one has that are unsatisfied or under threat, either with respect to the relationship with one’s partner or with respect to anything else. In the author’s case, maybe feelings of inadequacy regarding her perceptions of her career and achievements were causing her to wonder what her partner could possibly see in her and these feelings of insecurity left her vulnerable to jealousy. In that case, maybe communicating with a partner^{XLIX} about the kind of insecurity that’s being experienced and seeking affirmation

^{XLVIII} “Self-regulating activities were utilized by all participants, in a variety of forms. Mandy, like several others, relied on somatic tools.... Other participants, like Cameron, approached their self-regulation through self-inquiry” (25).

^{XLIX} “While monogamous participants of course engaged in communication with their partners, there was a more pronounced emphasis on explicit communication about jealousy among the CNM group.... Claire made

and reassurance^L would be helpful (25). Perhaps in response, a partner could talk about how the achievements that one is insecure over are actually impressive and something to be proud of, maybe even something they find attractive! It could also be that hearing a partner profess their love and expound upon some of the beautiful and endearing things they see and think and feel that make them just as enthusiastic about the relationship now as they've always been could prove reassuring and serve to illustrate that one is in no danger of losing them. This might have the effect of helping to alleviate feelings of danger and threat to one's needs and soothe (at least somewhat) feelings of jealousy in the process.

It's important to distinguish between one's own emotional turmoil that needs to be dealt with independently^{LI} in some manner, such as dissatisfaction with one's own choices or achievements, and any unsatisfied components of one's healthy minimum that it may well be on a partner to provide, such as sufficient quality time and attention if those things have been genuinely lacking. While partners can help in both cases^{LII}, they aren't therapists; communicating^{LIII} about and respecting boundaries pertaining to emotional labor and support is an important part of building a healthy and sustainable relationship for all parties involved, no matter the paradigm, and no one can accomplish reflection and growth for someone else. Whatever else may be going on, knowing that one is seen, loved, cared about, and responded to can go a long way towards making jealousy more manageable, threats less imposing, and communication more approachable, and partners can help with this. The more one shows vulnerability and is responded to with kindness, the easier it gets to do the same in the future until eventually it doesn't feel as difficult as it used to.

Furthermore, if healthy communication takes place and all goes well, the next time one feels threatened or anxious about whether or not their partner still finds them attractive, or is interested in them, or whatever the trigger may be, there will be memories of how that partner cared enough to listen and comfort and reassure, and above all else, to love; not just in the sense that they continued to experience love-the-noun as a feeling while witnessing their partner during a low, but in the sense that they demonstrated love-the-

it a regular practice, stating, 'I've had multiple processing conversations about jealousy with multiple partners including my spouse, because it's one of the things that comes up... that we discuss openly'" (25).

^L "The use of reassurance as a strategy to minimize jealousy-related discomfort also varied between groups. The monogamous participants tended to report reliance on their partner to self-monitor for behaviors that might inspire jealousy, while CNM participants reported asking for reassurance directly from their partner when they experienced challenging feelings like jealousy, which provided opportunities to apply relational tools as the feelings arise" (25).

^{LI} "Though jealousy exists within a social context, and thus could be easily understood to be a problem that must be solved by those one is in a relationship with, CNM participants universally acknowledged that responsibility for recognizing and managing jealousy belongs first to the individual experiencing jealousy. Cameron put it simply: 'Usually, jealousy is a me thing'" (25).

^{LII} "CNM participants reported specific commitments to ongoing, intentional jealousy processing both on their own and with their partners. Several mentioned seeing jealousy as an opportunity for self-work, albeit one they did not relish, that eventually resulted in an increased sense of capability in their emotional self-regulation" (25).

^{LIII} "Cora commented on her eventual acceptance that jealousy, and other big feelings, required her to do both the inner recognition work and the communication work.... She noted that this process had taken between ten and twenty years of effortful self-work" (25).

verb, through some obvious and unmistakable act of loving^{LIV}. Those memories can be useful in confronting painful thoughts or doubts based on insecurities or cognitive distortions that call into question the security of the relationship, and they can serve as the inspiration that enables one to write a different story, one more suited to the facts at hand than whatever the unhinged voice of jealousy may whisper, or scream, into the recesses of one's mind^{LV} (34).

While jealous narratives can feel hard to refute in the moment, or like refuting them does nothing to change the feeling, memories of one's partner being plainly supportive and caring can help to challenge false assumptions that jealous narratives may contain. Should that not be enough, it's always possible to check the assumptions in those narratives with one's partner:

"If part of your story revolves around something that you fear your partner might be thinking, you can check that assumption with your partner. You might learn that their perception of the situation is completely different from what you've been fearing.... Of course, when you check an assumption with someone, you have to be open to hearing their perspective.... Ask more questions if you aren't sure what they are telling you.... Usually, checking assumptions results in an understanding that is at least a little bit more positive than the original scary thought. Ideally, you can then use this new information as a tool to debunk similar scary stories you might tell yourself the next time the situation arises" (34).

Transforming or replacing unhelpful or misguided narratives is difficult, like any new skill, and like any new skill, it can be practiced and developed until one becomes proficient in its use. Regardless, with enough practice, it can become indispensable in the managing of jealousy.

Finally, there's one more tool that can help polyamorous people address jealousy, and like all the other tools polyamorous people use, monogamous people can learn to use it too if they like, although perhaps the thing itself is more of a feeling than a tool, but it can certainly be both. It's possibly one of the most important and intriguing ideas of the polyamorous community, brimming with potential to transform the way relationships are experienced, conceived of, and participated in if one is patient and willing to put in the effort that may be required to experience it, although in some sort of way, most people almost certainly already have. It's called...

Compersion: *A good example of a more general definition is, "compersion is about deriving joy from seeing another person's joy. It's about empathizing with their happiness. If you've ever been happy for someone else, you've experienced something like compersion" (20). Others focus on*

^{LIV} "Love love is a verb, love is a doing word..." Teardrop by Massive Attack (38).

^{LV} "I'd like to encourage you to start to be aware of the stories that you tell yourself that affect your emotional experience. Are you telling yourself a story that helps you feel better, or one that makes you feel worse? This is the key: You get to choose the story that you continue to tell" (34).

compersion as being specifically connected to partners, such as this one which defines compersion as, “a term coined within the polyamorous and consensually non-monogamous community used to describe positive feelings due to a partner’s happiness about another partner” (48). This definition likewise emphasizes the role of partners: “Compersion is the positive emotion one feels when one sees their partner involved with another person” (20). Some definitions try to explain what compersion is at least partly in terms of jealousy, such as the following: “Compersion, the range of positive emotions that may be felt in response to seeing another person experiencing joy... can be understood as an antonym of jealousy, it is also common to feel compersive and jealous simultaneously (Thouin-Savard & Flicker, 2023)” (25). However, at least one paper in dealing with topics relating to compersion, polyamory, and emotional response cautions against viewing it that way: “. . .some have argued that compersion is the opposite of jealousy, research suggests that compersion and jealousy may not be opposing constructs, despite being treated this way in both theoretical and empirical research” (3). Whatever compersion is, it’s complicated, but the essence of it is clear: positive emotion experienced in response to the positive emotion of someone else.

While most people have certainly experienced something fitting that description, which is to say, positive emotion in response to the positive emotion of another, looking at the definitions provided reveals a far more nuanced, contradictory, and interesting picture.

One definition refers to compersion as ‘joy’ from seeing the joy of another, while another refers to it as ‘positive feelings’, another as a ‘positive emotion’, or another as a ‘range of positive emotions’ and ‘an antonym of jealousy’ although something that can be experienced at the same time as jealousy, while others within the field of study caution against thinking of it as an antonym to jealousy at all. In short, it could be joy, it could be ‘positive feelings’, perhaps even a whole range of such feelings that can be felt alongside jealousy, or, most interesting of all, it could be an entire emotion unto itself: something unique, distinct in some way from all other emotions.

For many in the polyamorous community and the ethically non-monogamous community more broadly, the ultimate technique for dealing with jealousy is to change one’s perspective^{LVI} (15) such that rather than fearing that a partner will be ‘stolen away’ by someone showing them a wonderful time, they can delight in their happiness^{LVII} (18). Polyamorists often strive to learn^{LVIII} to love that their partners are loved, no matter where that love comes from, and to use the feelings of compersion^{LIX} that flow from that love to temper any natural and understandable feelings of jealousy that may spring up alongside

^{LVI} “Through the development of a polyamorous philosophy and subculture, polyamorists rethink feeling rules about love, relationships and jealousy with the goal of attaining compersion” (15).

^{LVII} “Feelings of envy, anger, hatred, anxiety or sadness are replaced by feelings of shared joy, curiosity, zest and composure. (Rüther, 2005)” (18)

^{LVIII} “Four of the five CNM participants mentioned having personal affective experience of compersion during their descriptions of jealousy, and three noted that compersion took some conscious cultivation on their part. Cora said, “It’s been a learned skill. It’s, it’s been, over the years as I’ve become more secure, I’ve been more able to experience compersion”. This aligns with research by Thouin-Savard (2021) which described compersion as both attitudinal, that is, fostered through intentional thoughts and actions, and embodied, which may be experienced as spontaneous emotional affect” (25).

^{LIX} “. . .although people in polyamorous relationships do at times experience jealousy (Deri, 2015; Visser & McDonald, 2007), they also report experiencing compersion (Ritchie & Barker, 2006)” (3).

them. Neither compersion or jealousy contradicts the other, but together, they can create new and powerful experiences, usually very uplifting, maybe even euphoric^{LX} (18), almost certainly not unpleasant, but definitely complex, and perhaps not unambiguously pleasant either, but how many things, if any, are? Unambiguously pleasant or not, it can feel wonderful, much better than feeling jealousy alone, and even if one's purpose in cultivating a sense of compersion is primarily as a way to cope with jealousy, then it's worth pointing out that few coping mechanisms come with uplifting and potentially novel forms of emotion built-in. For that matter, how many coping mechanisms are even remotely enjoyable to utilize? Many might only be enjoyable in comparison to having no effective coping mechanisms at all.

In an article for Psych Central, a researcher whose doctoral research was on the matter of compersion had this to say: "Much the way you can feel both happy and sad at the same time (we often call this bittersweet), even about the same event, you can feel compersion and jealousy at the same time" (20). It's important to note that these feelings don't invalidate or contradict each other, but rather intermingle and coexist. Anyone, polyamorous or monogamous, can experience compersion, although to a large degree, it seems to be much easier to do so once one knows the word^{LXI} (25), has a clear understanding of the concept, and understands what to look for. As the article goes on to say:

"Compersion is definitely a learnable feeling... One of the reasons people [may find it difficult] to feel compersion is that they don't learn the word for it while they are young and developing their emotional vocabulary" (20).

Elsewhere, the researcher quoted above, who, as the article states, "looks at how monogamous people experience jealousy and compersion," says the following: "monogamous people can identify compersion once they know how to name it" (20). She also suggests that if one wishes to nurture compersion in their life and relationships and to kindle one's ability to feel it, starting with platonic relationships may be the easiest approach.

This makes sense. It may feel weird, even uncomfortable, to try and imagine one's partner happily nestled into the loving embrace of someone else, smiling as they do something together, without you, and feel a sense of something akin to warmth, joy, or satisfaction. On the other hand, doing something similar but for friends seems to be far easier. Think of the excitement one might experience when a friend gets a good job, gets into a nice school,

^{LX} "there is an 'ecstatic calm, or ecstatic release' to it. Cognitions involved accepting other people's love and being happy for the partner, as the partner would be for them" (18).

^{LXI} "None of the monogamous participants, nor Carolyn, the CNM participant with a non-typical CNM relationship, described experiencing compersion when elaborating on their jealousy. It may be challenging to articulate and intentionally nurture compersion if one does not have an awareness of its existence or potential" (25).

buys a car, celebrates a birthday, or even when a friend announces that they have a new partner. Sometimes something good happens to a friend, and even if they're in another place, it feels easy to smile for them and celebrate them and their achievements from a position far removed, unbothered by the fact that others in their life may have much more access to them and can smile with them from somewhere much closer, perhaps even with a hand around their shoulder or with two wrapped around their waist. Often times, knowing that they don't have to celebrate alone is just a reason to smile all the wider on their behalf. Why can it be so hard to do the same with partners? Why isn't it easier to love it when they're loved and to smile for them too?

Like replacing narratives, like communicating, or like any other skill, it takes practice, and it takes the realization that there's something to practice in the first place (and also the persistence required to be bad at it for a while). The rewards of such practice can be immense for those brave enough to try, but trying itself is certainly not easy.

While skillful communication, assuming responsibility for one's own emotional regulation, and cultivating compersion represent some of the healthiest ideas and practices that exist in relationships, polyamorous or otherwise, it's important to take a moment to consider what it can look like when relationships fall short of healthiness. Though it can be unpleasant to think about, learning to recognize such failures and shortcomings along with the ideas and behaviors that can contribute to them is important, both for avoiding pitfalls in relationships, but also for achieving a greater understanding of what healthy relationships and behaviors look like. Furthermore, it's an area wherein there are some concerns that are particular to various forms of non-monogamy (or particular to monogamy) such that different narratives about relationships and their health may need to be considered in order to understand the dynamics at play in each type of situation. Be advised, some of what follows may make for an uncomfortable read.

Signs of Unhealthy Non-Monogamy

To begin with, contrary to what many seem to believe^{LXII}, it needs to be stated that abuse is not more common in polyamorous relationships than in any other kind of relationship, including monogamous relationships^{LXIII} (41), and it isn't necessarily more common in other types of non-monogamy either. Any relationship may become abusive on account of the behaviors of the people in that relationship, but the paradigms under which that abuse takes place are not to blame: people engaging in abusive behaviors are to blame.

Unhealthy relationships can be difficult to recognize and talk about with respect to polyamory and non-monogamy for many reasons, including all the typical reasons why abuse can be hard to discuss in any context. One such reason is that the rules of non-

^{LXII} "...the perception is not merely that CNM relationships are unusual or unfamiliar and hence confusing to the perceivers; they are perceived to be dysfunctional" (9).

^{LXIII} "...relationship abuse is not more likely than abuse in a monogamous relationship" (41).

monogamous paradigms are different from monogamy, and therefore there are different ways to violate them. Another is that dynamics that allow for multiple relationships mean that there may be additional people and types of associations that can be components of novel abuse tactics or behaviors that aren't generally possible within monogamous paradigms. However, one of the most important reasons is a lack of narratives and social scripts addressing what healthy, and unhealthy, non-monogamy can look like. One source in particular summarizes the problem quite nicely:

“Regardless of our own relationship style, most of us know hundreds of monogamous couples, and we’ve seen hundreds more depicted in movies, books, and TV. We have many, many examples to look to when assessing our own relationships, as long as they follow monogamous patterns. Even actively polyam people, though, often know at most a dozen or fewer other polyam relationships, and there are very few fictional representations of polyamory. This means that polyam people have to do a lot more learning by trial and error. We have fewer resources to develop maps of polyam relationship territory ahead of time, let alone to mark the spots on the map that should say Danger: Here Be Dragons” (8).

Another problem is that many people who become polyamorous or non-monogamous only do so after meeting someone from one of those communities and beginning to date them. From the onset, this introduces a power dynamic in the relationship. One side knows how the paradigm works, or is supposed to work, and the other side doesn't. Hence, it's very easy for the party with more knowledge to make up the rules as they go along in whatever manner suits them, potentially to facilitate or excuse bad behaviors that more experienced people in the non-monogamous or polyamorous communities would recognize as abusive or even antithetical to the professed relationship paradigm^{LXIV}. While not all non-monogamous relationships that start this way are abusive or become abusive, it is important to point out the vulnerable nature of the less-experienced partner (8).

Even for people experienced in polyamory and non-monogamy, the huge diversity of paradigms and rules relative to monogamous relationships means that some sort of appeal to the complex nature of the dynamic or a lack of clarity surrounding rules or boundaries can be used as an excuse for bad behavior, or even as the basis for accusing a partner of bad behavior and even demanding some form of unwarranted 'restitution'. Such accusations can also have the effect of making the targeted partner feel like the person accusing them of bad behavior 'knows better' about polyamory or non-monogamy than they do, and this can be exploited to gain control, which is to say nothing of the emotional damage it can cause. The logic of this behavior extends to the exaggerating of a partner's legitimate mistakes as well, blowing them out of proportion, and causing the same

^{LXIV} “For many people, their first mentors in polyamory are also their first partners. And while often, this works out fine, as more experienced people help their less-experienced new partners navigate the difficult waters, the power imbalance creates the potential for control and manipulation” (8).

outcomes of emotional damage and eroding their confidence in their understanding of the dynamic so as to make it easier to control them^{LXV} (8).

Another way in which the diversity within polyamorous and non-monogamous dynamics and a lack of clear, generally agreed upon understandings of how such dynamics are supposed to work can be leveraged to facilitate abuse is with respect to the provision of emotional labor. In particular, because polyamory and non-monogamy involve many different scenarios in which one might reasonably experience negative emotions in response to the perfectly healthy behaviors of one's partner, such as with experiencing jealousy in response to them being intimate with someone else, how responsibility for managing those emotions should be attributed is somewhat unclear. As has already been mentioned, regulating one's own emotions rather than placing the responsibility for doing so on one's partner^{LXVI} is an essential skill for healthy relationship participation, but at the same time, this does not mean that it's okay to be callous to a partner's pain or negative emotional experiences^{LXVII} (8). A loving partner should naturally be inclined to listen to communication regarding negative emotions and respond in a constructive and empathetic way. A balance has to be struck between failing to act in a loving and supportive manner in response to a partner's emotions, and demanding that a partner take full accountability for regulating and managing the emotions of another. Abusive and unhealthy dynamics can develop in either direction.

The plethora of approaches to polyamory and non-monogamy has also resulted in lots of discussion, debate, and downright arguments within the various communities under those headings about which paradigms are the 'best' or 'healthiest'. Naturally, it's okay to have opinions about various polyamorous or non-monogamous paradigms and how they relate to certain ideas or values; everyone in the community does, and it's okay to disagree about it. Ultimately, the best paradigm is the one that works best for the person who is considering engaging in it and the healthiest paradigm is whichever one someone is most capable of being a part of in a healthy fashion while ensuring that their own needs are met. There are no perfect or 'best' paradigms, however there may be a best paradigm for a particular polyamorist. That said, squabbles over the 'superiority' or 'inferiority' or 'correctness' of particular paradigms tend to involve lots of appeals to various philosophies, values, principles, practices, ideas, bodies of literature, and many things that someone new to polyamory and non-monogamy (or even someone who is practiced in it) might not be familiar with or may reasonably be confused or overwhelmed by. Creating confusion, making efforts to appear 'smarter' or 'better informed', using judgmental language, and inflexibility, particularly in response to how a partner feels about a paradigm or some aspect of it, are all red flags that indicate that someone is attempting to coercively control

^{LXV} "The key dynamic is that, instead of healthily expressing hurt and frustration, the abusive partner uses every mistake or perceived mistake as an excuse to shame and control their partner" (8).

^{LXVI} "Polyam guilt can make it easy for a partner to pressure, punish, and coerce us into dancing on eggshells around their negative feelings, even if we haven't actually done anything wrong" (8).

^{LXVII} "Because boundaries and taking responsibility for your emotions are so essential for healthy polyamory, some people will use these principles to justify being indifferent or hostile in response to their partner's feelings" (8).

the relationship by making it conform to a particular paradigm for whatever reason^{LXVIII} (8). Such behavior is especially egregious given that people can attach whatever attributes they like to their relationships and paradigms and all paradigms can be customized with the consent of those involved. However, unless one is particularly well-studied, well-informed, and well-spoken regarding such issues, potentially even including the issue of relationship abuse itself, recognizing these behaviors as unhealthy and advocating against them can be difficult. In general, if one is unhappy or feels disrespected in a particular relationship or paradigm, especially if one is feeling ignored or unheard, it may be prudent to consider leaving it behind.

One area in which relationships can become unhealthy that's unique to polyamory and non-monogamy and particularly confusing to navigate, even for people who are thoroughly experienced in non-monogamous relationships, is how to handle metamours. Some partners insist on sharing everything about one relationship with their partner in another relationship. For the partner who is being spoken about, this can obviously feel uncomfortable and create feelings of vulnerability and insecurity for reasons that are similar to why being the subject of gossip can do the same. On the other hand, if a partner refuses to talk about their other partners beyond the bare minimum required to clear the bar of everyone having full knowledge of what parties are involved in a dynamic so as to potentially qualify as ethical non-monogamy or polyamory on paper, this can be a red flag. Engaging with another partner in a surreptitious way, aside from being a sign of potentially shady intent or a lack of trust, can create justified feelings of jealousy or threat for the partners being kept in the dark. In general, a good rule of thumb for how to handle metamour interactions is to let the metamours themselves decide what they want their dynamics with each other to look like including how often they'd like to spend time together, under what circumstances, and how much they would like to have shared about themselves (within reason, as requesting secrecy with regards to things like certain sexual activities being performed or changes in STI status is obviously unreasonable)^{LXIX} (8). As with everything having to do with polyamory and non-monogamy, communicating clearly, particular about complex situations that extend beyond the confines of a single relationship such that they involve one or more outside parties, is essential to creating a healthy, safe, and pleasurable dynamic for all involved.

Often in polyamory, abuse can come in the form of attempting to weaken a partner's outside relationships. While polyamory requires that everyone be allowed to pursue other relationships, it imposes no requirement for anyone to like their metamours. However, this doesn't make it okay to be openly hostile to metamours, denigrate them in front of your partner, or express that one has 'issues' with such metamours in bad faith. Often times, though not always, many of these behaviors are explicitly intended to sabotage a partner's other relationships out of jealousy, particular the excessive expression of issues or concerns

^{LXVIII} "They may argue that it doesn't matter if something feels wrong or is making you unhappy: You have to keep doing things This Way or you're inferior in whatever ways they've decided people who don't follow their path are inferior" (8).

^{LXIX} "While the shared partner certainly has a stake in how metamours get along, they shouldn't be controlling the interactions. A metamour relationship needs to be established based on the comfort and interest level of the metamours themselves" (8).

(30). Aside from being a clear example of the common abusive pattern of separating people from other forms of relationship or support (a dynamic common in monogamous abuse), it's an example of failing to cope with jealousy in a healthy and mature way, as is necessary for stable and loving relationships under any paradigm. One source provides a succinct and useful description of how this form of abuse can present stating, "They can't put their finger on what it is, as opposed to having a good reason and examples. After a while, you realize they don't like ANY of your dates" (30).

One more unhealthy dynamic that is unique to polyamorous and non-monogamous relationship is 'collecting'. A 'collector' is someone who continues to date new partners despite not having the emotional bandwidth, time, or maturity to satisfy the needs of those partners. This can happen for several reasons. One common reason is to chase the heightened excitement and passion that can occur early on in a relationship (this is often referred to as NRE or 'New Relationship Energy') (65). Another common motivation for the collector is to prop up their self-esteem or social status by having a large number of partners:

"...they form relationships with people purely so they can boast about how many partners they have, or how desirable they must be for having so many desirable partners, to others. This is incredibly self-centred and objectifies the individuals they date, as they do so purely for social validation rather than because they genuinely care" (65).

This can leave the partners of the collector feeling used, particular once the collector moves on, as often happens.

While not strictly germane to polyamorous and non-monogamous relationships, it's important to discuss another common way abuse arises in a non-monogamous (or non-mongamy-adjacent) context. In particular, there are situations wherein a party to a monogamous relationship decides they want to see other people and employs coercive means to make their partner agree to it, whether or not they're actually okay with changing the dynamic. While this isn't the only scenario in which the concepts of polyamory or non-monogamy may be evoked to facilitate abusive or unhealthy behavior in a monogamous or monogamy-adjacent relationship, it is one of the most common. Some examples of these kinds of situations are outlined on the National Domestic Violence Hotline's website, which lists the following three items: "Your partner has cheated and decides they want to open things up as a result.", "Your partner wants to be non-monogamous but doesn't want you to have sex with or date anyone else.", and "You feel like you need to open up your relationship in order to keep it going" (41).

It's important to point out that what these monogamous dynamics develop into cannot be considered polyamory on a definitional basis, but they are legitimate forms of abuse, some of them may lead to situations that qualify for the label of non-monogamy or non-monogamous behaviors, and regardless of what kind of relationship paradigm these

scenarios ultimately represent, they do interact with the ideas of non-monogamy and polyamory and therefore warrant discussion in this article.

As has already been said, these scenarios are not polyamorous. In the first scenario, the reason is because polyamory requires explicit consent to the dynamic and the knowledge of all who are involved: cheating in a monogamous relationship violates both of these conditions. It's worth noting that some people who cheat may use the true statement that polyamory and non-monogamy are acceptable as a shield behind which to hide, thereby framing their unhealthy behavior as acceptable due to the existence of these labels and the perfectly acceptable nature of these dynamics when enacted in a healthy way. Furthermore, it represents a clear violation of boundaries, whether explicitly articulated or not, that are inherent within the parameters of monogamy^{LXX} (25, 41).

With respect to the second scenario, it fails to qualify as polyamory on account of the asymmetric ability to pursue outside relationships that is described. In particular, recall that polyamory requires that everyone involved be allowed to pursue multiple romantic relationships, hence if only one partner is allowed to do so, the dynamic is not polyamory. It is, however, an example of a relationship dynamic wherein one partner is attempting to establish unequal freedoms, and therefore a power imbalance, in a manner that is debatably consensual (at best). The scenario outlined is also indicative of generally controlling behavior as well as behavior that limits a partner's access to people outside the relationship, people who could potentially become alternative sources of intimacy and support. In such cases, stipulations that a partner not seek sex or intimacy outside of the relationship, in spite of the other partner requesting or demanding the ability to do so, may be phrased as boundaries or limits in order to mask them as components of a healthy relationship. However, as the website states, "the goal of... boundaries should not be to control your behavior or limit you in a way you don't agree with. Healthy relationships are based on equality and ultimately, each person in the relationship should feel heard and respected," further stating, "a red flag of polyamory and relationship abuse would be if your partner is only willing to talk about the possibility of them being open, but you aren't 'allowed to.' Your partner should not feel like they have the power to dictate those kinds of terms to you or determine what you can/cannot do" (41).

The third scenario fails to qualify as polyamory because coercion voids consent, which is to say that consent provided under duress is not valid consent, and threats to end a relationship if the dynamic is not changed to a non-monogamous one or implications of doing so both preclude valid consent from being provided. The paradigm of a relationship and any attributes attached to it which constitute rules, limitations, freedoms, or in any way extend beyond a single person stating a legitimate boundary based on a personal need (e.g. "If we're going to live together, you can't bring home shellfish. I'm deathly allergic") require respectful discussion and the informed consent of both parties.

These latter examples, though again, not strictly polyamorous or non-monogamous in nature, warrant discussion for an additional reason: they have the effect of perpetuating

^{LXX} "The CNM participants were more intentional and explicit in their agreements, while the monogamous participants tended to rely on unspoken or culturally-normative implicit agreements" (25).

myths about non-monogamy. Imagine someone being coerced into giving into their partner in one of the three scenarios outlined above and going on to refer to the dynamic as ‘polyamory’. What ideas might that give people about polyamory? About what it means? About the kinds of people that partake in it? Or of the community itself? What might the consequences of those misunderstandings be?

With respect to the first four questions, some answers will be discussed in the next section. Afterwards, it will be possible to, in some way, begin addressing the fifth....

Myths and Misconceptions

Myths and misconceptions about polyamory and non-monogamy abound. It’s derided harshly and unfairly in a manner that’s often either entirely unsubstantiated or based on the behaviors of people who misappropriate the label and whose relationship paradigms definitionally do not qualify as polyamorous^{LXXI}. Any unhealthy behaviors that take place within those paradigms are then perceived as being done within the context of a polyamorous relationship, and people may therefore associate those actions with the polyamorous community and potentially form their own opinions based on them. As one paper states, “...the perception is not merely that CNM relationships are unusual or unfamiliar and hence confusing to the perceivers; they are perceived to be dysfunctional. In sum, we have ample reason to believe that a bias exists against CNM relationships” (9).

This perception of dysfunctionality shows itself, subtly and implicitly, in the language that is used when communicating about polyamory and non-monogamy. Throughout all of the academic publications reviewed in doing research for this article as well as the vast majority of other sources, phrases such as ethical non-monogamy and consensual non-monogamy have been used to clarify that the paradigm falls within the bounds of generally acceptable conduct within relationships. No sources used in the writing of this article ever felt the need to clarify that the forms of monogamy they were discussing were ethical or consensual despite the fact that non-consensual and unethical dynamics within monogamous paradigms do, of course, exist^{LXXII}(61).

The research on what people think about polyamory and non-monogamy is strikingly conclusive. People tend not to think it can work. Society seems to believe that monogamy

^{LXXI} The issue of self-identification within the polyamorous community is complex. Polyamory has a specific definition that requires certain widely recognized and accepted conditions to be met in order to qualify. This can even extend to the conduct of one’s partners since ‘with the knowledge of everyone involved’ includes metamours. Failure to do so will typically result in the applicability of the polyamorous label being called into question, including by scientific investigators: “One participant in the CNM group (Carolyn) warrants special note and her situation raises a complicated issue.... Carolyn was unique among the CNM group in that she explicitly considered herself polyamorous, yet a partner of hers did not adhere to the central principle of informed consent with his spouse” (25).

^{LXXII} “It happened to Sherry Johnson, now 61, when she was just 11 years old. She was forced to marry a 20-year-old deacon from her insular Pentecostal church community in Florida. Johnson says he raped her when she was 10 years old; the rape resulted in a pregnancy. Johnson says her church community, including her mother, covered up the rape – and forced her to marry her rapist” (61).

is the only valid paradigm, and that anything else is necessarily unhealthy: “We concluded, along with many other observers, that monogamy is perceived in contemporary society as foundational for a healthy, satisfying relationship (Conley, Moors, et al., 2013; Easton & Hardy, 2009; Haag, 2012; Kipnis, 2004; Moors & Schechinger, 2014; Perel, 2006; Sheff, 2014; Smith, 1991)” (9).

Interestingly there is a mention of a way in which monogamy does seem to offer an unambiguous advantage: “...evidence does not currently support the favored status of monogamy in American culture. However, evidence does support the idea that monogamy is a means of avoiding the stigma of other relationship styles; reactions to consensual non-monogamy are quite pervasive and negative (Conley, Moors, et al., 2012a)” (10).

Clearly, this is an issue that society feels strongly about. Reactions to polyamory and non-monogamy are powerful. Even reactions to the suggestions that polyamory and non-monogamy can, in any way, have unique aspects about them that are positive appear to draw impassioned retorts:

“...we have found that even hypotheses suggesting that polyamorous or CNM relationships might have some advantages, in some circumstances, over monogamous relationships is often met with defensiveness above and beyond what we experience in publishing other research. For example, researcher Elisabeth Sheff (2014), conducted extensive research on the children of polyamorous parents and found evidence that the children are thriving. She discussed the unusual response she received from the scientific community about her research: ‘The specific tone of the reviews and the recurrent nature of the negative feedback signal a deeper, institutionalized issue of sex negativity.’ (p. 127). She further explains that, although every academic is critiqued, ‘not every critique is so defensive and vitriolic in tone’” (9).

It should be highlighted that the ‘reviewers’ mentioned are peer reviewers for a scientific publication and that Elisabeth Sheff holds a PhD in sociology and is credited with authorship in multiple peer-reviewed publications. However, the quote above was not taken from her research.

Instead, it was taken from a peer-reviewed scientific paper containing research conducted by a separate team of investigators who were writing about societal attitudes about polyamory and non-monogamy in addition to other related topics. While the first half of the paper concerned jealousy and satisfaction in polyamorous relationships, monogamous relationships, and relationships conforming to various styles of non-monogamy (work which has also been cited in this article), the second half of the paper contains the study on societal attitudes towards polyamory and non-monogamy. The second half begins with the following passage:

“Given that our findings might be unanticipated by (or jarring to) many psychologists, we would like to return to the issue of bias against CNM. As discussed earlier, CNM individuals and their

relationships are clearly perceived negatively. If researchers who conduct research into CNM are perceived as biased, then research addressing CNM populations will fall on deaf ears” (9).

The above quote underscores one critical reason why these attitudes are a problem: if people are so dead-set on believing horrible things about polyamory and non-monogamy, how might it even be possible to convince them otherwise?

The researchers gathered a sample of 107 monogamous people and had them read one of two texts written in the style of the results section of a hypothetical research paper studying trust and sexual satisfaction in monogamous and polyamorous relationships. The texts used the exact same wording, albeit one reported results that seemed to be favorable to polyamory and the other reported results that seemed favorable to monogamy. They then had the participants fill out a survey regarding how they felt about the hypothetical study and the hypothetical researchers who carried it out. The items on the survey were statements about the research and the researchers, and responses utilized a six-point scale ranging from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’. The items included statements such as, ‘The researchers are good scientists’, ‘The researchers are biased’, ‘I trust that the results are accurate’, and ‘The researchers are likely to be polyamorous’ (9). The results and conclusions section associated with that study states the following:

“These findings suggest that researchers who address monogamy and CNM may be faced with perceptions that they are biased regardless of how even-handedly they frame their findings. Of course, we ideally would replicate these findings among actual scientists; however, as mentioned previously, scientists are not immune to the biases displayed by the general public (see Banaji & Greenwald, 2013)” (9).

A later quote from the same results and conclusions section, seemingly referencing the survey item about the researchers being likely to be polyamorous, states the following:

“...reporting positive data about CNM groups puts researchers at risk of being perceived as biased and as being members of the socially undesirable group that their data portray positively” (9).

In the notes section of the same paper, immediately prior to their citations, the authors have the following to say:

“Consistent with Sheff’s (2014) analysis, some of the reviews we have experienced have also seemed curious. For example, one editor wrote ‘I found it interesting that in discussing your consensually non-[sexually] monogamous relationships outcomes seem so positive, given that the earlier

literature on open marriages suggests that these were typically very unsuccessful' (personal communication, November 16, 2011). Other reviewers have indicated that the research establishing the superiority of monogamy already has been conducted. However, we were unable to locate this research. Another reviewer indicated that 'gay men almost always report relationships that deteriorate into nonmonogamy of some sort' (personal communication, May 21, 2012). The use of the term 'deteriorate' struck us as particularly emotionally laden. Most uncomfortable for us, some reviewers have made presumptions of our relationship configurations. For example, one wrote "The discussion section claims the paper isn't espousing a polyamorous alternative, but that's disingenuous. Might as well be upfront about it, and say, like gay psychologists might have done in the 1980s, "We're here, we're not going anywhere, and we demand better research on our lives and sexualities"' (personal communication, April 2, 2012). Although each of us has conducted work on other identities (e.g., research about lesbian and gay identities or ethnic identities), we have never for any other topic had reviewers implicate our identities in a review. Finally, reviewers have described our research as biased in favor of CNM dozens of times" (9).

To reiterate, 'reviewers' refers to peer reviewers for the scientific journal in which the research was published. The reviewers, who were reviewing a paper studying perceptions of research on polyamory and non-monogamy that contained items designed to measure whether or not researchers publishing positive findings about non-monogamy would be perceived as biased, have their results called into question, or be perceived as being part of the marginalized group they were studying, did an excellent job of corroborating the findings of said research by calling the results into question, accusing the investigators of bias, and making assumptions about their relationship paradigms.

As for Dr. Elisabeth Sheff, the researcher who was mentioned twice throughout the above passages and whose work was cited multiple times throughout the paper being quoted, as well as others utilized in the writing of this piece, she seems to no longer be involved in academia. She's referenced in an article on the website of board-certified clinical sexologist Dr. Richard Wagner:

*"Elisabeth Sheff, a leading polyamory researcher who left academia for lack of grant funding, now frequently serves as an expert witness in custody battles; she says that often a grandmother or a former spouse will find out that a co-parent has multiple relationships, be scandalized, and demand to take the kids – even though her longitudinal research, reported in *The Polyamorists Next Door: Inside Multiple-Partner Relationships and Families*, indicates that kids who grow up in polyamorous families aren't any more screwed up than average American children" (2).*

Note how the passage says she serves as an expert witness in custody battles initiated by people feeling offended or 'scandalized' by the idea of polyamory or non-monogamy. Given that there are probably many more court cases initiated on such grounds than the ones she serves as an expert witness in, it begs the question: how many people lose their kids in such

battles? Perhaps that's an example of the consequences caused by myths and misconceptions about non-monogamy.

Of course, such a statement is hypothetical, although the strange reactions of peer reviewers for scientific publications to particular types of research are less hypothetical and certainly qualify as consequences of those same myths and misconceptions. Regardless, these passages say very little about how such things affect the lives of polyamorists and non-monogamists on a more personal level. Naturally, such things are hard to study, the body of research on polyamory and non-monogamy in general is rather sparse, and with such a wide variety of possible outcomes that could be defined as 'personal consequences' it's hard to imagine how an effective study on the issue could be put together in the first place. While no one can say what consequences may arise for all polyamorists, or all non-monogamists, I can at least speak to some of the consequences for one polyamorist in particular....

On a More Personal Note...

In writing this article, I began by disclosing that I'm polyamorous. I also stated that I don't believe polyamory is better than monogamy or any other relationship paradigm. I truly believe this. I've done my best to present the information that I came across in an even-handed and informative manner. One of my primary hopes in writing this piece has been that people might take the time to engage with it and gain a clearer and deeper understanding of what polyamory and non-monogamy are so that such an understanding could displace whatever myths and misconceptions may have existed beforehand in the minds of my readers. The strength of my motivation in writing as extensively as I have for this piece and engaging with all the sources I've found, including many that were frankly very upsetting to read on account of their contents (I left out several passages that would have fit very nicely in the above section; you can imagine how the cops tend to react when they find out sexual assault victims are polyamorous), has stemmed from a desire to create an environment in which myself and other polyamorous and non-monogamous people can be themselves without so much fear of judgment or ridicule, without feeling like something as important to us as how we love or how we think about relationships is a part of ourselves we have to check at the door (or at least stay quiet about) if we wish to enter a space and not have to put up with ignorance or even vitriol. If I can be said to have an agenda beyond educating people, it's that.

It's not as though I'm closeted about my polyamory. I do mention it. Sometimes someone will say something that demonstrates a misunderstanding about what polyamory is, and I'll try to engage with it in as diplomatic a manner as possible. The response that follows is usually something along the lines of, 'It was just a joke, no need to take it so seriously', followed by some sort of assurance that they know what polyamory is... and then typically they attempt to provide an example of some 'polycule' they've heard of or encountered that demonstrates to me beyond a shadow of a doubt that this person has no clue at all what polyamory is (and the people in whatever 'polycule' they mentioned probably don't

either). They may as well say it's okay because they have a polyamorous friend and leave it at that.

Here are some examples of such jokes: "Polyamory is just organized cuckoldry", "I could never be poly, I have no interest in threesomes", "I'm gonna make a 69-member polycule and make them worship me, but they won't be allowed to date anyone else".... Each of these is a variation on something that I, and most polyamorous people I know, have heard dozens of times before in multiple different spaces and communities. None of them are original, clever, or even humorous.

To be clear, it's not that it's bad to joke about polyamory, at least not if the jokes are told in good faith (not the same as told with an absence of deliberate intention to offend) and demonstrate at least some understanding of the material being joked about. It might also be nice if people could seriously engage with the topic sometimes, but they never seem to. When the only way I hear polyamory discussed by non-polyamorous people is as a joke, what am I supposed to think aside from that this aspect of my identity, something I'm so passionate about and is so important to me, something nuanced and deep with its own culture and ideas, is nothing but a joke to them? Because that really does seem to be all it is to most monogamous people: a joke. Maybe a curiosity.

It's even more tragic because if one really wants to joke about polyamory, there's so much genuinely hilarious material to work with. Life as a polyamorous person is a bit absurd sometimes in very amusing ways. For example, I was once engaging in 'activities' with a partner and a friend we were staying with. The friend's husband walks in on us in the middle of her doing some things to me, smiles wide, and bursts out laughing (an excellent example of compersion), and apologizes just as my partner was asking if he wanted to join us. He kept laughing and declined, saying he had some work to do still before turning and leaving. The three of us laughed for a bit, briefly mused about how funny it is that in poly culture, a man can walk in on his wife engaged in 'activities' with someone else and laugh about it and how the socially expected response to that situation is much different. I imagine someone could tell a pretty good joke about that if they wanted to.

What's worse though are the cruel blanket assertions that reflect so many of the myths and misconceptions I discussed above. One genre of statements that bothers me is the, 'It must suck getting, like, a third of a partner in a relationship,' genre. As if polyamorous people don't put their all into each and every relationship they involve themselves in and strive to be the best partners they can for all their partners, including by providing all the love and support that may entail, just as a monogamous person might. Sure, scheduling may need to be considered sometimes, but if every monogamous person who had to schedule some stuff with friends on a regular basis on the level of how polyamorous people allocate their time were accused of not putting their all into relationships, or being some sort of 'timeshare partner' (yes, I have heard polyamorous people referred to that way), they would be well within their rights to be pissed! It sucks to feel like your love for people who mean so much to you is disrespected. In writing this article, I've been very careful to present information in a manner such that (hopefully) no one feels like their love for their partners is being devalued or dismissed.

I've spent several hours revising passages repeatedly to ensure that I was representing relationship paradigms, especially those other than my own, in a respectful and compassionate way, spending many words clarifying that such-and-such finding or statistic or this-or-that statement should in no way be used as the basis for cruel inferences or to dismiss the validity of the manners in which other people love and express themselves to the people in their lives. I'd invariably be thinking about all the members of all those groups who'd have never bothered to show polyamorous people the same courtesy. Nevertheless, I feel that those passages are the most important parts of this piece. I feel that way because the idea of anyone else being made to feel devalued and disrespected on account of their relationship paradigms, or any other aspect of their identity, because I wasn't careful and helped perpetuate a myth or misconception of the same sort that I mention in this article makes me feel sick. I don't want anyone to have to feel that way, and as a general rule, when I go through unpleasant experiences in life, I remind myself of how much I never want to visit the same sorts of hell on others that I may experience myself.

I think worst of all though are the various forms of assertions that polyamory is fundamentally broken, toxic, or abusive. "Polyamory is unhealthy", "I feel sorry for their partners", "Why are all poly people weird and abusive?" In fact, the pervasiveness of comments like those are some of the things that prevent polyamorous people from seeking assistance when they're abused. Have another quote:

"The social stigma and misunderstandings around polyamory create huge hurdles to getting support during or after a relationship with an abusive partner. As with any stigmatized identity, most of us have to work hard to show other people that polyam relationships can work and be healthy.

In even thinking about telling other people that something might be wrong, there are two common and valid fears: 1) that the person we're talking to will decide polyamory is fundamentally unhealthy, as proved by the abuse, and 2) that we will be blamed for whatever's the matter because we decided to get into a polyam relationship in the first place.

We're also prone to doing a similar thing in our own heads: fearing that if we acknowledge that our relationship is toxic or abusive, we're acknowledging that there's something broken about polyamory.

As with any lifestyle that is considered "sexually deviant" by many, polyamory can make it near-impossible to report..." (8).

Obviously, the passage doesn't end there, but I'm sure the savvy reader can spot where it's going. That's also not the only thing that myths like that prevent us from talking about. Say a polyamorous person regularly hears statements from their community that exemplify the popular mythology about the supposed toxicity of polyamory. If such a person winds up

with a partner, or partners, would they feel comfortable sharing that fact? Might they reasonably think that, if they try, sure, people may act like they're responding in all the appropriate ways, but in the backs of their heads, will they just be feeling sorry for that person's partners? Will they think that the person in question is abusing them simply on account of the fact that it's a polyamorous relationship? Do they think that I'm an abuser just because I'm polyamorous? Most people would probably be too polite to say it to our faces, but I doubt they're too polite to think it. Perhaps I'm being uncharitable. Not as uncharitable as people tend to be about polyamory, but I do try to see the good that might exist in people, even if I often have a hard time believing it's there.

Being polyamorous is exhausting. It sucks having to deal with all the deeply weird misconceptions. The way they fuck up your relationship to yourself, the way they change how you have to handle relationships with people you love in ways that neither of you signed up for (although since polyamory is definitionally a consensual arrangement, all parties would have definitely signed up for that). Every time a misconception comes up and I feel frustrated or deeply misrepresented or just so very tired, I think to myself, Is it worth it? Should I try and explain? Sometimes I do, and then usually I wind up wishing I hadn't, but most of the time I don't. I force a laugh, wait for the conversation to move on, try not to dissociate too much, and mentally check back in in a bit. Besides, if I really wanted to try and explain in response to some low-effort joke, how could I? See all the explaining I'd have to do? How do you think that would go? I doubt my audience would be very patient just like I doubt the I-identify-as-an-attack-helicopter people would pay much attention if you put them in a queer studies class.

Of course, it's not like polyamorous people can't be mean about other peoples' relationship paradigms too. It's not uncommon to hear stuff in the polyamorous community about how, "monogamy isn't about love, it's a mutual ownership contract", or "monogamous people don't trust their partners, that's why they take their autonomy away", or "monogamy is inherently toxic". If I'm being honest, sometimes it does feel cathartic to listen to, or if I'm being more honest, to participate in, particularly given all of the things polyamorous people put up with. Afterwards, I tend to feel pretty bad about my participation in it because like I said, I don't want people to have to feel bad in anything resembling the manner that polyamorous people have been made to, and to that end, I'd like to go about addressing those statements.

While polyamory does place a tremendous amount of value on autonomy, including and especially bodily autonomy and freedom of association, it's not that monogamous people don't value those things, they just have different ways of utilizing their autonomy. To begin with, there are many kinds of autonomy^{LXXIII} (17). In particular, creating a framework of behavior consisting of rules and stipulations that constitutes a set of guidelines for what behaviors are moral or acceptable within the context of a monogamous relationship and

^{LXXIII} "Moral autonomy, usually traced back to Kant, is the capacity to deliberate and to give oneself the moral law, rather than merely heeding the injunctions of others. Personal autonomy is the capacity to decide for oneself and pursue a course of action in one's life, often regardless of any particular moral content. Political autonomy is the property of having one's decisions respected, honored, and heeded within a political context" (17).

agreeing to be bound by those same rules can be said to be an example of Kantian autonomy (6). On the subject of Kantian autonomy, one source had this to say:

“Our practical rationality gives us the capacity to originate our actions from within ourselves. Although constrained by the (moral) rules of reason, our willed actions are free in the sense that we dictate the rules that our behavior follows for ourselves” (6).

In short, one can reason about morality, and on the basis of that reasoning, produce a set of rules, originating from the self, to which one freely conforms their behavior, and the acts of producing the rules and conforming one’s behavior to those rules, constitutes an act of autonomy. If one’s rules for relationships are the rules inherent in monogamy, and one finds them reasonable, and decides to follow them of their own accord, how is that not autonomy?

To put it another way, for polyamorous people to say the monogamous approach to autonomy is wrong is to deny monogamous people the autonomy to conform to the restrictions they provide for themselves in whatever ways they see fit for whatever reasons they see fit. If doing so counts as ‘giving up autonomy’, by such logic, Odysseus would have had no right to request that he be chained to the mast of his ship so that he could hear the beauty of the sirens’ song without being tempted to a watery grave by it simply because he had to give up some bodily autonomy in doing so, whereas I say that making such a request was well within his rights on account of that very same bodily autonomy in addition to the aforementioned Kantian autonomy. His body, his ship, his rules.

However, monogamous people are not Odysseus and the things that may tempt them are not sirens. Although, should they ever choose to take a leap from monogamy towards the things that might tempt them, perhaps what awaits them isn’t death in the chilling embrace of the waves, but a new perspective and way of life in the warm, affectionate embraces of as many people as they care to be held by. A way of life that may not be for everyone but one that rewards the patient and compassionate and can only be attained by the curious, willing, thoughtful, and brave, although perhaps at the cost of some stability and contentedness, at least at first, and only for people who are lucky enough to have such things to begin with.

I hate the confrontational framing of the discourse between monogamy and polyamory. It sucks. It makes everyone feel bad about themselves, generates animosity over a topic that should be about love, and it couldn’t be any less constructive. The ‘problem’, if one wishes to think of it that way, isn’t polyamory being toxic or monogamy being toxic, it’s people being toxic.

There is nothing morally wrong with someone being an alcoholic; there is something morally wrong with someone being an alcoholic who drunkenly beats their partner. There is nothing morally wrong with experiencing anger; there is something morally wrong with experiencing anger and punching holes in the wall while screaming and making everyone

around fear for their safety. There is nothing morally wrong with feeling jealous; there is something morally wrong with feeling jealous and invading someone's privacy by going through their phone, pockets, purse, journal, or drawers. There is nothing morally wrong with being non-monogamous, polyamorous, polygamous, monogamous, single, or practicing any other relationship paradigm one pleases; there is something morally wrong with being abusive.

If there's one thing that anyone takes away from this piece, I hope it's that. I should probably wrap this up now. Spoilers incoming for the 2016 movie *Arrival*, by the way.

Bringing it Back Around

In the 2016 movie *Arrival*, a linguist is called upon to try and communicate with aliens who land on Earth, open the doors of their spacecraft and... wait. Her job throughout the story is to figure out what their purpose is in coming to the world so that humans can figure out how to respond. Over the course of the film, she ends up learning the language of the aliens, whom the humans refer to as Heptopods on account of their seven leg-like appendages. Understanding the nature of the Heptopod language, its overarching principles, its structure, its concepts, and the general way in which it appears to treat the world, changes her. She begins to see the universe differently in very fundamental ways, in particular, she sees time differently, and she is able to interact with it differently too. As a result, she's able to see into the future and use what she learns to help the various nations of Earth come together and collaborate and finally understand the purpose of the aliens in coming to their planet: to unite humanity and prevent humans from destroying themselves through unnecessary violence and competition, so that in 3000 years time, when the Heptopods require humanity's assistance, humanity will still be alive (62).

New language and new concepts are the key to her ability to act differently, think differently, and choose options that are not available to other people because they can't conceive of them as being there even though, in some sense, they always were and are and will be. I believe it can be much the same with the language and concepts of polyamory. The ideas, words, and perspectives used by polyamorists to make sense of the world, their relationships, and themselves can be used by monogamists, or anyone else, to do very much the same. These ideas can help people to interact with the concept of relationships in new ways, as well as the adjacent concepts of communication and love, by unlocking alternative ways of thinking that create the potential for alternative forms of action in much the same manner as the linguist was able to change how she interacted with time. Just as the linguist in the film didn't need to become a Heptopod in order to experience the things that she experiences, monogamists do not need to give up their monogamy to benefit from the perspectives of polyamorists.

This is a perspective echoed by researchers themselves. Commenting on the matter to *Time* magazine, a researcher from UCLA who investigates monogamous relationships said: "I don't see studying non-monogamous couples as studying a totally separate country with no relevance to monogamy at all... Consensually non-monogamous couples might have a lot

to teach everybody about negotiating desire and competing interests” (11). Equally important to realize though is the idea expressed by the following excerpt from the same article:

“Carrie Jenkins, a professor of philosophy at the University of British Columbia... who participates in polyamorous relationships herself, cautions that there isn’t a one-size-fits-all approach to relationships. ‘One impression that I don’t want to give is that I think polyamorous relationships are better for everyone.... We’re all very different from one another’” (11).

This is a sentiment with which I strongly concur and one that I’ve tried very hard to represent in this article. I also think that even though monogamists do stand to gain a lot from polyamorous perspectives, it’s not a one-way street and that polyamorists can learn a lot from monogamy as well– or rather that most of us already have.

I believe that the difference between talking with someone and talking down to someone more often than not lies in a willingness or unwillingness to admit that everyone is on the same level. Much like in Arrival wherein all of Earth benefited from the knowledge of the Heptopods, it may appear as though I’m presenting polyamory and its ideas and vocabulary to monogamists as something almost ineffably different, something alien, containing a unique and advantageous understanding of things that offers abilities and perspectives beyond those that monogamists could attain by themselves, and generously gifting it from on high. This is not the case. To be honest, I see this article as being more like something from the humans of 3000 years in the future coming to the aid of the Heptopods who in the past had gifted them something essential: a tool of such overwhelming power and strength that it saved them from themselves, enabled them to conquer their worst instincts, avoid self-annihilation, and endowed them with the indomitable wisdom and perspective to persevere through three millennia of unknown obstacles.... From whom do you think most polyamorists first acquired concepts of love and loving?

It’s not as though visible examples of polyamorous love are abundant in most of our cultures (though it would be nice if they were). Our first examples of love overwhelmingly tend to be from monogamous parents, monogamous romances in books or on TV, seeing our monogamous friends and peers giddy with excitement as they experience their first crushes and relationships, even before many of us realize what things like ‘monogamy’ and ‘polyamory’ are or that such concepts exist. These examples of love, healthy monogamous love, though as imperfect as anything else human or as any other form of love, exhibited to us some of the most remarkable attributes: joyousness, radiant beauty, sometimes even downright ecstasy! They exhibited devotion, security, blissful contentment, support, care, companionship, and compassion, conveying a captivating image of something wondrous and inspirational that for as long as we live will always have a place in our hearts and minds. We were shown a goal, a purpose, something worth aspiring to and cultivating, potentially even a reason to be. For many of us, certainly for me personally, those

aspirational visions of what love could be may have helped save us from ourselves, enabled us to conquer some of our worst instincts, allowed us to avoid self-annihilation, and given us the ability to overcome whatever obstacles lay before us such that we could arrive at the present day. In my case, love, beginning with the concept of love I acquired from the monogamous examples available to me early on in life, has been the main driving force that's allowed me to persist through nearly three decades of such obstacles, and I believe that if humanity hones its understanding of love and works to apply it, we just might manage to overcome three millennia of obstacles and survive well into the future. I know of no other tool with the indescribably tremendous power and potential required to possibly achieve such a feat.

If these contributions and lessons gleaned from monogamous love seem to go unnoticed or unappreciated, it's likely for the same reason one may overlook a polar bear in a torrential snow storm. Such things can easily go unseen and unacknowledged due to the fact that they blend seamlessly into the chaotic ambiance of the world itself in spite of representing particular spots of warmth and life and softness amidst a frigid and uncaring backdrop of abrasive monotony. Monogamy blends in because for so many of us, it's treated as the default^{LXXIV} (10), a fact of life, a given, the omnipresent cosmic background radiation of our romantic universe. If something stands out, it's often by way of contrast with monogamy and monogamous paradigms, thereby robbing us of the ability to see the exceptional potential and diversity of monogamous love in its own right unless we are equipped with the proper tools and specifically looking to see it. However, it is most certainly there.

I hope everyone who reads this article is able to improve their lives and relationships in some way as a result. Perhaps these ideas can change how one communicates with partners or the kinds of attributes one is able to attach to certain types of relationships. Maybe it can provide new ways of thinking about love, even in the context of non-romantic relationships. Maybe it allows you to recognize and embrace the love you may feel for your friends, perhaps even allowing you to talk about it with them and name the feeling. It's even possible that it can change how one handles emotions, like jealousy, it may even have the potentially to unlock new emotional experiences, such as the complex, intense, and ambiguously euphoric maelstrom of sensation that is the simultaneous experience of jealousy and compersion in the context of a loving relationship. It could even be that as a result of new perspectives, one finds new ways to enrich the health of their associations with others, or endeavors to cultivate compersion in all of one's relationships, whether they be to friends, partners, strangers, or any of the people for whom the nature of one's connection may be too complex for labels, and other types of relationships, far beyond those listed.... First, allow me to redefine a concept from the beginning of the piece and correct a slight mistake:

Relationship: *A relationship can be thought of as an immaterial object that exists not just between any two people, but between any two objects, including sets of objects. This includes the relationships between an apple and orange, an individual and society, light and dark, autonomy*

^{LXXIV} “Few would disagree that monogamy is currently accepted in contemporary Western societies as not only normative but optimal (e.g., Conley, Moors, et al., 2012a)” (10).

and restriction, one relationship and another relationship, the relationship between a human and art, and of course, the relationship between one human and another, and even the relationship between a human and itself. It's possible to discuss the relationships between groups, such as the relationship between one group of humans and another group of humans, between humans and animals, humans and the world, between people who are queer and people who are straight, between monogamists and non-monogamists, or between monogamists and polyamorists. One can even refer to the relationships between overwhelming feeling and passive indifference, between love and hate, love and jealousy, jealousy and compersion, and between who we are now and who we may become. Of course, we can also talk about the relationship between people and the concept of love, the concept of relationships, or of certain types of relationships, or between our perceptions of those things and some examples of their reality. One may even go on and on for dozens of pages or thousands of words in doing so, if they're into that sort of thing, though admittedly, much like polyamory or monogamy, it's understandably not everyone's cup of tea.

By recognizing these forms of relationships and becoming increasingly aware of their existence, we gain the ability to interact with them consciously and take a more informed and deliberate role as parties to those relationships. We present ourselves with the opportunity to nurture each relationship and all parties to them, to facilitate their growth in positive directions, and to ensure that health and goodness are ever present goals and guiding principles in doing so. Consciousness of these connections unlocks new avenues for pleasure, more opportunities to experience happiness, and even chances to practice experiencing compersion.

The next time you have the chance, stop for a moment and gaze upon a vibrant bed of flowers. Whether their existence and health is due to their relationship to you and the labor of your own hands in planting and caring for them or whether its due to their relationships with the bees, the sun, the rain, and however many other things, or a combination of both, revel in their beauty. Rejoice at their life and thriving, look upon them lovingly, and look upon all else that allows them to thrive with joy and compersive appreciation, and revere all the things and vast networks of relationships that make such vividness and wonder bloom. Strive to do the same with every other aspect of your world that enriches it and brings warmth and delight to your life; honor whatever else allows those aspects of your world to thrive and to be. Learn to see love in all its myriad shapes and presentations, or at least as many as possible, and never doubt its presence and its role in making the world go around. Stop to smell the roses and appreciate their scent and everything beyond their petals that makes their fragrance so sweet, and never doubt that the world is filled with love....

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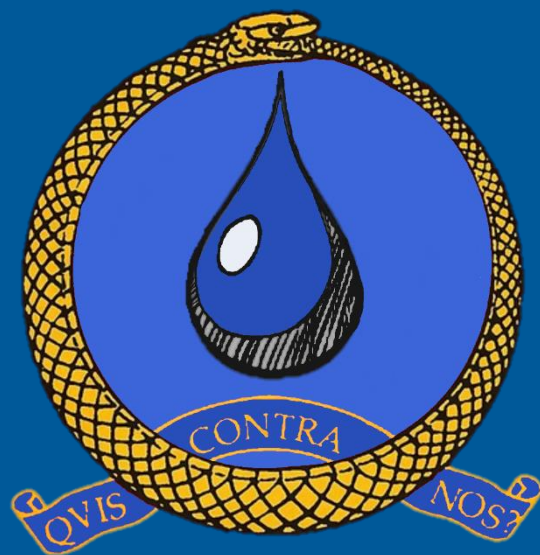
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