2023

Attachment Styles and the Impact of Extradyadic Behaviors in Polyamorous Relationships

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Recommended Citation

ATTACHMENT STYLES AND THE IMPACT OF EXTRADYADIC BEHAVIORS IN
POLYAMOROUS RELATIONSHIPS

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of

Antioch University New England

In Partial Fulfillment for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

by

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November 2023

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This dissertation, by Noah Corey, has
been approved by the committee members signed below
who recommend that it be accepted by the faculty of
Antioch University New England
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

ATTACHMENT STYLES AND THE IMPACT OF EXTRADYADIC BEHAVIORS IN
POLYAMOROUS RELATIONSHIPS

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This study examines the emotional experience of extradyadic behavior (EDB) in polyamorous
relationships through an attachment lens. Estimated prevalence rates suggest that one in nine
people in the United States have engaged in polyamory at some point in their life (Moors et al.,
2021). Attachment theory addresses with anxiety and separation in relationships, feelings likely
aroused by extradyadic behavior, yet it has been minimally applied to this population (Moors et
al., 2015, 2019). The current study utilized a phenomenological approach where eight
participants were interviewed, examining the emotional experience of EDB in polyamorous
relationships through an attachment lens. The study assessed each person's adult attachment
styles, by administering an Experiences in Close Relationships-Short Form (ECR-S) measure,
and conducting a semi-structed interview of the participants' experiences of EDB. The results
suggested that those with an anxious-preoccupied attachment style expressed more avoidance
when discussing their romantic relationships compared to other attachment styles. Additionally,
individuals with fearful-avoidant attachment styles may have a decreased tolerance for
ambivalence as compared to other attachment styles. The results also suggest that individuals in
polyamorous relationships have increased capacity for increased open communication, tolerating
ambivalence within relationships, and for developing a differentiated sense of self. Finally,
results suggested there is a large role of society and internalized monogamous views that

influence individuals' experiences of polyamory. This research could be a reference for future

research with more participants, and further inform clinical work with polyamorous clients. This

dissertation is available in open access at AURA (https://aura.antioch.edu) and OhioLINK ETD

Center (https://etd.ohiolink.edu).

Keywords: extradyadic behavior, polyamory, attachment

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Although exact prevalence rates of polyamory are unknown, Moors et al. (2021) sampled

3,438 single adults to estimate prevalence rates, and found that one in six people (16.8%)

expressed a desire to engage in a polyamory, one out of nine people (10.7%) have engaged in

polyamory at some point in their life, and one out of 15 people (6.5%) reported knowing

someone who has or is currently in a polyamorous relationship. These estimated prevalence rates

demonstrate the popularity of polyamory. Despite its frequency, there is minimal research

pertaining to polyamorous individuals' experiences with Extradyadic Behavior (EDB), which is

a defining feature of this relationship style; and polyamorous individuals are incorrectly grouped

with the larger consensual non monogamous group (Balzarini et al., 2017). Attachment theory

conceptualizes separation and anxiety in relationships, experiences likely precipitated by EDB

(Moors et al., 2015; Moors et al., 2019). I argue for the need to explore polyamorous individuals'

emotional experiences of their partners' EDB from an attachment theory perspective. This study

has met this objective by conducting a qualitative analysis examining eight polyamorous

individuals' emotional responses to EDB. Their experiences of EDB were identified by an EDB

measure, then assessed by comparing themes related to emotional experience derived from a

semi-structured interview to the results of an attachment self-assessment. This research is

intended to add to the scant literature on polyamorous individuals, and contribute a deeper

understanding of their experience, serving as a reference for practitioners to better work with this

population in psychotherapy.

EDB is one's expression of romantic or sexual behaviors with someone outside of their

relationship and should be understood along a continuum (Rodriguez et al., 2018). EDB refers to

both physical and emotional intimacy, various acts of deceit, including both in-person and virtual

involvement (Rodriguez, 2018). There are many different forms of physical and emotional intimacy. Examples of physical intimacy include hugging, kissing, cuddling, sex, among many others, whereas emotional intimacy includes investing emotional energy into someone. While EDB is not synonymous with cheating or infidelity, it can be perceived as such if it occurs in a relationship in which individuals have established exclusivity in their romantic relationship (i.e., monogamy). EDB is likely to be experienced as infidelity in monogamous relationships, which continues to be the most common relationship style in the United States (Balzarini et al., 2017). Perhaps for this reason, relationship infidelity continues to be one of the most complex issues faced in couples' therapy today (Blow & Hartnett, 2005). Notwithstanding, if there is no agreement of exclusivity, or if there is an agreement to have multiple partners, such as in polyamory, then EDB is consensual.

While monogamy is still the most common relationship arrangement in the United States polyamorous relationships are also prevalent. A study from Weitzman (2006) found that there are more than half a million open, polyamorous families in the United States. Estimates from internet samples conducted by Rubin et al. (2014) state that approximately 4–5% of people in the Unite States are involved in some form of consensual non-monogamous relationship. Polyamory is the relationship practice in which individuals agree to having intimate, romantic relationships with multiple people (Balzarini et al., 2017). An essential quality of polyamory is that there is consent from all members involved (Graham, 2014), and therefore EDB cannot be defined as infidelity. Therefore, consensual EDB is a fundamental component of polyamorous relationships.

There are a variety of intimate involvement styles practiced in polyamory (Balzarini et al., 2017). Most polyamorous relationships, however, consist of one primary relationship and one or more secondary relationships (Balzarini et al., 2017; Veaux, 2020). The focus on having

multiple romantic and sexual commitments with multiple individuals differentiates polyamory from other forms of Consensual Non-Monogamous (CNM) relationships, such as swinging or open relationships because forming committed romantic relationships with multiple partners is different than having brief relationships or casual sexual relationships with others outside of one's primary relationship (Balzarini et al. 2017). As attachment theory postulates experiences of separation and anxiety in relationships, feelings likely precipitated by EDB, this study will explore individuals' emotional experience of EDB within polyamorous relationships from an attachment perspective.

Statement of the Problem

There is little research about polyamory specifically (Graham, 2014). Much of the research has been conducted on CNM, which is a larger category that polyamory is often collapsed into (Balzarini et al., 2017). Results from the CNM population can be useful, as it is the most abundant research remotely pertaining to polyamory. One must be careful, however, not to generalize results to polyamorous individuals as these sample populations contain members who identify as swingers or as having open relationships, which is distinctly different from polyamory because, as I previously noted, these consist of brief or casual sexual relationships with others rather than multiple committed relationships.

Attachment theory has also only been minimally applied to polyamory and CNM. Research from Moors et al. (2019) examined if attachment influenced the relational functioning in concurrent polyamorous relationships. Results indicated that partners often exhibited the same attachment style, and high levels of anxiety and avoidance were associated with decreased relationship satisfaction. Moors et al. (2015), examined how attachment style influences attitudes towards, and willingness to engage in CNM. Results indicated that avoidance predicted increased

support and willingness to engage in CNM, and anxiety predicted negative attitudes with CNM. Notwithstanding, attachment security predicted involvement in CNM.

In summary there appears to be no, or very few, studies examining the emotional experience of EDB in polyamorous relationships. Attachment theory has only been applied broadly to examine relationship quality among polyamorous individuals (Moors et al., 2019); and then to examine attitudes towards and actual engagement in CNM relationships (Moors et al., 2015). As researchers define and clarify the basic structures of polyamory there is a need to examine the unique emotional experience of those involved in polyamorous relationships in the hopes of gaining a deeper understanding of and increased sensitivity to polyamorous individuals' experiences (Kisler & Lock, 2019).

The current research examines the impact of EDB, a fundamental component of polyamory, on participants using an attachment lens. Participants' emotional experience of EDB was examined through a qualitative analysis of participants' perspectives. Given the limited research on polyamory, specifically in relation to the emotional experience of EDB, qualitative research is appropriate to gather preliminary data. The data uncovered in this research may be beneficial in aiming to offer couples' therapists a frame as they work with polyamorous couples struggling with challenging feelings associated with EDB. This research could also serve as a point of reference for future research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory was initially developed from the joint work of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth (1991). Bowlby drew on concepts from ethology, cybernetics, information processing, developmental psychology, and psychoanalysis to identify the basic components of the theory (Bretherton, 1995). Mary Ainsworth used innovative methodology that made it possible to empirically test Bowlby's theories and then build upon them (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bretherton, 1995). The theory examines how early relationships with early caregivers influence the development of an internal working model (IWM) that influences an individual's relationships going forward (Bowlby, 1973). An IWM is a cognitive structure that holds self-other mental representations, organizes cognition, affect, and behavior that people use for understanding the world for the remainder of their lives (Bowlby, 1969, 1973).

This theory of personality development came from examining infant–caregiver relationships, specifically how infants dealt with separation from their caregivers, otherwise known as the strange situation procedure (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). The primary caregiver is identified as the infant's first attachment figure; they serve as a secure base that an infant can use to explore the world (Ainsworth & Wittig, 1969). The level of security an infant feels is based on the primary caregivers' sensitivity to infant signals (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Based on the infant's reactions when the primary caregiver leaves and returns, the infant tends to fall into one of four categories. The four infant attachment styles identified are secure, insecure-ambivalent, insecure-avoidant (Ainsworth et al., 1978), and disorganized/disoriented (Main & Solomon, 1986).

Attachment theory has also been successfully expanded to adult relationships with Main et al. (1985) who examined attachment responses during infancy, and again at age five, along with their parent(s) using the adult attachment interview (AAI). Results showed consistent attachment styles across infants, children, and some of their parents, demonstrating the influence of attachment across the lifespan. The AAI assessed parental attachment through examining patterns of language, and mental structures of self and others, specifically feelings, behavior, attention, memory, and cognition, thereby identifying attachment as an organizing framework across the lifespan (Main et al., 1985). As people age, adult romantic relationships, mentors, and close friends can replace attachment relationships with early caregivers (Siegal, 2012). The IWM, or the cognitive structure for relationships, developed from early attachment relationships continues to influence a person's relationships with themselves and others (Bowlby 1969, 1973).

It should be noted that although early attachment and adult attachment hold many similarities, they are not always derived from the same literature base (Roisman, 2009). Adult attachment as developed by Bowlby, Ainsworth, and Main, and measured through the AAI is derived from a developmental object-relational perspective (Roisman, 2009). Adult attachment proposed by Hazan and Shaver (1987), is derived from the social-personality literature and assessed through self-report of attachment-related thoughts and feelings in adult relationships (Roisman, 2009). The distinct measures derived from these two literature bases are not always correlated, and researchers must select their measure in accordance with the focus of the research they are conducting (Roisman, 2009). Accordingly, this research focuses on adult attachment, proposed by Hazan and Shaver (1987), examining attachment along a continuum rather than categorical models. This framework describes the adult attachment style categories as secure, anxious-preoccupied, dismissive-avoidant, and fearful-avoidant (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

One can choose to examine all four adult attachment styles, or examine continua of anxiety and avoidance (Bartholomew & Horowitz 1991; Brennan et al., 1998). Securely attached adults have diminished levels of anxiety and avoidance, which is to say that they are content being close and intimate with their romantic partners without fear of being abandoned (Allen & Baucom, 2006). Attachment anxiety refers to worry of abandonment or that their partner will not be available when needed, increasing desires for extreme closeness and interdependency; anxious-preoccupied individuals tend to have high levels of anxiety (Allen & Baucom, 2006). Attachment avoidance refers to discomfort with intimacy, leading individuals to avoid close relationships, or dismiss the quality of the relationship; dismissive-avoidant individuals have high levels of avoidance (Allen & Baucom, 2006). Fearful-avoidant individuals experience both high levels of anxiety as well as avoidance; they experience anxiety about their relationship and will avoid opening up to romantic partners, to protect themselves against rejection (Allen & Baucom, 2006).

Love and intimacy in both child and adult romantic attachment relationships involve many of the same components. They include "eye contact, holding, kissing, touching, caressing, smiling, crying, clinging, a desire to be comforted by the relationship partner when distressed, experiences of anxiety, anger, and sorrow following separation and loss, and feelings of happiness and joy upon reunion" (Warach et al., 2019, p. 4). Similar to child attachment, adult attachment relationships serve as an important source of support, stability, and safety for the individuals involved (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Therefore, when an individual's partner engages in EDB, it likely activates an individual's attachment behavioral system; as a result, attachment theory provides a helpful framework for viewing responses to these behaviors.

Polyamory and Attachment

Attachment theory has been minimally applied to polyamory to examine relationship quality. A study from Moors et al. (2019) applied attachment theory to polyamory in two ways. First, they examined whether people in polyamorous relationships had the same attachment styles with each of their partners. Next, they examined the extent to which the attachment relationship impacts relationship quality within a specific relationship and across concurrent relationships. The study consisted of 357 community participants engaged in polyamorous relationships with at least two simultaneous romantic partners. They found that participants exhibited similar attachment styles to each of their partners. They also found that the quality of one relationship did not affect the other relationships. Finally, they found that relationship specific attachment orientations predicted relationship specific outcomes as high levels of anxiety and avoidance were associated with diminished relationship satisfaction (Moors et al., 2019).

There were a few concerns with the study from Moors et al. (2019). First, they recruited participants from an online community founded around the topic of polyamory, so it is possible that individuals involved in this community may have had a well-integrated identity and positive sense of self in relation to polyamory. As a result, their findings may not apply to individuals struggling with this identity, which could be a considerable amount of the population as polyamory is still considered a minority relationship orientation and thus stigmatized. Next, while the article uses an attachment theory framework to explore how partners generally relate to each other, and measure current relationship satisfaction, it only examined the larger feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, minimizing exploration of other emotional experiences. Lastly,

they examined relationship satisfaction using self-report scales, thereby minimizing the opportunity for exploration of emotional experience.

Attachment and Consensual Non-Monogamy

Attachment has minimally been applied to CNM relationships, specifically referencing EDB. Moors et al. (2015) conducted a two-part study. The first part examined how attachment style influences attitudes towards CNM, and a willingness to engage in CNM among monogamous participants who had never engaged in CNM. The second part examined if individual attachment styles predicted "actual" engagement in CNM participants. The first part of the study consisted of 1,281 heterosexual, monogamous participants. Results showed that among the monogamous group, avoidant individuals expressed more support for, and a greater willingness to engage in, CNM. Individuals higher in anxiety held negative attitudes toward CNM. The second part of the study consisted of 196 CNM participants and 1,281 monogamous participants serving as a comparison group. Participants lower in avoidance were more likely to be in CNM relationships over monogamous relationships, however anxiety was unrelated to CNM or monogamous relationship status.

The research from Moors et al. (2015) is compelling as it demonstrates that attachment influences support for, and actual engagement in, CNM. Results from part one of the study indicated that attachment avoidance increases expressed support for CNM, while attachment anxiety decreases expressed support for CNM; part two demonstrated that involvement in CNM is more indicative of low avoidance (i.e., a secure attachment style). A major limitation with the results from part one, however, is that the authors examined attitudes toward CNM in a monogamous sample, thereby excluding the emotional experience of those involved in these relationships and limiting generalizability. The authors appeared to only use the CNM sample to

determine if certain attachment styles were more likely to predict CNM involvement in study two. However, these results can only be generalized to CNM individuals, including swingers and those in open relationships, rather than the polyamorous population more specifically.

Research from Mogilski et al. (2019) again examined emotional reactions to EDB in CNM and monogamous relationships. The researchers examined 529 monogamous, and 159 CNM individuals' emotional responses to participants imagining their partner engaging in EDB, involving two different scenarios in which the partner did and did not consent to the EDB. CNM participants reported less emotional jealousy than monogamous individuals; however, these individuals reported more cognitive jealousy, meaning they spent more time thinking jealous thoughts, and potentially rationalizing them. The researchers found that CNM individuals reported that it was more important that their primary partner did not engage in extra-pair involvement, or EDB, rather than their partner from their secondary relationship (Mogilski et al., 2019).

Mogilski et al. (2019) did expand upon the specific emotional experience of jealousy and compersion in relation to EDB. Compersion is the "feeling of warmth, satisfaction, joy, or pleasure from knowing/imagining that your partner is emotionally or sexually involved with another person" (Mogilski et al., 2019, p. 1813). They examined both emotional and cognitive jealousy in participants, as well as compersion. The authors, however, provide a limited picture into this emotional experience as they did not examine emotional experiences like ambivalence, hurt, contempt, and confusion. Secondly, jealousy and compersion were examined after being asked to imagine a hypothetical situation in which their partner engaged in EDB; therefore, these results may be a reflection of how the participants think they should feel, rather than how they actually feel. Another concern with this study is that the participants were identified as CNM

including but not limited to polyamory, those in open relationships, and swinging. Therefore, the results can only loosely be applied to polyamorous individuals, as the study involved participants from several groups that fall under CNM. It is possible that polyamorous participants would have a different reaction than those who involved in swinging or open relationships in which EDB is often limited to brief encounters of physical intimacy without emotional intimacy (Balzarini et al., 2017), as the presence of emotional intimacy may evoke a stronger emotional reaction to EDB.

There have been several studies that explored the relationship between attachment and CNM, though these studies do not focus explicitly on polyamorous individuals (Mogilski et al., 2019; Moors et al., 2015). While one study has focused on how attachment influences relationship quality in polyamorous individuals, it did not examine EDB (Moors et al., 2019). Research from Moors et al. (2015) examined attachment in relation to attitudes towards a perceived actual involvement in CNM; however, they examined emotional experiences of monogamous participants, and the larger CNM population, limiting generalizability to exclusively polyamorous individuals. Mogilski et al. (2019) explored and expanded upon the emotional experience of CNM, but again limiting generalizability, and only exploring hypothetical experiences of EDB among CNM participants. Lastly, research from Moors et al. (2019), did not directly address one's experience of EDB, only the larger relationship experience, limiting a broader exploration of emotional experience, falling outside of satisfied or unsatisfied experience, and not explicitly addressing the experience of EDB.

Research Questions

Using a qualitative, namely phenomenological approach, this study addresses literature gaps in the following ways. First by explicitly examining EDB in polyamorous individuals.

Then, by exploring the range of emotional experiences and attachment styles of participants who have lived experienced with EDB. Last, by exploring this emotional experience in those who exclusively practice polyamory. Specifically, this study addresses the following two questions. First, what is the emotional experience of someone in a polyamorous relationship whose partner(s) has engaged in EDB? Second, does a person's attachment style influence their emotional experience of EDB?

CHAPTER III: METHOD

Rationale for Research Methods

The current study follows a qualitative research approach for several reasons. First, because minimal research has been conducted on those who practice polyamory, the standard first step would be to engage in qualitative analysis in order to explore this experience and hear from previously silenced voices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Second, phenomenological research attempts to interpret a phenomenon in its natural setting by making sense of the phenomena through uncovering the meaning that individuals ascribe to that experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research seeks to understand the experience of those who are involved (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and qualitative research methods will enabled me to explore the participants' experiences in more depth than quantitative methods. Finally, my world view is more closely aligned with that of qualitative analysis—precisely, the emphasis on understanding, subjectivity, and context rather than measurement. Accordingly, participants will have the space to identify a complex, explorative, detailed, and holistic account of their experience if they wish. In providing this opportunity to participants, this research will give voice to polyamorous individuals, a population that has been frequently oppressed within society. While there are several examples of stigma that are experienced by polyamorous individuals, some of these include: (a) negative bias from other individuals (Weber, 2002); (b) bias and/or lack of knowledge about polyamory from therapists (Kolmes & Witherspoon, 2012; Witherspoon & Wilson, 2013); and (c) assumptions of pathology for being polyamorous (Kolmes & Witherspoon, 2012). It should be noted, while this research incorporates quantitative measures, they were used to generate descriptive data rather than inferential data, therefore qualifying the study as qualitative.

Social Constructivism

The current study was guided by the social constructivist paradigm, which rests on the belief that people develop their own perspective of their world that is developed through interactions with others, as well as through historical, cultural, and social norms present in someone's life (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), under this paradigm, an understanding of people's realities is developed through dynamic interaction. This study followed the social constructivist worldview for several reasons. It followed the qualitative analysis approach in that it values the meanings people make of their world, and it sought an understanding of phenomena in its context. It helped me answer the research question by allowing for dynamic interaction in which the participant can describe and explain their reality. It allowed participants from a marginalized social group to define and explain their own social realities, rather than using constructs predicted by others who do not identify as such. Finally, it aligned with several of my world views as the researcher.

Polyamory is a construct suited for study through the social constructivist paradigm as it is a relationship practice that falls outside typical relationship norms and values, and so it is the individuals who identify with this relationship style, not those outside, who should define the meaning of this experience. Those who attempt to define this experience, living outside it, may hold implicit stigmatizing beliefs based on their biased perception of the relationship style that may be expressed in their construction of the relationship. Therefore, it seemed essential to adopt an interpretive framework that allows participants to define and describe their own experiences.

Phenomenology

Phenomenological research approaches involve the study of the participant's words to capture the essence of the experience of the phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Essence can be

understood "as a grasp of the very nature of things," or the "what" or "how" of the thing (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 121). Phenomenological research is concerned with developing a description of the event rather than determining why it occurred (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology was appropriate for this study because the primary intent was to describe the essence of an experience, and the goal of this study was to describe the essence of how people in polyamorous relationships experience their partner's EDB. Therefore, it is the most suitable qualitative research methodology to answer the research questions. It was also chosen because there is no research into these identified experiences, so there is no knowledge of what this phenomenon is. Therefore, it was appropriate to conduct this form of research to describe an experience before attempting to determine why it is happening. Finally, phenomenological research aligns with my world views and assumptions as the researcher.

Participants

Sampling and Recruitment

I interviewed a sample of eight active polyamorous individuals who have previously experienced EDB, asking about their present and previous relationships. The study used snowball sampling by reaching out to the administrator of a social media page, *Polyphiliablog*. Potential participants who expressed interest were administered a subset of questions (questions 1–4) from the "Singles in America" survey. This subset of questions was previously used by Moors et al. (2021) to create an index of participants to assess previous engagement in polyamory, their desire, and their attitudes towards the experience. For the purposes of this study, the survey was primarily used to assess previous and current involvement in polyamory relationships.

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest phenomenological sample sizes range from three to 15 participants. This research had a smaller sample because of the volume and quality of data gathered from each participant, allowing me to maintain a deeper focus on the data. It was essential that each participant had space to describe what they experienced and how they experienced it, and that this information was comprehensively analyzed. This practice was especially important given the intersecting identities of the participants that were interwoven into their experience. As such, more time and space was given to participants to explore and expand upon how these identities impact their experience of EDB in their polyamorous relationships, although the maximum interview length was 60 minutes. The study had eight participants with a variety of attachment styles, adhering to the sample size range necessary for phenomenological research.

Measures

Adult Attachment Measure

I collected data through a brief self-report attachment survey and semi-structured interviews via Zoom. First, participants were administered the Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory-Short Version (ECR-S). This self-report measure was modified from a larger 36-item Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory (ECR) to a 12-item attachment assessment. The short form was administered to reduce the procedural completion time. The ECR-S uses a 7-point Likert scale, 1 being "disagree strongly," and 7 being "agree strongly," measuring levels of attachment avoidance and anxiety towards romantic partners, where participants rate the degree to which each statement describes their feelings towards others in close relationships. The results show to what extent the individual expresses attachment avoidance and anxiety in their close relationships.

Wei et al. (2007) developed the ECR-S and conducted a six-part study, to examine the reliability, validity, and factor structure when administered as a single assessment across six samples of undergraduates. Their results indicated the ECR-S maintained similar psychometric properties to the original scale, having a stable factor structure, with appropriate internal consistency measured through Cronbach's alpha. The values ranged from acceptable to good for both avoidance (α =.78 to .88) and anxiety (α =.77 to .86) with samples ranging from N = 65 to N = 851. The test-retest reliability suggested acceptable reliability for avoidance (r = .83) and anxiety (r) = .80) with a sample of N = 122.

Measure of Extradyadic Behavior

To my knowledge, currently, there appears to be no qualitative assessment for EDB. Therefore, I borrowed from Rodriguez et al. (2018) Outside A Relationship Scale (OARS) to both conceptualize and identify experiences classified as EDB . The OARS served as a screener for participants, and a tool to identify explicit experience of EDB. Individuals who endorsed EDB were used for this study; those who did not endorse experiences of EDB were not used within this study. Researchers defined and measured EDB, according to a range of face-valid behaviors people may engage in during the attraction and relationship-initiation process (Rodriguez et al., 2018). These include both in-person and virtual interactions including behaviors beyond those explicitly sexual or emotional including deceptive behaviors, and deceitful use of technology, such as "To what extent have you fantasized about someone other than your partner?" and "To what extent have you deleted phone calls, and messages, to keep your partner from seeing them?" Participants completed an OARS for themselves, and from their previous partner's perspective. At this time, no reliability or validity statistics have been reported on the OARS (Rodriguez et al., 2018).

Semi-Structured Interview

After completing the OARS, participants who identified experiences of EDB were given a semi-structured interview, first asking basic demographic information, age, gender, ethnicity, and then asking questions inquiring about what and how they experienced their partner engaging in EDB, and factors that influenced their experience (see Appendix A). This interview was guided by several predetermined questions and included space to further explore any unexpected experiences that arose during the interview process. Implementing the semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to inquire about specific components of each individual's emotional experience of EDB, including those that were unexpected, and could not be attained through the OARS or attachment survey.

Methods of Analysis

Phenomenological research involves capturing the essence of an individual's experience (Smith et al., 2009). When conducting Phenomenological research, a specific data analysis model must be implemented (Creswell & Poth, 2018), therefore Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyze this data (Smith, et al., 2009). According to Smith and colleagues, IPA seeks a comprehensive analysis of a lived experience. This model attempts to capture a detailed understanding of how a person makes sense and meaning out of their experience. However, access to this experience is limited to what the participant shares with the researcher (Smith, et al., 2009). The researcher then interprets the participant's interpretation of their experience and supports their interpretation with extracts from the text. Finally, IPA follows an iterative and inductive process of analysis (Smith, et al., 2009). IPA was selected for this study because this research is primarily concerned with how individuals make meaning or sense of a particular experience.

According to Smith et al. (2009) the steps of IPA are as follows: (a) the researcher must complete a detailed reading and rereading of the interview transcripts; (b) an initial noting is required, which is an exploratory analysis of the semantic content to produce a detailed and comprehensive set of notes and comments about the data; (c) utilizing these notes, the researcher completes the next step in developing emergent themes; (d) the researcher then searches for connections across emergent themes; (e) the researcher repeats the previous steps on each subsequent transcript; and (f) following the coding of all cases, the final phase requires looking for patterns across cases. A flexible application of these steps is expected as it should be based on how best to answer the research question (Smith et al., 2009). These steps were utilized in the current data analysis.

Validity and Reliability

In all qualitative research, especially in research with a single investigator, the researcher must take care in implementing specific practices for ensuring the validity and reliability of their research methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the context of this research, validity refers to how accurately the researcher's account reflects the participants' lived experience of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Validity strategies are those that address the accuracy and therefore credibility of the research and refer to the inferences derived from the data rather than the data itself. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest engaging in at least two validation practices; however, this research proposes three strategies, two primarily address the researcher's role, and the third involved the participants. Strategies for addressing validity were implemented throughout the research, rather than post-hoc, as recommended by the literature.

Validity

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest implementing other measures to corroborate the data. I used attachment measures to gather corroborating evidence to compare against themes derived from the semi-structured interview, to either confirm or disconfirm the influence of attachment. Essentially if themes derived from the semi-structured interviews did not correspond to the participants' attachment styles, it could be assumed that the participant's attachment style did not influence their response to their partners' EDB, the semi-structured interview did not capture the intended phenomenon, or the themes derived from the data were invalid. As such the participants' attachment styles were recorded and included in the presentation of the data.

The next verification method included a clarification of researcher bias through reflexivity. Below are my disclosed values, beliefs, prejudices, and experiences they bring to the research. The intent of this is to "illuminate the dark matter" and provide the reader with necessary background to understand the position from which the researcher analyzes the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In order to adhere to this validation method, the researcher included several notes exploring, writing, and disclosing to the audience how connections to past experiences and perspectives emerged from the data and influenced analysis. From this, researchers and participants can make their own inferences about how these experiences and perspectives have influenced data analysis.

Reliability

Reliability is also essential for establishing rigor in qualitative research designs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). First, reliability was enhanced through the use of high-quality recordings and transcriptions for analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Second, an additional coder was employed to analyze transcript data. Therefore, in this context, reliability primarily refers to the intercoder

agreement, or, simply put, whether both coders developed the same or similar themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I employed the following method to ensure intercoder reliability. First, both coders used the same software program for coding, so results could be shared easily (Creswell & Poth, 2018). We then met and shared this list of codes to develop a codebook (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To develop the codebook after coding the first two transcripts separately, the second coder and I met, assessed the codes, names, and text segments, and combined the codes. This codebook contains the definition of each code and select text segments assigned to that code. The code book served as a collection of the most common codes rather than an exhaustive list, and as the analysis proceeded, more codes were added (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I revised and finalized each code to be used with future coding. Next, the second coder and I applied the codebook to additional transcripts, and these codes were compared across the researchers. Following this, we then assessed the intercoder agreement between the researchers, across all the coded data. We had developed similar themes upon analysis and reached agreement around any differences within coding.

Researcher's Perspectives and Assumptions

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), in qualitative analysis, the researcher's perspective and assumptions will inherently inform the research. As such, they must explicitly state their world view and assumptions as qualifiers for the following research. I identify as a White, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied, man. I was raised Roman Catholic and presently identify as agnostic. I grew up in a two-parent monogamous household. My cultural background is defined as English, German, and French Canadian. I was raised in, and continue to be in, the working-class income level. I am presently in an open relationship. Based on the definition of

EDB provided above, I have engaged in consensual EDB in a relationship and found it to be a positive experience. I earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from a state university, and have earned a doctoral degree (PsyD) in Clinical Psychology. I recognize, as a result of systemic inequality present in the United States, these identity factors grant me privileges that those individuals with marginalized, racial, gender, sexual and socioeconomic identities, along with other marginalized identities, are not granted.

Based on my review of prior research, I expected to primarily see securely attached participants. I anticipated insecure participants would express more avoidance, rather than preoccupation, when relating to their partners. Finally, I anticipated that participants would be eager to present themselves in a positive light. After noticing biases associated with the outcome of the study, I was able to hold this within awareness during analysis and did my best not to allow them to influence on the analysis.

Author's Worldview

I believe that people are inherently meaning-making creatures. They construct their realities, which develop from interactions with others and are influenced by historical, cultural, and social norms. As a result, everyone holds their subjective reality. I also believe that people cannot be understood outside of their context. I believe that one can only come to understand another's reality through dynamic interaction with that person, and knowledge of another's reality is limited to what that person shares. I hold a social justice perspective, such that I believe that individuals in the United States are subject to systems of oppression that privilege certain individual members over others, with the most privileged group being White, heterosexual, non-disabled, cisgender men. The systems of oppression are more covert than they were in the

past. Finally, because these systems are rooted so deeply in society, and in our conditioning, one must actively work against them throughout the lifespan to not contribute to them.

I lean towards a relational psychoanalytic approach to psychotherapy, meaning that I subscribe to psychoanalytic schools of thought including but not limited to interpersonal, object relations, and self-psychology. Relational theory adds that the mind develops from these early relationships, and psychopathology is the result of concerns in interpersonal relationships (Mitchell, 1988). Within each interaction, the unit of analysis is the relational matrix that forms from the interaction of both parties' subjectivities in the here-and-now (Mitchell, 1988). Within this field, enactments from the past are reenacted, and both parties construct new meaning of this experience. Accordingly, there is no such thing as an objective observer, only the co-constructed reality between those involved.

Ethics, Trustworthiness, and Rigor

Researchers have an ethical duty to protect their participants from both harm and inappropriate disclosure during the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given that polyamorous individuals often face discrimination and may hold other identities that have been discriminated against, special care has been taken to ensure protection of this population, through adopting equitable power dynamics between the researcher and participants throughout the research process, as much as possible. The following are ethical concerns that were addressed throughout the stages of research including prior to conducting the study, as well as throughout data collection, data analysis, data reporting, and publishing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Ethics approval was obtained from Antioch University New England's Institutional Review Board (IRB). This ensured the proposed practices met the university research requirements for respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Interview sites were reviewed by the researcher to ensure the locations did not hold a vested interest in the results of the study, to ensure safety for participants, and to eliminate unapproved disclosure.

Participants received a general description of the purpose of the study prior to beginning with the research. To limit pressure to participate, the description stated that participation in the study was completely voluntary. At the start of the data collection process, to reduce deception, participants were given an informed consent form detailing the purpose of the study, the research process, the purpose and use of the study data, and their anticipated participation in validity and reliability. This form included possible psychological distress that could result from discussing these experiences. It is possible that inquiring about, discussing their experience of EDB, and participation in the data analysis process, could cause psychological distress. Participants were also provided with information about where they could seek prolonged or immediate services in their area, following the completion of the study. After their participation in the initial data collection process, they were rewarded a $25.00 Amazon gift card for their participation in the study. To protect participants' confidentiality, during the data collection process, participants' data and self-report measures were stored in a secure location and will be maintained for up to seven years after the completion of the research. Additionally, to protect the participants' privacy, the researcher developed composite profiles for each individual.

Within the data analysis process, special care was taken to ensure integrity in reporting findings openly and honestly, and to protect participants' information. Given the intimate nature of the topic and required time in which the participant and myself spent with each other, it was possible for me to side or over-identify with the participants in reporting their findings. To avoid

this concern, specifically within the validation process, despite possible disagreement, I reported multiple perspectives, as well as contrary findings.

In the process of reporting the data, to avoid falsifying, data, findings, and conclusions, I reported results honestly. In the presentation of the results, no identifying information was presented. Given that this research has been developed from an underserved group, and has been conducted for their benefit, I have taken care to present the results in lay terms, so this information is widely accessible to those in need. Finally in publishing the study, to ensure equal access to their information, participants were offered the opportunity to see a copy of the dissertation.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Participants

For this study, I sampled polyamorous individuals, who endorsed previously or presently engaging in physical or emotional intimacy with more than one partner and were living in the United States or England. Participants were initially recruited, from the *Polyphiliablog* page on Instagram, based on their responses to the recruitment message, expressing interest. Of the 34 participants contacted, 17 individuals did not respond after initial contact, and five individuals who expressed interest in the study were excluded due to living in countries outside the United States and England. Prior research has demonstrated that while romantic love differs within different geographic areas, there have been studies that utilized United States and English participants within the studies (e.g., Biggs et al., 2012) due to similarities within Western notions of romantic love (Karandashev, 2015). During the screening process, only individuals who endorsed engaging in EDB could continue in the study. Given that all participants up to that point had endorsed EDB, no participants were excluded based on this criterion. Potential participants were sent a link containing the informed consent, the "Outside a Relationship Scale" (OARS) assessment, and the Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory-Short Version (ECR-S). The participants included in this study self-identified as polyamorous, reporting previous and current involvement in a polyamorous relationship through the OARS assessment. Following this, participants completed a semi-structured interview.

Eight participants were recruited for this study. Of the eight participants, four identified as female, two as male, one as gender fluid, and one as woman/non-binary/gender queer. All participants were White, and two identified with a British ethnicity. All participants identified as polyamorous. Three participants identified as heterosexual, three identified as bi-sexual, and two

identified as queer. Last, one participant reported having "some college" experience, two reported they were pursuing an undergraduate degree, two reported having an undergraduate degree, two were pursuing graduate degrees, and one reported having a graduate degree.

Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were held via Zoom during an agreed upon appointment time. Interviews lasted between 40–60 minutes. Interviews were recorded through Zoom, then downloaded with the text transcription. I then individually reviewed each interview and transcript to ensure transcription accuracy. Upon feedback from the third participant, and to more accurately capture participants' experiences when their partners were engaging in EDB, question three in the semi-structured interview was amended to ask interviewees to recall a specific previous occurrence in which their partner engaged in EDB. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interview, this question was not changed, but rather adapted to hone in on a specific experience (i.e., asking individuals to describe the exact setting, where they were, what they were doing, what was around them, what were they thinking and feeling) in order to help participants better recall the feelings they experienced in that moment and have greater access to their affective experience at that time.

<div align="center">

Analysis

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I conducted analyses using IPA steps outlined by Smith et al. (2009). I wrote down their own personal experiences with EDB and polyamory before completing data analysis, to identify previous experiences that may influence data analysis. Next I transcribed interviews. Following this, I completed a detailed reading of each interview transcript, making notes about the data, and reflecting their exploratory analysis of the interviews. Notes included descriptive patterns, interpretations, and process notes from both the auditor and myself. From these notes I identified

themes reflecting the psychological essence of the participant's experiences. Emergent themes were then organized into a five-column chart containing superordinate themes and sub-themes. Raw text segments were then analyzed to further highlight the emergent themes.

I took steps to adhere to previously described validation and reliability methods. I took several notes identifying how connections to past experiences and perspectives emerged from the data and influenced analysis. To ensure interrater reliability, me and the coder used the same software program for coding (i.e., TAMS Analyzer). After coding the first two interviews separately, the we met to assess the code names and text segments and compiled a list of common codes that were used to code the remaining interviews (see Appendix B). After coding the remaining six interviews, we met again to review interviews and assessed for inter-coder agreement between both. While there were minor differences in coded text segments, we both had consistent code types and volume for each interview.

Results

Attachment Analysis

The ECR-S was used to assess the participants' attachment styles in order to explore if there was an influence of attachment style on engagement in polyamory. Of the eight participants included in this study, the results showed that one individual endorsed having a secure attachment style, one individual endorsed having a dismissive-avoidant attachment style, three individuals endorsed having an anxious-preoccupied attachment style, and three individuals endorsed having a fearful-avoidant attachment style. The attachment styles were used to further understand how individuals may experience EDB, and though there were minimal differences based on attachment status within this sample, there are attachment-related observations that were notable within each of the themes.

Results showed all four attachment styles were present among participants, and the two highest frequencies of attachment style were anxious-preoccupied and fearful-avoidant attachment styles. Participants with an anxious-preoccupied attachment style demonstrated more avoidance of affective experiences within interviews than dismissive-avoidant, fearful-avoidant, and secure participants. The three participants who demonstrated an anxious-preoccupied attachment style had more avoidant codes combined within their transcripts (26), whereas the three individuals who were fearful-avoidant had fewer combined avoidant codes (10). Responses were coded avoidant, where avoidance was used around affective experiences, namely when participants appeared to use other experiences, beliefs, or values, to avoid directly discussing their underlying emotional experiences related to polyamory and EDB (see Appendix B for code book and definitions).

> P6: Yeah, you know, I'm aware of it. It stings a little, but it's not my place to think about it. I don't want to think about it. What you do in your private time is you, so long as you know when me and a partner together, then it is hopefully you know me and that partner is quality time. Then, sure, whatever you do outside of that cool, not my problem.

This information suggests that attachment style may not dictate who chooses to engage in polyamory. While there were a disproportionate number of preoccupied-anxious and fearful-avoidant individuals in this study, this sample size is not generalizable to represent all individuals who engage in polyamory. Though the results cannot be generalized to assess attachment styles of individuals who engage in polyamory, attachment style may influence the experience they have navigating polyamory and EDB.

Table 4.1

Experiential Themes Analysis

Superordinate Theme	Affective Experience	Emerging Awareness	Open Communication and Internal Processing	Social Influence
Sub Themes	More Feelings Envy Emotional Jealousy Physical Jealousy Stigma: Guilt/Shame	Avoidance Preoccupation Insecurity Insecure Relational Style Sexuality ENM Due to a Sense of Lacking	Open Communication Self-Reflection Differentiation Tolerance of Ambivalence Support of Polyamorous Needs Iterative Growth Polyamory Encourages Relational Development	Societal Stigma Deconstructing Societal Norms Family Expectations Gender Expectations Heteronormative Expectations Monogamous Expectations Familial Stigma Community Support Therapist Fluency

Experiential Themes

Five main themes emerged from the data: (a) affective experience, (b) emerging awareness, (c) open communication and internal processing, and (d) social influence (see Table 4.1). Each of these themes were made up of sub-themes that further identified the nuance of each participant's experience (see Appendix C for table of thematic excerpts).

Affective Experience

The first theme encompasses affective experiences felt by participants after their partners engaged in EDB with another individual, including feelings like jealousy, envy, guilt, shame, happiness, and excitement. Some participants highlighted the normalcy of affective experiences.

P1: I think that what happens, you know, when jealousy arises and it's, it's normal for it to arise in in polyamory or non-monogamy that's just a thing that is, it. It's not good. It's not bad it's just normal.

Several participants highlighted the desire to share the same experience as their partner(s).

P7: I felt very, not so much jealous or like upset, that she had that experience, but more like jealous that I didn't have that experience in my life.

Participants also reported having many different affective experiences.

P1: There's more frustration. There's more excitement. There's you know. There's more like you know electricity during sex. There's more of everything.

Participants identified experiencing ambivalent feelings simultaneously.

P8: But there's a lot of the time there's been a very mixed reaction. Most of me goes, "This is the best thing in the world," and I'm living my dream that you can sit down and talk to me and tell me about how excited you are about this new connection … On the other side, I think there's sometimes … I definitely get [an] insecure reaction, and maybe they're the same thing.

Participants also spoke to this experience of "more," in relation to the strength of their positive and negative affective experiences.

P1: Being polyamorous is like being the most in love, and also, the most heartbroken you've ever been at the same time all the time.

One participant commented on how their mix of affective experiences made it challenging to decipher what they were feeling.

P6: Yeah, this feeling of I'm going through a break up. I feel terrible. The world is crashing down, and at the same time, you know, last year I was having that, and I was falling in love at the same time I was falling head over heels for this person who was comforting me. And it is, and the worst thing I have felt for a while, because it is so, seasick. You don't know what to feel.

Participants identified their initial affective experiences, highlighting the strength and volume of conflicting affective experiences occurring simultaneously, and the difficulty in identifying their affective responses.

Emerging Awareness

The second theme, "emerging awareness," referred to underlying experiences, or beliefs driving individuals' affective experiences, that were not apparent at first but then became more apparent in time.

Participants commented on the experience of co-occurring, sometimes conflicting, affective experiences. As they described these experiences, the underlying cause appeared to be unclear at first, but became clear in time, after further reflection.

> P8: But I will definitely at times have a response where I go, "Oh, that makes me feel uncomfortable." And normally it is a reflection of something else I've already been feeling within that relationship.

> P4: I still experience jealousy, but I've been able to look at the root of it more often, and been able to avoid using it to control my actions and my partner's actions, so I've been able to sit with it. And I had jealousy over my other partner going on a first date last week, because I hadn't seen them for a week and a half, and I was able to dig down to, "I just missed them," and so I need to talk to them about seeing each other soon.

Participants noted how avoidance increased their affective response. Of note, one participant described how he tried to manage his initial reaction through avoidance and reflected on the outcome of the avoidance.

> P3: I think I was trying to push thoughts away when they became too concrete, or to present in my mind specifically around sexual activity between her and the person that I had not met did not know what he looked like … While I was well I was laying around, I remember at least one time sort of texting [partner's name] while she was on her date.

Underlying many participants' affective responses was insecurity within themselves, namely insecurity related to both emotional and physical intimacy.

> P1: Jealousy, like for myself, tended to look like insecurity. Like there's something, it's not like I don't trust [Primary Partner's name]. It's not that I don't trust someone, or I don't trust him, or anything like that. There's something within me that I actually had to resolve, and sit with … like as a human being when we feel a negative emotion it's natural to want to try to stop feeling it as quickly as you can.

Participants engaged in exploration of varying degrees, to uncover underlying causes and meaning of their affective experiences. They identified how time clarified conflicting affective experiences, and avoidance increased their affective responses. Last, many participants came to understand their affective responses, were often related to some insecurity with in themselves.

Internal Processing and Open Communication

Open Communication. The next theme, "open communication," refers to the ways in which participants learned to navigate their experience with their partners. Many participants identified the role of open communication in navigating their experiences.

> P8: I've learned the communication to be like, "Can we talk about this," or "Hey, I'm going on a date tonight. I don't know how this can make you feel, but I can talk about it." It's just great, just takes away all those worries.

Participants also identified how open communication helped them to explicitly define the relationships they want with each other.

> P2: There's been multiple times like along the journey of that evolving where, like both me and him, had to stop and evaluate like, are we okay with this like, how do we feel about this, do we want to like keep going further down this scale, or is that like not what

we want? So there have been like multiple checkpoints of having that thought or like that

conversation.

P3: Okay, so what if we talked about, you know what is and isn't okay, rather than just

set having a particular arbitrary line that was defined by sort of our expectations as

monogamous people.

Another participant reflected on a previous conflict with their partner, and how this experience

has changed over time, with changes they made in their relationship. This reflects the nature of

change within the process of polyamory.

P7: After the week that I went to visit him, like we, you know, had to talk through some

things, and, like, you know, just be like, "How did this go," and "How would we maybe

approach our communication differently next time?" But then, like, he just came to visit

me a couple of weeks ago and I called my girlfriend beforehand I was like, "Hey, you

know, like partner is coming this week. I just want to check in with you, because I know

it's been a thing for you in the past like is, you know, can I support you around this, or

how can I support you?" And she was like "Oh, no, I'm feeling totally fine about this,

like I think that's like, not an issue for me anymore." So, I feel like it's just getting, it's

improving for everyone, the longer that everyone's involved with it.

Participants used open communication to more effectively navigate these experiences with their

partners as it illuminated the explicit relationships they would like to have. Additionally, open

communication assisted others in identifying and discussing their interpersonal process and

communication styles, serving as a reference point for development throughout their

relationship.

Internal Processing. The next theme, "internal processing" refers to how participants learned to create shared stability with their partners. Participants also demonstrated the role self-reflection played in clarifying their internal experience and facilitating communication.

>P3: I think, that that has been one of the big lessons over the years that I''ve been practicing Polyamory is that one of the best things I can do for any relationship I'm in is look out for myself and make sure that I'm okay and be communicative about what I'm doing on that front, so that everyone understands here is what [partner's name] is doing to take care of himself. Because even if that leads to me spending less time with that person, you know they care about me. So the fact that I'm taking care of myself is good, and if they understand that that's what I'm doing, then they won't have time to come up with other narratives in their head about, you know, I'm clearly not important.

>P6: It does sting. We, as humans, are not immune to jealousy. I know I certainly am not. Yeah, I do get jealousy, fantasies and hot flushes and breakdowns. But I am learning to better deal with that now you know trying to unlearn all that unpicking of not every person is a threat really takes a while trying to unpack everything you know or have been taught. I think that has been one of the most challenging experiences.

Participants' capacity to differentiate, mainly to identify their experience in relation to their partners, served as an anchor for navigating challenging emotional experiences.

>P7: If one of my partners is having an emotional connection with someone else. I don't really feel insecure about that because I feel stable about my ability to give that.

>P8: I want you to read up about non-monogamy. I want you to learn about polyamory and to decide. You don't need to do it, you don't need to decide that that's what you want. But

you need to understand, I'm not going to change, and that's what I want, and therefore we need to work out what will work for us [self and partner].

Along with this, participants could identify and respond to their partner's needs consistently over time, despite how confusing the experience could be.

P4: I just remind myself that this is part of the work, and I know what my goal is. My goal is to be able to allow my partner to be a full-fledged person with all of the autonomy, to be able to love and experience different things and that's hard for me sometimes. But it's what I want for them ultimately.

Several participants noted how tolerating the conflicting experiences allowed them to accept the ambivalence and work through their experiences, coming to a resolution.

P4: They can temper each other a little, it can also feel slightly bipolar-ish of getting into the good, and then, being reminded of the heartbreak, and swinging back and forth between the two. But at one point I did hit like a very zen moment, where I was just like appreciating the changes of life. And like this is life. It's love, and it's loss. And it all happens.

In engaging the processes identified above, and making changes, participants could then build shared security within their relationships.

P7: Because I like to feel stable in my relationships, and stable doesn't mean no change, it just means, I know where you're at, and you know where I'm at, and we like respect each other enough to like, take a next step together with dignity.

Finally, participants reflected on the ways in which polyamory can reflect their own development, as well as their partners' development, and the ways in which they relate within relationships.

P2: I personally like that because it feels like anything and everything has unlimited potential. It's not about like oh, you can't do these things, you can't do those things, it's like you can do anything. And now, like, choose like what's best for you like or what you really want.

P6: I'm trying to. I feel like it would ... I don't want to intentionally hurt people, so I've really tried to arm myself with all the information I can. I've got books and blogs I'm reading through, just to try and make sure that everything is as good as they can be, because at the end of the day I'm the happiest I've been in relationship. I'm romantically, sexually, the healthiest I've been. And yeah, I want to keep that feeling for as long as I can. If that means a little extra homework. Then I'm happy to do that.

Participants implemented various methods to internally process their affective experiences. These methods included self-reflection, increasing their sense of differentiation within their relationship(s), and ambivalence tolerance. The tolerance of ambivalence helped individuals to clarify their internal experience and their partner's experience and to navigate emotionally confusing events. Additionally, participants identified how these experiences reflected psychological development, both in themselves and their partners, and how they would like to engage in other relationships.

Social Influence

Social influence refers to the impact that surrounding social expectations and groups have on participants experience, and the challenges individuals experience navigating polyamory within a society that holds monogamous values.

P5: Obviously, there's this big misconception that polyamorous people can't commit. I would just argue that polyamorous people commit a hundred percent to whatever your

agreement is. So like, if your agreement is, I see you once a month and we have sex, like I one hundred agree to that agreement, and if my agreement is, I move in with you, and I have a kid with you. That's my agreement, and I still uphold this other agreement that I have with someone else about meeting them up meeting up with them once a month, you know, like, yeah, I think people, this whole thing about commitment is ridiculous. And yeah, to me it is. It's really actually about full commitment to whatever it is. But being honest about what I can commit to, and what I want to commit to, and it feels like a much more active choice in that way. So yeah, I would say, I put work into like all of my life relationships, and it's not just about like love and sex. It is very much about my other.

P7: So, you have all these societal scripts about what it means to care about your partner, and to show devotion and polyamory doesn't agree with those or polyamory uses different, offers different ways to, reaffirm your trust and love for the person sitting across from you that isn't just based in sexual fidelity for no reason.

Most participants noted how the surrounding society contributed to their experience and their ability to navigate affective experiences.

P4: I have polyamorous friends that I talk things through with, people who get it, and I'm able to talk to about different things.

P5: I have just found these people who are fantastic, and you know we can be couples together, and um they embrace me for who I am, and meet me for where I'm at.

P8: I do sometimes wish occasionally, I wish that I naturally felt drawn to monogamy, and that I never considered outside of that, and I wasn't bothered, and then I realized all the great things that it's brought to me, and I forget that. But occasionally, just because of

the constant stigma and the constant having to explain yourself and worry about the

impact on other people, and your life is exhausting sometimes.

Several participants identified the impact of working with a couples' or individual therapist, who

invalidate polyamory.

P4: Yeah, I've had experiences with relationship therapists, counselors that don't get it

[polyamory] and how infuriating that can be.

Participants identified the confusion they experience, in knowing where they can receive social

support from others.

P2: It's also been weird like trying to not … like it's been weird like trying to navigate

like how to be like, be secretive, be open, like telling people what we're doing to be like

hiding what we're doing versus like … I-I don't know. That has always been like a weird

journey throughout the years.

P5: I'm a little more closeted. Just because I feel like I'm not, you know, prepared to

answer the really legitimate questions that people from a heteronormative background

would.

Participants identified how social influences, such as relationships and societal values, impacted

their experience of polyamory. Participants identified experiences in which social influences

served as a source of support, helping individuals feel seen. They also identified how social

influences have created challenges, through unstated social values, and stigma experienced from

both peers and others around them. Last, participants highlighted the additional confusion they

experience, attempting to identify whether they will be met with support or stigma.

Relationships Among Themes

Themes identified above highlight the shared experiences among the eight polyamorous participants included in this study. Taken together, the superordinate themes demonstrated a similar process amongst participants where they identified what they felt, how they navigated their experience with their partners, and the ways in which social factors influenced their experiences. While each of these themes has independent content that characterizes them, there is interdependence and overlap between them. When participants were able to explore and engage with their affective experiences, it allowed for increased emerging awareness around them. This awareness facilitated increased open communication within relationships. As individuals became more aware of their affective experiences, they could then engage with their partner, and themselves, more openly. This allowed for, and encouraged, an increased sense of self-reflection and differentiation as individuals were engaging with their experiences. This also encouraged differentiation between internal and external experiences, increasing the opportunity for exploration of what has been internalized due to societal pressure and expectation, rather than values and beliefs individuals may hold. This demonstrates the experience highlighted by participants that their engagement in polyamory has facilitated an increased sense of intra- and inter-personal growth. Though there were a disproportionate number of preoccupied and fearful-avoidant participants in the small sample used, the experience of being in polyamorous relationships seemed to move them towards earned security. This experience of earned security is likely due to the interpersonal, and internal, growth that is experienced within polyamorous relationships.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The intention of this dissertation was to explore polyamorous individuals' emotional experience of their partners engaging in EDB with other individuals through an attachment lens. The engagement in EDB is one of the defining features of polyamory differentiating it from monogamy. I employed a qualitative research design enabling polyamorous individuals to define their own experiences. The main purpose of this research was to identity and explore the participants' emotional experience with their partners' EDB. Additionally, I aimed to examine how someone's attachment style could play a role in their experience of polyamory and their emotional response. Finally, I reviewed qualitative results to explore potential connections to attachment in the following sections.

Attachment

When compared to the general population, there were more preoccupied-anxious and fearful-avoidant participants than anticipated within this sample. The only discernible response pattern among participants based on attachment was those preoccupied-anxious participants' use of avoidance in discussing their affective experiences when compared to individuals who had fearful-avoidant styles. As such, these results suggest that individuals with a preoccupied-anxious attachment style may use more avoidance in navigating their affective experiences associated with EDB, at least in comparison to fearful-avoidant and secure attachment styles. This result aligns with broader anxiety literature, though it may at first appear counterintuitive based on previous attachment literature. This finding suggests that anxious response styles may manifest as avoidance within this sample, rather than manifesting as ruminative, as within previous AAI literature (e.g., Main et al., 1985). One reason for this might

be related to societal and internal stigma pertaining to polyamory that has not allowed for open communication and exploration of these ideas and values.

One thing that may have limited the validity of attachment results and prohibited more findings within attachment style was that several participants noted how the mononormative language used on the ECR-S influenced their responses. While Moors et al. (2015) utilized the ECR-S measure within their study and found some influence of attachment style on participants' engagement in ENM, their study looked more broadly at CNM rather than specifically focusing on polyamorous individuals. Therefore, it is possible that this mononormative language did not stand out to participants, particularly those who practice CNM, but do not identify as polyamorous. Additionally, Moors et al. (2019) explicitly explored the experience of polyamorous individuals using the ECR-S; however, they utilized the ECR-S specifically to measure if an individual's attachment style was consistent among partners, rather than how attachment influences relationships. It is also of note that these studies were conducted in 2015 and 2019, and current societal expectations may require more inclusive language, particularly as there is increased engagement with CNM.

Affective Experiences in Polyamory

Participants identified a range of affective experiences with varying degrees of intensity. While some individuals noted minimal affective responses, others noted strong feelings of jealousy, envy, and excitement. A prevalent finding within the data on affective experience was the seemingly increased tolerance of ambivalence within polyamorous relationships across participants. While individuals were able to acknowledge and attend to the "negative" affective responses, they were also able to hold the excitement and happiness they experienced, because their partner could form romantic relationships with others. Some individuals reflected on the

experience of ambivalence as being helpful. For example, as the experience of excitement for their partner felt more salient, it made other co-occurring affective experiences, such as jealousy, more manageable.

For other participants, the experience of ambivalence was more difficult to tolerate. For example, one participant likened experiencing differing affective responses to "seasickness," making it challenging to determine how they were feeling and how they wanted to proceed. These are affective responses someone may not allow themselves to experience or express with their partners. Of note, however, is that both participants who expressed a difficulty tolerating ambivalence had fearful-avoidant attachment styles. Given that the tolerance of ambivalence is often reflective of secure attachment (Schore, 2001), it would therefore align that this was expressed by two fearful-avoidant participants. Given that fearful-avoidant individuals have an increased sense of anxiety, as well as avoidance (Allen & Baucom, 2006), the experience of ambivalence likely increases the internalized sense of anxiety, thus causing an increased desire to avoid the affective experience to decrease their anxiety. This in turn may help further illustrate why these individuals may then have increased difficulty tolerating ambivalent affective experiences. This finding may capture an earlier developmental period where participants are able to hold both, and work towards greater security within their relationships.

Open Communication

Open communication referred to participants' communication patterns with partners in which they explicitly brought up or inquired about feelings or concerns within the relationship. This subtheme was present among all participants, regardless of attachment style. The finding may be explained, in part, by the current sample, as all individuals were polyamorous and had been for some time. One important capacity for individuals engaging in CNM relationships is the

capacity for open communication, in order to further understand agreements and create boundaries within the relationship (Orion, 2018). Therefore, it is possible all participants needed to develop this capacity to maintain polyamorous relationships. This may also be explained by the need for open communication to discuss relationship parameters and feelings that are not assumed in polyamory the same way they are assumed in monogamy.

Internal Processing

Participants identified how they came to understand their experiences and their partners' experience within polyamory, which included experiences of internal processing, such self-reflection, differentiation, and developing ambivalence tolerance. A noted byproduct of this experience was participants' personal growth resulting from these experiences. These themes were found within most transcripts and are traditionally abilities reflective of secure attachment (e.g., Blatt & Levy, 2003). Similar to findings in open communication, these are abilities necessary to maintain sustained polyamorous relationships. Individuals who are securely attached generally have an increased capacity for mentalization, allowing them to both mentalize their experience and that of those around them (Bouchard et al., 2008). While many participants in the study demonstrated the capacity for self-reflection, differentiation, and tolerance of ambivalence, these internal processing capacities were most certainly present within the securely attached participant. Additionally, the role of internal processing around experiences was discussed in hindsight and reflected their processing of past experiences. Therefore, this may reflect the participants' development of increased self-reflection and differentiation over time.

Emerging Awareness

Participants also discussed their process in developing awareness of underlying factors influencing their experiences. When participants were asked about early experiences with EDB,

multiple who had been in polyamorous relationships for several years noted they had not thought about these in a long time. Participants were, however, keen to express how they felt about these experiences now. When prompted to think about their first encounters, they could then identify some of the initial affective experiences and thoughts they had. In doing so, many could then identify early experiences of avoidance and preoccupation. Additionally, all participants were able to identify how their initial affective responses often indicated other concerns they were experiencing and not addressing; for example, one participant noted their jealousy was coming from the fact they had not seen their partner and missed them.

A primary component of individuals' affective experiences was the sense of insecurity in an individual's ability to meet the physical and/or emotional needs of their partner. One participant highlighted a comment from an early book about polyamory, *The Ethical Slut* (Easton & Liszt, 1997), highlighting the importance of "simply allow[ing] yourself to feel it [jealousy]" (p. 23) to then figure out what the jealousy means. This demonstrated participants' ability to sit with the discomfort of their experience and trust they will eventually come to understand what their feelings are telling them to make meaning of their experience. This increased tolerance for discomfort may be one reason why most codes in the codebook were present within each of the transcripts, was because those willing to participate had experienced some level of happiness and success in polyamory, resulting from their initial capacity or the development of ways to process their affective experiences.

Participants also identified several ways they came to process their affective experiences. While there was no specific sequence of events, it appears that open communication leads to self-reflection, which in turn leads to greater sense of differentiation, allowing participants to better delineate between their partners' affective experiences and their own. This process

encouraged participants and their partners to grow as differentiated individuals, allowing them to better identify and support their own needs, their partners' needs, and subsequently make changes in their relationships. This follows typical relational development in which people come to explore and know themselves better through their relationships with others (Blatt & Levy, 2003). The continuation of this process, in relation to different relational conflicts, appeared to help participants construct secure, mutually satisfying, and desired relationships with their partners, as well as to determine if the relationship could not continue. This process of constructing secure and mutually satisfying relationships may demonstrate the role of earned security (Pearson et al., 1994), allowing individuals with insecure attachments to re-create a sense of security in their adult relationships. The process identified above may explain participants feeling that polyamory has allowed them to continue growing and to develop, as well as integrate, their sense of self (Moors et al., 2019).

Social Influences

Another superordinate theme that manifested was the influence of societal values around monogamy. Participants reflected on how social influences impacted their experiences with polyamory and EDB. Several participants identified encounters with others who expressed ideas about polyamory that made them feel unsafe, often inducing an experience of shame or guilt, causing these individuals to sometimes withhold information within different settings. While there was a great emphasis on the importance of community for support, community would often consist of both polyamorous and monogamous individuals. Additionally, access to resources served as support in providing participants with language to understand and process their experiences within a relationship style that many have a limited understanding of. This was particularly important for individuals who were reflecting on the "fluency" of their therapist in

understanding non-monogamous values and choices, and the harm that could come from having therapists who hold internal biases towards polyamory.

The Experience of "More"

One of the codes used to capture the experience of polyamory was the word "more." The use of the word more highlights the importance and recognition of the increased cognitive and affective awareness that individuals in polyamorous relationships acknowledge. In addition to using more to highlight these experiences, they also described polyamory as a whole as being more, for example the need for more time management, and more communication. Both time management and communication were important to successfully and ethically navigate relationships with partners, discussing emergent needs, relationship paraments, boundaries, etc. While these needs may be present within monogamous relationships, there may be a different valence associated with them, particularly because some of these conversations never have to be navigated due to the assumption of these values within monogamous relationships. However, it is of note that even the use of the word more can be reductionistic. When reflecting this concept back to one participant, they described this as "simplifying" the overall experience. Therefore, while the concept of more carried truth for some participants, it should not be overlooked that this may not feel apt for some polyamorous individuals, specifically those who may experience monogamy, and its many unspoken values, as confusing.

Clinical Implications

Given that adult attachment style influences the way individuals engage within romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), understanding an individual's IWM can provide insight into initial experiences in polyamory and their capacity for mentalization, distress tolerance, and emotional regulation. Given that individuals who engage in polyamorous relationships have been

found to have an increased sense of differentiation (Moors et al., 2019), this finding also highlights the opportunity for earned security within these relationships.

Another factor highlighted by participants was informed by the ways they came to navigate their experience. Of note, in the data was the process of differentiation that served to help participants better understand their own experience and served as an anchor to withstand their partner affective response while staying true to their own experience. Given that polyamory includes several partners sometimes engaging with themselves or others, developing greater differentiation may be a helpful point of development to help polyamorous folks maintain greater clarity of experiences. The ability to hold this range of experiences may also highlight the possibility of developing earned security within these relationships, given that earned security is often earned through supportive and structured relationships, despite having a previous insecure attachment style (Roisman et al., 2002). Sadly, polyamorous individuals have few resources to turn to navigate the unique challenges within their relationships, increasing the use of avoidance around ambivalent affective responses.

A potential challenge in sitting with the uncomfortable affective experiences within polyamory pertains to the internalized unconscious monogamous values and biases held by our current culture. Some of the affective responses, such as jealousy, come from scripts that rest upon unspoken monogamous values that are ascribed to relationships. One participant described the experience saying:

> So you have all these societal scripts about what it means to care about your partner, and to show devotion, and polyamory doesn't agree with those, or polyamory uses different, offers different ways to like, reaffirm your trust and love for the person sitting across from you that isn't just based in sexual (or romantic) fidelity for no reason.

This highlights that these individuals are often not only navigating challenging emotional circumstances, they must also simultaneously deconstruct unconscious monogamous values that may be influencing their affective experiences. When these values are so heavily ingrained in society, to the point that they are often assumed without any conversation, the deconstruction can take more mental energy and work due to the level at which this is unconsciously embedded.

There were several strengths that were apparent amongst the participants. These strengths included: (a) participants' ability to tolerate ambivalent affective experiences, (b) engagement with self-reflection, (c) differentiation, (d) open communication, (e) a developing sense of self, and (f) working towards earned security. Given that polyamorous individuals may not always have support within the larger community noting these internal strengths may be beneficial, both in beginning to better understand the polyamorous community and as an attempt to further build on these strengths. This is particularly useful in clinical treatment when thinking about conceptualizing individuals from a strengths-based approach. Accordingly, while there may be unique challenges that someone within a polyamorous relationship may experience and want to explore, their unique strengths will also allow for development of these skills in tandem with other challenges.

Another important implication was the importance of therapist knowledge and fluency around engaging with polyamory. Several participants expressed the importance of having a therapist with whom they could discuss different facets of polyamory, including joys and difficulties. They also expressed the fear that could come from approaching this topic with a therapist for fear of judgment and being seen as "less emotionally mature" than monogamous individuals. Those who did have a therapist, or therapists, who were able to engage around the dynamics of polyamory expressed how helpful this has been for them. Therefore, it is likely

important for therapists to continue to learn and develop their awareness of polyamory and CNM, and to continue to explore their internal biases to provide space for individuals to process their experience in an open and non-judgmental fashion.

Limitations

There were several limitations within this study. A major limitation within this study was the nature of the surveys used to assess attachment style and EDB (i.e., ECR-S, OARS). While Moors et al. (2015, 2019) utilized the ECR-S within their studies on CNM and polyamory, respectively, there was discomfort that was expressed by participants in the current study. It is of note that both studies by Moors and colleagues (2015, 2019) were quantitative research; therefore, it is possible that their participants had similar concerns, however did not have the same opportunity to express this as within an interview setting. Additionally, as previously mentioned, the methodological differences, as well as the time in which these studies occurred, may have influenced how comfortable individuals were in naming their discomfort. During the semi-structured interview in the current study, most participants expressed discomfort with language used on both measures and felt the questions were irrelevant to their experiences due to the emphasis on monogamous values and lack of presence of non-monogamous views. Accordingly, this likely impacted the validity of attachment survey results and therefore these results should be understood with this in mind.

Another limitation of this study was that, due to the snowball sampling, some individuals who were interviewed knew one another and reported to the researcher that they discussed their experience of the interview with other participants. This is of note as it may have influenced how some participants reported on their experience due to holding the knowledge that the researcher may have spoken, or plan to speak in the future, with one of their partners. While individuals

were told that their information was confidential, this could have impacted the level of vulnerability within the interview setting.

This study also focused on individuals predominantly from the United Sstates, with two from the United Kingdom. This is of note as there may be different societal and cultural influences that manifest within different parts of the world. While all individuals spoke of the role of societal stigma, this may have manifested differently based on cultural norms and expectations. Though an examination of cultural differences was beyond the scope of this study, it may be beneficial in the future to have a greater understanding of different cultures to better understand this manifestation.

Another limitation of this study was that all individuals were recruited from the blog *Polyphiliabl* Given that all the individuals followed this blog, it is possible that they may hold similar beliefs that have led them to that specific community. Therefore, to further explore the experience of polyamorous individuals, it may be important to recruit individuals from different sources in order to explore an array of experiences and perspectives, rather than from sampling within a common group.

Implications for Future Research

The current study aimed to explore the experiences of polyamorous individuals as they relate to their attachment style. Due to the monogamous values that were held within the language of ECR-S, future researchers may choose to use another assessment for attachment style (e.g., AAI) that does not have these same biases. Given that the field is growing in regards to knowledge of open relationships, an implication of this study may be to explore the creation of future measures to explore attachment style and one's capacity to relate that does not adhere to monogamous values.

Another implication of this study is to further explore how individuals with different attachment styles may relate to, and engage in, polyamory. Given the use of avoidance with anxious-preoccupied participants, further research exploring the use of this avoidance can help to understand how this is manifesting within polyamorous relationships. Additionally, the decreased tolerance of ambivalence within fearful-avoidant individuals, when compared to other attachment styles, may be something that could be explored with a larger sample size to better understand the relationships with ambivalence within polyamory. Further, given that all participants appeared to have increased emerging awareness when describing their relationship, future research exploring the role of earned security within polyamory could help to add to the literature and better understand the experience.

This study focused on individuals in the United States and the United Kingdom. However, many individuals expressed interest in being part of this research but were in different parts of the world and therefore did not meet the inclusion criteria. Though there would need to be further exploration of the role of societal values within each of these cultures, future research may begin to explore the experience of polyamory more globally.

Finally, this study asked individuals about their experiences within an interview format to help gain greater understanding of polyamorous individuals without ascribing questions and rather encouraging self-definition. While there are many benefits to qualitative analysis, it may be beneficial in the future to have more quantitative analysis around experiences of EDB within polyamory as that would require an increased sample size to better understand the collective experience and would add to the power behind generalizing the findings. Additionally, one area that may be further expanded on based on the results of this study is to further explore the difference in the tolerance of ambivalence with non-monogamous and polyamorous individuals.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

The current study was conducted to further understand polyamorous individuals'
experiences of EDB and the role of their attachment style on these experiences. The study was
conducted using qualitative research methods in order to encourage individuals to describe their
own experience in a way that felt most authentic. Within the sample, there were a
disproportionate number of individuals who endorsed having anxious-preoccupied and
fearful-avoidant attachment styles. The results emphasize that while individuals experience a
range of affective experiences, there are likely factors outside of awareness contributing to
affective responses. Some of these include individuals' attachment style, namely that those with
anxious-preoccupied attachment styles demonstrated more avoidance than those with
fearful-avoidant attachment styles, and the latter had more difficulty tolerating ambivalence
within their relationship than other attachment styles. Additionally, there appeared to be an
experience among polyamorous individuals highlighting several aspects of their romantic
relationships where there were experiences of more (e.g., more cognitive, affective experiences)
introduced. An important finding within this research was the role of social influence, namely the
monogamous values that are held within society that can result in experiences of shame and guilt
for individuals who do not follow monogamous values. This is particularly salient for individuals
for whom monogamy is not resonant but did not know of other relationship styles. Therefore, it
is important to create greater awareness and understanding of the experience of polyamory, not
only to decrease the stigma around the nature of open relationships, thereby serving a
marginalized group, but also to increase awareness of differing relationship styles. Indeed,
results of this study emphasize the importance of dedicating further time to explore the

experience of polyamorous individuals and the way in which their relationships differ from

monogamous individuals.

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APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

<u>Identity Qualifiers:</u>
1. Relationship status:
2. Relationship style:

<u>Demographic Information:</u>
1. Age:
2. Race:
3. Ethnicity:
4. Gender Identity:
5. Sexual Identity:
6. Romantic Identity:
7. Education:

1. Would you tell me about your current relationship?
    a. Time in a relationship?
2. Would you tell me about your experience as a polyamorous individual?
3. Has your current or former partner engaged in extradyadic behavior, as defined and measured by Rodriguez, (2018) on the Outside a Relationship Scale (OARS)?
    a. Follow-up: If so, what was the form of EDB?
    b. Follow-up: How was this for you?
    c. Follow-up: How did you respond to this experience?
    d. Follow-up: What was your emotional reaction?
    e. Follow-up: Tell me about that relationship (structure, length, parameters)?
4. What have you experienced in terms of your own extra dyadic behavior?
    a. Follow-up: To what extent?
    b. Follow-up: What frequency?
    c. Follow-up: Quality of experience?
    d. Follow-up: How was this for you?
    e. Follow-up: How did your partner(s) respond to this experience?
5. What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experience of extradyadic behavior (Moustakas, 1994, via Creswell and Poth, 2018)
    a. What also occurred at the time?
    b. Who was there?
6. How is it to share these experiences with me now?

APPENDIX B: CODE BOOK

Avoidance: Sense of avoidance around affective experiences

Community: The reliance on other individuals in the ENM world to be able to process affective experiences.

Deconstructing Societal Norms: Participant reflects on the deconstructing of societal norms within their own development

Differentiation: Participant is aware of, acknowledges, and responds to partners relational needs that may or may not differ from their own; "Buying in" to the relationship style

EDB: Participant or partner speaks to their engagement in EDB

ENM Due to a Sense of Lacking: Seeking ENM because of something lacking in the previous or primary relationship

Envy: Envy manifesting within the relationship

Family Expectations: Societal expectations that are believed by family

Feelings: Understanding that feelings (e.g., jealousy) are not a choice despite being in a poly/open relationship. They need to be acknowledged and held

Gender Expectations: Gender norms that are ascribed within society

Heteronormative Expectations: Places where heteronormativity influences relationship/sense of self.

Insecurity: Sense of insecurity in the relationship not named.

Insecure Relational Style: Insecurity around the risk of changes within the parameters of relationship style (e.g., someone entering a polyamorous a relationship with someone who later identifies as monogamous).

Emotional Intimacy: Any occurrence where the participants expresses any form of emotional intimacy with others.

Physical Intimacy: Any occurrence where the participants expresses any form of physical intimacy with others.

Iterative: Relationship style has been a process of exploring, reflecting upon, defining, and redefining needs and wants with consenting partners. Iterative indicates that there has been action that changes the relationship style due to self-reflection.

Jealousy: Participant acknowledges their own experience of jealousy—non-specified emotional/physical jealousy.

Emotional Jealousy: Experiences of jealousy around emotional/intimate experiences

Physical Jealousy: Experiences of jealousy around physical experiences.

Monogamous Expectations: Expectations of monogamy in relationships.

More: Polyamory hold "more" of all affective experiences (e.g., pain, happiness, etc.)

Open Communication: Open communication within the relationship around emotional/affective experiences

Participant Inclusion: Participant makes suggestion in an attempt to improve research.

Polyamory Encourages Relational Development: The challenges and parameters of ENM and polyamory help facilitate someone's emotional growth with more relationships with others.

Preoccupation: Excessive concern with partners experience, needing assurance that things are "okay" between them, and their partner will be readily accessible.

Security: Sense of participant's security within their relationship. Security is the internal sense of security, reflected through the ability to discuss difficult matters without the belief individual or the relationship collapsing.

Self-Reflection: Evidence of self-reflection around different aspects of identity (e.g., relational style). This may include concurrent behavior.

Societal Stigma of Guilt/Shame: The stigma of society causes some sense of internalized guilt/shame around discussing different relationship aspects.

Support of Polyamorous Needs: Participant or partner has the capacity to/is aware of and responds to participant or partner's emotional needs.

Therapist Fluency: A need for therapists to be fluent in ENM so the client isn't educating them and also isn't isolating them or stigmatizing their experience.

Tolerance of Ambivalence: Ability to hold both positive and negative elements of an experience.

APPENDIX C: TABLE OF THEMATIC EXCERPTS

Categories, Themes, and Quotes Across Participant Interviews

Categories	Themes	Quotes
Affective Experiences	Feelings	"There's a little bit of me that sometimes kicks back when a partner or a friend comes and says, Um, I'm finding this really difficult if it's about the fact that I'm non monogamous, I'm poly, and I'm exhibiting that freedom. There is a tiny bit of me that kicks back and goes well, "You knew that I was not monogamous. You knew I was polyamorous, You knew this would happen." And then I think, I kind of take a step back and I go, "Okay, well look these are natural feelings, and we need to just talk about them and work out what that feels like and what's going on here."
		"So there's still a lot of ownership, a lot of issues with jealousy and stuff like that, and I like the idea that you can control your emotions."
	Envy	"Um, envy happens to be something, I mean, if you're like separating out jealousy and envy. Sometimes my partner goes out on dates with people and does things that I would really like to do. It's not that I'm jealous that they're with other people, but that I really wanted to do it."
		"There was one instance where my girlfriend had a particularly spicy sexual experience. I felt very, not so much jealous or like upset, that she had that experience, but more like, um, jealous that I didn't have that experience in my life."
	Jealousy (Emotional/Physical)	"Yea, um, so particularly like on the very early dates I would wind up sort of unable to think about anything else uh, just sitting there stewing on the fact that she is out with somebody else."
		"Jealousy is very difficult for me. I experience a lot of jealousy."
		"But I have met like people that they've dated, and I really enjoy also meeting those people, and I enjoy like the opportunity to work on like my jealousy, or to be like, oh, like there's something coming up for me like, how can I work through this. It makes me feel good."
	Stigma: Guilt/Shame	"It's also been weird like trying to not…like it's been weird like trying to navigate like how to be like, be secretive, be open, like telling people what we're doing, be like hiding what we're doing

		versus like… I-I don't know. That has always been like a weird journey throughout the years. And then, like as we've become like more entrenched in our partner's, lives to the point where we're like committed partnerships, and it's like very much like a central part of our life like that's when we've started to like have to become more open and kind of like come out to people we know."
		"I am far too open of a book and honest to a fault, so that definitely doesn't help with the whole people not wanting to have us around their kids. So, this is…this is fairly normal for me, but I am definitely on the far end of the spectrum when it comes to that."
		"So, um I'm a little more closeted. Uh, just because I-I feel like I'm not you know uh prepared to answer the really legitimate questions that people from a mononormative background would."
	Avoidance	"However, on the heels of something ending. It feels nice to be able to meet new people and look for something to help fill the hole that the other one left and explore new connections and see, um, see what happens?"
		"Yeah, you know, I'm aware of it stings a little, but not my place to think about it. I don't want to think about it. What you do in your private time is you, so long as you know when me and a partner together, then it is hopefully, you know, me and that partner's quality time. Then, sure, whatever you do outside of that cool, not my problem."
Emerging Awareness	Insecurity	"Uh, certainly, at the start of opening things up, uh, that was extremely, emotionally challenging for me. Um, I had uh, particularly when she was engaging uh with someone who was fairly kinky, which is not something that I naturally can get into. Um. I had a lot of feelings of, uh, inadequacy or sort of like, yeah, I guess I think inadequacy is like almost exactly the perfectly accurate term for it of like she is looking for this thing that I cannot give."
		"But I-I will definitely at times have a response where I go 'Oh, that makes me feel uncomfortable.' And normally it is a reflection of something else I've already been feeling within

		that relationship. Um, but it is normally the thought pops into my head of uh, I'm not-you're going to get something from that person that's going to reveal me as kind of a fake or a false um like value in your life. That person will give you more value than I'm able to, um, and that I don't think I believe that that that they would not want me in their life. It's just that they might de-escalate my value because of that new person coming into their life."
	Insecurity Relational Style	"There's also other weird insecurities that come in with personally dating a solo poly individual who is um my other partner is very new to the lifestyle, so I have concerns that they will meet someone and decide to go monogamous for them. Um, which is always a concern in polyamory. I see that whether you're a couple of starting out people are worried that you're gonna close things down again, or a solo poly person might just be exploring, and then find the one so. Um that insecurity is very new for me."
		"That was the first point of having those kind of conversations, and they were felt like I was going to die every time every time. Um! To the begin with, just bringing up the smallest things of um, 'Can you tell me a little bit more about this?' Or um, 'I'm worried that you're going to, uh decide that you want monogamy in the future.' It felt like the world was going to fall away. Um! Or if they brought insecurities, I think that partner particularly for a while, he didn't know what he wanted, and he didn't know that if he would be satisfied with me being polyamorous, and that that nine months of kind of humming and hawing. And just naturally it was an insecure relationship because of that was really hard, because it-I couldn't. It was completely out of my control."
Open Communication and Internal Processing	Open communication	"More than anything like communication is key. Like, you know everything works inside of communication. So it's like when everything is out in the open, like you can just deal with it like that to me is what makes that?"
		"That was very difficult, because it made me feel very guilty, even though like, even though we would talk about that and she would be like 'You

	don't need to feel guilty because I've consented to do this like I want to do this.' But the fact of the matter is, I'm also feeling jealous like um, so I feel like it was always really helpful for me to remind myself, like if she didn't want to be doing this, we wouldn't be doing it like we have agreed to do this."
	"Okay. So, what if we talked about it? You know what is and isn't okay, rather than just set having a particular arbitrary line that was defined by sort of our expectations as monogamous people."
Differentiation	"Sometimes I just remind myself that this is part of the work, and I know what my goal is. My goal is to be able to allow my partner to be a full-fledged person with all of the autonomy to be able to love and experience different things and that's hard for me sometimes. But it's what I want for them ultimately."
	"I'm living my dream that they can sit down and talk to me and tell me about how excited they are about this new connection"
Self-reflection	"So she definitely was the driver for like, let's-let's try as well as we can to figure out how to do this. Well, um, but-but some of the challenges and hurt feelings have led to…you know, better understanding of boundaries and led to us doing couples therapy, and each of us doing individual therapy, and you know a variety of other developments over the years."
	"Yeah, it does. It does sting. Um, we, as humans, are not immune to jealousy. I know I certainly am not. Um, yeah, I do get jealousy fantasies and hot flashes and breakdowns. But I am learning to, uh, better deal with that now you know, and trying to unlearn all that unpicking of not every person is a threat really takes a while trying to unpick everything you know or have been taught. I think that has been one of the most challenging experiences."
	"Well, I-I started out as swingers with my first husband. Um! I got into it for the wrong reasons, and when that relationship ended, I learned that I enjoyed having the relationship structure that was open and non-monogamous."
Iterative Process	"More than anything like communication is key. Like, you know everything works inside of

		communication. So it's like when everything is out in the open, like you can just deal with it like that to me is what makes that?"
		"That was very difficult, because it made me feel very guilty, even though like, even though we would talk about that and she would be like 'You don't need to feel guilty because I've consented to do this like I want to do this.' But the fact of the matter is, I'm also feeling jealous like um, so I feel like it was always really helpful for me to remind myself, like if she didn't want to be doing this, we wouldn't be doing it like we have agreed to do this."
	Tolerance of ambivalence	"Being-being polyamorous is like being the most in love, and also the most heartbroken you ever been at the same time all the time"
		"There's more opportunities and opportunities for um allowing very conflicting feelings to be present at the same time. A few weeks ago I had a sort of break up with a partner, and it was very heartbreaking and very, very emotionally difficult. But I was also having very sweet moments with another partner, all within the same couple of days, and it was this mixture of very deep and heavy mourning, but also such an abundance of love and joy with different people. And it was, it gave a new light to both experiences. Yup, there's not really that opportunity in monogamy to be able to sit in both of those feelings and experiences at the same time."
	Support of polyamorous needs	"We're very heavily involved in the kink scene, which polyamory is very wonderful for that, or polyamory and non-monogamy specifically is very good for that, being able to experience different things when you and your partner don't share the same kinks."
		"And I personally like that because it feels like anything. He, and everything, has unlimited potential. It's just about like it's not about like 'Oh, you can't do these things, you can't do those things,' it's like you can do anything. And now, like, choose like what's best for you like or what you really want."
Social Influence	Monogamous Expectations	"I was dealing with a lot of that struggle with mononormativity that you're married, you're supposed to stay married, you're not supposed to

		get divorced. You're supposed to fight, even if you're miserable. So, non-monogamy seemed like a way to fix things that I mean, like I said I got into it originally for unhealthy reasons, non-monogamy, seemed like a great way to fix things that were lacking in my original relationship. Now I realize that is an absolutely terrible reason to get into it, because that doesn't make those problems go away. But that definitely was a catalyst to it."
		"There is a degree as far as like, what is it like being polyamorous. Um, there's a weirdness um that you feel from other people that like don't get it, or maybe don't approve of it"
	Deconstructing Societal Norms	"So, you have all these societal scripts about what it means to care about your partner, and to show devotion and polyamory, um, doesn't agree with those or polyamory uses different offers different ways to like, reaffirm your trust and love for the person sitting across from you that isn't just based in sexual fidelity for no reason."
		"Obviously, there's this big misconception that polyamorous people can't commit. I would just argue that polyamorous people, or relationship anarchists more specifically, commit a hundred percent to whatever your agreement is so like. If your agreement is, I see you once a month, and we have sex like I one hundred agree to that agreement, and if my agreement is, I move in with you, and I have a kid with you. That's my agreement, and I still uphold this other agreement that I have with someone else about meeting them up meeting up with them once a month, you know. Yeah, I think people, this whole thing about commitment is ridiculous. And yeah, to me it's really actually about full commitment to whatever it is. But being honest about what I can commit to, and what I want to commit to, and it feels like a much more active choice in that way."
		"I never understood the rules of the relationships. I never understood why I could kiss one person and I could only hug another, or I could only handshake another person. And therefore I just kind of behaved in that way until someone turned around and said, 'No, you're not allowed to do that,' um, and which is, I think I rebelled against

	that for a long time. And after a few years of trying to kind of mold myself uh my gap, I guess, and surround myself with people who are okay with me, just having fun and enjoying what I'm doing and building relationships in that way. But uh, I think the I turned to monogamy eventually, because it was just so exhausting. I didn't know that there were other people out there who felt the same. So, I cannot remember a time when I understood monogamy, if that makes sense, or ever lived my life in that way."
Gender Expectations	"There's a societal thing that plays into, you know it, hey-if you, if you're a man, if you identify as a man like there's like there's ways you're supposed to show up."
	"My dad's just like 'You get to have sex more than one person, that's awesome man!" And then my mom was just like, 'Okay, explain this to me like, How does this work?' You know, like there was more. Yeah, so the perspective probably also changes depending on who you ask"
	"I think non-monogamy actually has helped reveal how toxic and abusive my relationships were, because when I was in the marriage I would talk to other people who were married, and they'd be like, 'Oh, yeah, I hate my husband, too, they just suck. They're just men.'
Community Support	"I have polyamorous friends that I talk things through with. Um people who get it, and I'm able to talk to about different things with."
	"I lived in a very queer city. It's a very young city. It's this huge amount of openness. There's a lot of poly people non-monogamous people. Once I started talking about my experiences, suddenly everyone was non-monogamous. It was just ridiculous. They just popped out of the woodwork, whereas no one was talking about it before. It wasn't that people weren't talking about it; but I wasn't part of those conversations, or because I didn't bring up, they didn't bring up um. So, I think that made a big difference."
Therapist Fluency	"And I saw on a lot of people's dating profiles, and I was curious about what that was, and so I brought it up with my therapist, and I was expecting her to explain to me how these people have, you know, like they're emotionally

underdeveloped, or you know um, just to tell me like how these relationship structures are abnormal and what they're lacking."
"I know a lot of um polyamorous people who specifically seek out those sorts of, not only for couples counseling, but also for individual counseling, someone who understands polyamory."
"My partners couple's therapist that they've been with for years is like unbelievably amazing, and has and knows everything about our whole dynamic and situation, and they like frequently talk with her about stuff relating to like us, and what's going on with the four of us, or with one of us, or something and like has literally been like the gem of a lifetime that because, like they've been to other therapists in the past, we're terrible and stuff and yeah, they've had that experience."