The Stories We Tell:

On Representations of Non/Monogamies in Popular Culture

by

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Acknowledgments

Saint Mary's University is located on sacred land that has been the site of human activity since time immemorial. We are in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People, and we acknowledge them as the past, present, and future caretakers of this land. As scholars and storytellers, we are grateful to work and build community here. As stewards of culture, we are in the process of learning more about how we can improve our relations with Indigenous People and uphold the values of collaboration and inclusivity in all that we do.

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Stay safe.

Abstract

The Stories We Tell:

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By Liz Borden

Saint Mary's University, June 6th, 2022
Under the Supervision of Dr. Michele Byers

Representations of non/monogamies in popular culture offer opportunities for viewers to imagine new and different relationship models, yet non/monogamies in popular culture are most frequently conceptualized within narratives of colonial settler-sexuality and mono- / homo- / polynormativity. In "The Stories We Tell", I interview twelve Canadians, who identify as and practice consensual non/monogamies (CNM). Through thematic analysis, I examine the intersectionality between notions of family, kinship, sexuality, intimacy, and non/monogamies to ask the question, what do these interpretations reveal about the ideological labours—work—popular representations of non/monogamies in this research are doing? In the Conclusion, I consider in which ways popular culture remains a critical site of social and political action, where power and privilege are established and potentially unsettled, and where the un/recognizable and un/intelligible become visible and known, thus envisioning how non/monogamous lives and experiences might further disrupt and perhaps transform representations of non/monogamies in popular culture.

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Preface

"Baring One's Breasts"

I am wild woman.

I am grand/mother. I am teacher and mentor.

I am devout student and captivating lover.

I am epiphany, aesthetic moment, and intuition

I am recklessly beautiful, intentionally provocative, and confrontational.

I re/claim and take up space. I am loud.

I show up in the world refusing to lie down.

I speak inconvenient truths; "Love's Not Colour Blind".

I am relationship anarchist in the age of Professor Marston and the Wonder Women,

Savages, The Magicians, and Unicornland.

I am polyamorous in a culture of #MeToo, enthusiastic consent, body positivity,

shame and trauma awareness, and LGBTQI2S+ parenting.

I am sex-positive in a world of infinite love.

I am feminist killjoy and un/happy queer.

I am threat to polite politics, colonial settler- sexuality, and pedestrian fantasies.

I refuse to cultivate fragile masculinity.

I spit out status quo bullshit when it becomes too sour.

I am love's tender rampage; "The Hella Problematic Slut".

I loathe riding relationship escalators built by the fruits of colonial imperialism

and reeking of Indigenous dispossession.

I sew dangerous coats, made of pockets and sedition.

I am not more radical than thou. There are no free passes here.

None of this will be a simple story of subjects, subjectivity,

transcendence, or self-indulgent telling.

None of this will be un/comfortable. None of this will be un/familiar.

I am hurting and healing, articulate and uncertain.

I am unresolved conversations and interrupted arguments, strange dialogue.

Here, I disrupt taboos, break silences, and reclaim lost and disregarded voices.

Here, I ask the unanswerable, seek indeterminacy, and consider my own unforeseen.

Here, omissions and failures, disappointments, tensions, and exclusions

are transformed into stories of resistance, reproduction, and oblivion

to help clear the way for a

full-throated feminist futurity.

r***EVOL***ution

Introduction

Current representations of non/monogamies in popular culture offer space for viewers to see and thus imagine new and different relationship models at the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age. However, I feel these representations are neither informed by the lived experiences and everyday practices of the subjects they purport to represent, nor do they disrupt normative notions of romance, intimacy, family, queer kinship structures, and sexual citizenship. By interrogating how representations of non/monogamies are understood by people who live in non/monogamous ways, this thesis investigates the role representation plays in the popular imaginary, and the implicit and explicit mono- / homo- / poly-normative messaging which, until now, have remained largely under-investigated.

In this thesis, I consider the following questions:

1. In which ways do my participants, who identify as and practice, non/monogamies, understand, and interpret representations of non/monogamies in popular culture?
2. In which ways do I identify (or not) with popular narratives about non/monogamies in popular culture concerning my knowledge and lived experiences?
3. What do these identifications and interpretations reveal about the ideological labours—work—those popular representations of non/monogamies examined in this research are doing?

This research draws on non/monogamous people's stories gathered from interviews and my reflections of experiential knowledge of non/monogamies. Motivated by goals of social emancipation and transformation, these stories were examined using thematic analysis to explore

the extent to which people, who identify as non/monogamous, understand, and interpret mono- / homo- / polynormative narratives in popular culture and to explore how individuals who are non/monogamous are positioned/orientated within these narratives (e.g., Lazar 2005, 2007). Responding to Meg Barker and Darren Langdridge's (2010) call for the need for more attention to be paid to more diverse interpretations of non/monogamies, my approach to the study of gender, sexuality, and non/monogamies is situated within post-structuralist theorization. I examined the participants' accounts from a critical feminist perspective—meaning with a desire to view our stories as a site of struggle, where forces of social (re)production and contestation are played out—with a special interest in mapping out in which ways non/monogamous individuals are orientated towards and away from mono- / homo- / polynormative narratives to make sense of their lives and experiences. Analyzing participants' stories of non/monogamies is valuable in considering the work that representations of non/monogamies in popular culture are doing to steer the colonized and the colonized mind towards a "happily ever after." The participants' interpretations of the representations of non/monogamies in popular culture also aided in envisioning how future projects might further disrupt normative narratives of non/monogamies and create space for non-white, queer, racialized, Indigenous, and other intersectional perspectives.

On "The Stories We Tell"—On Situating the Self in the Research

For the past 25 years, I have been practicing non/monogamies in various configurations. I raised my only son in an open non/monogamous, sex-positive, and queer household. In 2012, two of my domestic partners and I participated in a commitment ceremony honoring our respective relationships. Held in Point Pleasant Park, overlooking the Halifax Harbour, we

celebrated our lives together with family, partners, and friends in the most public way we could imagine. In 2015, we separated as domestic and intimate partners and, in a very exciting and profound way, this research came back to me. Driven to see this research to completion, I returned to grad school in 2016 and immersed myself back into critical social theories and actively sought out opportunities to talk about non/monogamies in the academy, in the community, and in various public forums: from published articles, 3MT© competitions, lecture halls, and community roundtables, as a guest speaker at The Discovery Centre's annual "The Science of Sex and Love", and as co-host of the podcast "All Love is Love". In these spaces, I encountered individuals who were thinking and engaging with concepts related to non/monogamies—sometimes for the first time—in ways they had not before.

I currently live openly as a relationship anarchist, both in political and practical terms; non/monogamy is as much a political identity as it is a personal one for me as it begins from a position that intentionally orientates away from normative ideologies and mechanisms of oppression found within colonial and imperialist notions of family and kinship. My intentional family is a queer one and, for the most part, we pass—as white, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual, and cis-gendered—which is its own kind of complicated privilege.

There are many pivotal moments during my time in graduate school that I could speak about to help situate this project in time and space. Two stand out as turning points in building my self-confidence and competence as an academic, advocate, and activist, and in reaffirming my commitment to values that uphold inclusion, diversity, and social justice. The first occurred during a Queer Theory seminar; we were given the assignment to collect and share origin stories of queer childhoods / for children. There was a moment when I—frustrated that I could not find source materials relevant to my proposed assignment—went to my supervisor to show her what I

had gathered (or rather, what I did not have) for show and tell. After looking through the texts I had brought and a long pause, she looked at me and said: "Write one." And so, with the help of my son and an illustrator, I wrote *One, Two Three More Love.*

Polyamorous and multi-partnered family structures are not (often) depicted in children's books, and those texts who purport to do so are often deliberately ambiguous (e.g., Pallotta-Chiarolli et al. 2020). Drawing on my grassroots education experience, experiences of radical parenting in opposition to rigid heteropatriarchal and mononormative ideologies, the belief that all children should be able to see their families represented in stories, and a desire to contribute to the huge task of representing family diversity in children's books, my published article *Non/Monogamies in Canadian Children's Picture Books* (2019) tell of an intentionally unambiguous representation of the life of a child (my son, James) growing up in different kinds of familial structures including an open polyamorous household. The traditional model of the nuclear family – married, monogamous, heterosexual parents and their offspring – has undergone enormous changes. In some religious and social groups, this structure is still idealized as the only "right" form of family, though it has never been the dominant family structure in Western history. In Canada, discourses of "family" have become more-or-less untethered from marriage, gender, sexual orientation, reproduction, and childrearing. The presumption is that domestic, romantic, and sexual relationships that are limited to two adults at one time are likely the next focal point of change. However, many books, movies, and TV shows still insinuate that ideal relationships consist of two loving adults who are sexually, romantically, and emotionally exclusive partners. Depictions of individuals in consensual, non-dyadic, non-heterosexual relationships in popular culture are sporadic at best and, when they do appear, there are few consistencies. For these reasons, the incorporation of realistic portrayals of non/monogamous

relationships is of concern to many Canadians who find themselves thinking about the meaning of family—its popular representations and manifestations—in all its possible configurations.

Due to the social currency of popular culture, it becomes clear that the presence of polyamorous and multi-partnered family structures in media matters in many ways, the least of which is that it helps shape the perspectives, lived experiences, and possibilities of children. Narratives about families that are ambiguous and do not explicitly represent diverse relationships fail to offer a meaningful challenge to mononormativity. To build coalitions around shared issues, such as expanding definitions of relationships, families, and communities, we [polyfamilies] need to tell our own stories, on our terms. Where most stories fall short, *One, Two, Three, More Love* is a children's book centering on an unapologetic queer poly-family. My aim in writing was not just thinking unsayable things but speaking to them and in so doing refusing the demands of mononormativity by writing poly-families into existence.

The second moment speaks to my experiences as a non/monogamous partner sharing domestic space with two other adults who also identify as non/monogamous, and two children under four, during the single most significant moment of our generation: SAR-CoV-2 (COVID-19). The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed the way individuals engage in labour, relationships, sex, and almost all aspects of life. My Blog entitled; *"Pandemic Poly—Problems" Journal (Or, Non/Monogamies at the End of the World)* is a reflection on the crisis of intimacy that many individuals seem to be experiencing and openly talking about as we navigate a new normal of social interaction, shopping for groceries, buying online, drive-through only restaurants and contactless pick-up, work-at-home employment and redesigned workspaces, and accessing the public health care system. As an exercise of practicing writing my story, the Blog contains ruminations and observations made by me, a polyamorous person in the time of

COVID-19. These are not analytic by intention but, rather, were thoughts tumbling around my mind at the time of my research and writing. They had no home, so I gave them one.

Ironically, I left this research almost a decade ago amidst an existential crisis only to return to it during a global pandemic where many people are experiencing a crisis of intimacy. The effects of COVID-19 on human sexualities, multi-adult relationships, and familial connections have started to circulate in media and popular culture (e.g., Doring 2020). Some have described the pandemic related isolation and lack of touch and physical closeness as a distinct sensory experience, and even body trauma:

> It's like a dull ache.
>
> Skin that hurts.
>
> A hole in the pit of the stomach.
>
> An illusion that you're wearing an eggshell, nerves encased in a thin layer of calcium (Bonos 2020: 1).

COVID-19 has also impacted this research in myriad ways. There is a real concern about how stigma is generated, created, and reinforced during the pandemic and the harm that it has caused (e.g., Ziafati 2020). Addressing the emotional and relational effects of the pandemic, and COVID-19 specifically, on non/monogamous individuals, families, and communities is outside the scope of this research. In the Conclusion, I will address avenues of future work on ways non/monogamous individuals and communities negotiate and navigate a COVID-19 world.

Definitions[1]

Relationships are often thought of as agreements that partners decide upon. Some people may agree to be romantically and sexually exclusive to one partner (commonly referred to as monogamy), while some people may agree on varying levels of romantic or sexual openness with more than one partner (commonly referred to as non-monogamy). Consensual non/monogamies (CNM) is an umbrella term for relationships in which all partners give explicit consent to engage in romantic, intimate, and/or sexual relationships with multiple people. These are consensual relationships, not to be confused with infidelity, when one of the partners engages in interaction—sexual, romantic, intimate play, etc.—with someone without the consent of everyone involved. CNM can take a variety of forms, such as polyamory, polygamy, and polyandry. While polyamory tends to be about intimate relationships of all kinds (including dating, swinging, friends with benefits, and marriage), polygamy specifically refers to marriage, as do polygyny and polyandry. In many countries and cultures around the world having one spouse is not the only form of marriage.

In the context of consensual non/monogamies, and how I use this term in this thesis, it is the practice or condition of consensually participating in more than one intimate relationship at a time. Although it can be, it is usually not related to religion or marriage (Boyd 2017: 1). Some

[1] In this section, I explain several definitions which are integral to this research: namely consensual non/monogamies, normalization, and mono- / homo- / polynormativity. These terms are highly contested and reflect individual and collective histories, ongoing scholarly debates, and current politics. The definitions are not meant to be definitive or prescriptive but rather aim to assist in understanding terms that frequently come up in in this research.

individuals are involved in stable, long-term, loving relationships involving two or more other people. Others are simultaneously engaged in several relationships of varying degrees of permanence and commitment. Still others are involved in a web of concurrent relationships ranging from short-term relationships that are purely sexual to more enduring relationships characterized by deep emotional attachment a relationship agreement might involve partners engaging in sexual, but not romantic relationships. Intimacy is not assumed to be a romantic interaction and can include other types of love, including filial, familial, and platonic. with the importance of inclusivity to expand to aromantic, asexual persons, and other marginalized identities.

The term "non/monogamies" has been used extensively in discussing monogamy and non-monogamy as parts of a multi-locational, dynamic, and multidimensional system, and as a mode of conceptualizing the cultural naturalization of monogamy with a cultural denaturalization of non-monogamy (e.g., Rambukkana 2010a/b, 2015). Rambukkana (2010/b) argues that the term "first… allows movement outside the conventional binary without abandoning the ability to discuss it; and second, it acknowledges the binary as a systematization (and symbolization) of one way of subdividing intimacy that is often taken to represent and categorize a broader swathe of intimate possibilities" (16). Thus, the term "non/monogamies" stands for multiply possibilities that work to de-mystify current ways of thinking about "monogamy" and "non-monogamy" and to "formulate some broader conclusions about non/monogamy's relationship with power and privilege. For these reasons, I adopt the term "non/monogamies" in this research in recognition of "the multiple intersected nature of monogamous and non-monogamous intimacies" (20). In this thesis, non/monogamy is an umbrella term I use to describe the social practice or philosophy of consensual intimate relationships that do not strictly adhere to the standards of coupledom,

particularly that of having only one person with whom to exchange sex, love, and affection. More specifically, non/monogamy indicates forms of interpersonal relationships, consensually and intentionally undertaken, in which demands for exclusivity (of sexual interaction, romance and intimacy, and/or emotional connection, for example) are reduced, and individuals may form multiple and simultaneous sexual, romantic, intimate, and/or domestic bonds (see Appendix B: Types of Non/Monogamy).

"Normalization" can be understood as the role of the cultural norms, the shared values or institutions that are constitutive of social structure and social cohesion. These values and units of socialization thus act to encourage or enforce social activity and outcomes that ought to (concerning the norms implicit in those structures) occur while discouraging or preventing social activity that ought not to occur. It describes the ability to fit things into existing and accepted narratives. Normalization is the process through which configurations of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age are made / forced to fit into narrow, normative ideologies.

Like other normative models, mono- / homo- / polynormativity works in concert with a range of other norms to create a full, if rarely explicit, a picture about who counts and who does not, about what is real and what is not, what and who has value and what and who does not. The role of mono- / homo- / polynormativity is to prop up a heteronormative, patriarchal, and colonial society and is used primarily to justify and rationalize "broader race, gender, and sexual regimes of domination and oppressive perspectives" (Schippers 2016: 25) which slam against the intersection of a multitude of marginalized identities, non/normative relationships, and queer possibilities and often results in the erasure of the complexities and multiplicity of non/monogamous relations, communities, families, and kinship structures. The term

"homonormativity," popularized by Lisa Duggan in her 2003 critique of contemporary democracy, equality, and LGBTQI2S+ discourse, is the privileging of heteronormative ideals and constructs onto LGBTQI2S+ culture and identity (e.g., Halperin 2012). It is predicated on the assumption that the norms and values of heterosexuality should be replicated and performed among homosexual people (e.g., Rubin 2011). Homonormativity selectively privileges cisgender relationships (that is coupled and monogamous) as worthy of social acceptance. Similarly, the normalization of non/monogamies, termed polynormativity, refers to the selective privileging and depiction of certain types and aspects of non-monogamies (and not others) in normative ways. For Eleanor Wilkinson, "Popular narratives about polyamory tend to emphasize that polyamorists are mature, responsible, and 'normal'… This helps create a respectable image of polyamory that could easily be assimilated into the existing order" (2010: 349). Mono- / homo- / polynormative narratives do not provide a radical departure from the status quo but, rather, are strategies for policing and containing non/normative gender, sexualities, and queer ways of relating (e.g., Petrella 2007).

On Representations of Non/Monogamies in Popular Culture

As a queer feminist living a non/monogamous life, I am interested in examining myriad stereotypes and assumptions the popular cultural complex of the Global North tells about non/monogamous lives and experiences. This thesis emerged from my curiosity about whether and how mediated stories about non/monogamies would resonate with my assumptions about intimacy, family, and queer kinship structures, and my increasing recognition that we live in a culture where personal power often relates directly to various levels of privilege. Popular culture is a powerful vehicle for the creation of public knowledge; it is a powerful generator of our

collective memories, a sometimes seductive and shocking mirror of society, and a virulent incubator of social trends. In the last decade, mainstream popular culture appears to have developed an appetite for topics relating to non/monogamies, and, more specifically, polyamory. Myriad movies, TV shows, and news stories still hinge on the idea that the ideal relationship is one where two people are loving, mutually exclusive partners. The more common forms of non/monogamies portrayed in media where an individual will have a secret lover—such as Woody Allen's (2005) *Match Point*—while others reinforce the relationship between a heterosexual couple, rather than enhance it—such as Antony Cordier's (2010) *4 Lovers*, McG's (2012) *This Means War*, and Katie Aselton's (2010) *The Freebie*. Other depictions of open relationships, such as Ang Lee's (1997) *Ice Storm*, Woody Allen's (2008) *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, and Nick Payne's (2018) *Wanderlust* end in tragedy or difficulty. In the romantic comedy genre, the American sitcom *The Unicorn*, for example, has little to do with consensual non/monogamies despite the implication in the title. This trend can also be evidenced in television series with explicit forms of non/monogamies such as *Easy* (Netflix 2016-2019), *Sense8* (Netflix 2015-2018), *Wanderlust* (Netflix 2018), and *You Me Her* (HBO Canada 2016-2020) and reality tv shows such as Polyamory: Married & Dating (Showtime 2012-2013)

In the Global North, for several decades now, ideas about what constitutes a normal relationship have entered the mainstream in many ways: queer families have become more visible, people are more likely to live together before marriage, and the age when people first get married has risen considerably (e.g., Little et al 2016) Younger people approach marriage and relationship structures as self-determined, flexible, and negotiable (e.g., Fabello 2020). The rise in public awareness about non/monogamies is, in part, due to a focus by social movements on making themselves represented, even when such representation can be seen as problematic, as

often several axes of privilege are reinscribed through discourse on non/monogamies in popular culture (e.g., Rambukkana 2015). And despite the non/monogamous community and its networking being situated in a "politics of recognition" (Hurson 2016: 292), non/monogamous lives and experiences remain extremely underrepresented in popular culture, political discourse, and academic research.

All the work I do, be it writing polyamorous families into existence, participating and contributing in non/monogamous spaces and forming meaningful and respectful relationships within these communities, or conceptualizing and mapping my interpretation of non/monogamies is, as Kim TallBear has expressed of her interrogation of Eurocentric / white-settler normativity, polyamory, and colonialism, "really about interrogating the violently imposed worldviews and structures of the Eurocentric settler-colonial state" (2021:1). Acknowledging the work that Kim TallBear has done to interrogate white Eurocentric white cultural norms of compulsory monogamy and marriage, means that I can no longer keep my work separate from considerations of mono- / homo- / polynormativity within the Eurocentric settler-colonial state. While depictions of non/monogamous relationships have increased exponentially over the last several decades, the forms of non/monogamy that receive the most attention are typically those that most resemble, and are thus the least threatening to, the dominant cultural norm of monogamy.

Current representations of non/monogamies in popular culture offer space for viewers to see and thus imagine new and different relationship models at the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age. However, representation is problematic. Consensual non/monogamies are extremely common and normalized among gay men. Bisexual women are the norm in mainstream polyam communities. Lesbians are already marginalized due

to homophobia and misogyny and may be reluctant to take on another axis of marginalization. A similar dynamic happens for transgender individuals. Communities of colour may experience similar resistance to mainstream representation, as they do with sexual orientation. For these reasons, I remain highly cautious of efforts to normalize non/monogamies, including those within mainstream media, particularly when the forms of non/monogamy getting the most airtime are those that are least threatening to dominant social norms. However, while visibility is no guarantor of legitimacy, and inclusion does not always result in transformation, representation matters. While representation may connect individuals; it is a window into who has power, and is thus afforded rights and privileges, and who does not. The fact that non/monogamies and/or queer subjects now have a presence in popular culture does not make these representations sites of resistance, nor does it offer agency to those represented. For these reasons, this research found that disidentification is a point of departure for many non/monogamous subjects.

Chapter Summaries

In Chapter 2, I discuss the literature on how non/monogamies have taken shape in cultural discourses, the intersection of normativity and non/monogamies, and other elements of social stratification such as race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age. Central to this research is ensuring that I situate myself in the research and literature by clearly defining some key terms whose definitions may not be familiar to all readers. I have also provided a glossary of key terms (see Appendix A: Glossary of Terms). In that chapter, I also discuss the theoretical framework that animates this research. In Chapter 3, I lay out the methodology and methods used in this work. Using thematic analysis, this research draws on participant interviews and my feminist reflexivity to explore the discourses invoked and

mobilized in the stories told about non/monogamies. In pursuit of radical inclusion for non/monogamous communities, interviews were conducted with non/monogamous diverse participants to explore their understanding and interpretation of representations of non/monogamies in various films, movies, and television shows.

In Chapter 4, I discuss some of the stories the participants shared of how they arrived at non/monogamies and have constructed the practice as both an identity and orientation. In this Chapter, I also focus on my personal experiences with non/monogamies and popular representation. In Chapters 5-7, I assessed the themes of the participants, and my own, experience of watching several non/monogamous themed television shows and films. The conclusion to this thesis asks what happens when we begin to imagine what a truly diversified landscape of non/monogamous representation might look like (and why might we want this) at the end of the world. I also present the limitations and contributions of this research, as well as future implications and possibilities.

Chapter 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

One of the goals of this research is to identify and focus on intimate relationships as political and ideological constructs (e.g., Ahmed 2006, Halberstam 2005) and representations of consensual non/monogamy in popular culture as reinforcing or challenging normativity (e.g., Puar 2007, Schippers 2016, Warner 1999). In this chapter, I review some of the literature that informs this research with a specific focus on how non/monogamies have emerged across various disciples, concepts of normativity, and representation of non/monogamies in popular culture. In the last section of this chapter, I outline the theoretical framework that animates this research specifically, feminist theory, political theories, and trans-studies as well as other conceptual models of intersectional subjectivity and discussions of the making of family, intimacy, and nation.

On Non/Monogamies in Popular Literature

In the early 1990s, non/monogamy, and more specifically polyamory, emerged as a topic of interest in popular culture, political discourse, and the academy. For instance, between 1992 and 2016, a few dozen self-help texts were published and widely circulated related to the practice of polyamory, swinging, and other consensual multi-partner relationships. These texts focus on individual choice and personal agency, and celebrate polyamory as a proud, conscious identity or orientation. For example, *The Ethical Slut*, by Dossie Easton and Janet W. Hardy (1997), is commonly referred to as "the poly bible." In this text, Easton and Hardy reclaim the term slut, transforming its negative meaning into a positive identity, one that refers to an ethical, honest, adventurous person who celebrates and enjoys sex without shame or secrecy. Tristan Taormino's *Opening Up* (2008), explores polyamory and open relationships by offering stories about people

who are engaged in non-traditional, ethically non-monogamous styles of relating, and concrete responses to the question: "just how do they do it?" (xiv). Franklin Veaux and Eve Rickert's, *More Than One: A Practical Guide to Ethical Polyamory* (2014), offers a practical guide to polyamory and other consensual non-monogamous relationships based on experiential knowledge.

Critics of popular self-help texts on non/monogamies, such as Melita Noël, point out that, "these texts, written by and geared an assumed audience of white, middle-class, able-bodied, educated people fail to address how nationality, race, class, age, and (dis)ability intersect with non/monogamies in theory and practice" (2006: 602). Similarly, Rubin et al. contend that:

> …while it is highly likely that there are diverse communities that engage in alternatives to monogamy, both empirical research and mainstream media reinforce a homogenous identity associated with consensual non-monogamy. Some research endorses consensual non-monogamy as an effective relationship-style for anyone; however, despite this emphasis on diversity, the experiences of white, educated, heterosexually paired primary partners are predominant throughout academic literature and relationship self-help books (2014: 4).

For these academics, popular self-help texts do little to address how non-normative communities depend on, and even reinscribe, white privilege and heteronormative, patriarchal, and colonial society.

During this same period, academic conversations about non/monogamy emerged across a range of disciplines and addressed a variety of topics ranging from anarchist politics and

polyamorous identity (e.g., Shannon and Willis 2010), communication in polyamorous communities (e.g., Ritchie and Barker 2006), BDSM in polyamorous communities (e.g., Barker 2005), diversity within polyamorous communities (e.g., Noël 2006), safe-sex practices (e.g., Munson 1999, Munson and Stelboum 1999), cheating and infidelity in polyamorous practice (e.g., Heaphy et al. 2015, Mint 2004), sexual hierarchy and coupledom (e.g., Ho 2006, Jamieson 2015), religion and theology (e.g., Goss 2004 and Willey 2006), feminism and polyamory (e.g., Jackson and Scott 2004) and theoretical contestations of monogamy, marriage, stigma and social regulation (Coelho 2011 and Klesse 2006, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2019). These projects frequently center on identity and/or or identity politics as a mobilizing characteristic and conceptual tool for polyamory and community relations. For example, in "There Aren't Words for What We Do" Ani Ritchie and Meg Barker (2006) explore the relationship between language and relationship practices. Drawing on research on linguistic forms in web-based communication, the authors describe how polyamorists challenge the culture of compulsory monogamy through the construction of new polyamorous languages. Klesse (2006) argues that the discursive construction of polyamory as "responsible non-monogamy" is marked by a strong tendency to set polyamory apart from other forms of non-monogamy, for instance, BDSM (group) play, swinging, casual sex, and an abstracted notion of "promiscuity" (565). The rhetoric of "more enlightened" types of consensual non/monogamies ignores civil rights issues, systematic and systemic oppressions, marginalization, and other power disparities related to gender, race, class, and ability, for example. As a result, these idealized types are portrayed as inherently healthy relationship styles, suited only for the emotionally strong. Arguments comparing race, gender, socioeconomic status, or disabilities, to determine who is the worst off, and the most oppressed is not a new phenomenon in conversations about non/monogamies (e.g., Jiwani 2006). By engaging

in comparisons instead of thinking about and acting upon notions of equality across differences, there is a failure to foreground the radical potential of non/monogamies to attend to and disrupt oppressive vehicles of power (e.g., Ackelsberg 2013, Dhamoon 2011, Yuval-Davis 2012).

In search of the radical potential of queer politics within non/monogamies, it is a paradox to practice a politics centralized on the critique of normativity, when the politics normalize what it means to be queer and queerness. Similar to Cathy Cohen's racial critique in her piece "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?," I choose to focus on the idea that "if there is any truly radical potential to be found in the idea of queerness and the practice of such politics, it would seem to be located in its ability to create a space in opposition to dominant norms, a space where transformational political work can begin" (1997:438). That is, "consensual non/monogamies", in all its possible configurations (queer or straight), can be thought of as a queer practice and a queer orientation—ones that present resistance to regimes of the normal, the default. For me, recognizing the radical potential for queer politics (and queer non/monogamies) to challenge systems of domination and oppression – especially those normalizing processes embedded in mono- /homo- /polynormativity and the multiple layers of power, privilege, and discrimination embedded within and between them – to consciously view the intersection of non/monogamies and queerness – as political statements. Cathy Cohen asserts that this radical potential lies in resisting prevailing notions of normality (1997: 438). The manifestation of non/monogamies in contemporary Western culture alludes to the multitude of ways non/monogamies can be expressed and articulated. As Anna Storti states: "These various embodiments contribute to an array of difference, one that if viewed non-hierarchically, serves as an opportunity for queer politics to productively refrain from attaching to any normalized expression of performance, whether [*non/monogamist*] or queer" (2013: 10, italics my own). A

radical queer politics will allow for a workable discourse that challenges notions of mono- / homo- /polynormativity in representations of non/monogamies in popular culture.

Heteronormativity

The concept of normativity has its roots in Gayle Rubin's (1984, 2011) conceptualization of the "sex/gender system" and Adrienne Rich's (1980) notion of compulsory heterosexuality. Rubin (1984) argues that modern society's understanding of sexuality establishes a “hierarchal system of sexual value” that favours one form of supposed ‘natural’ sexuality and gender relations and relegates the ‘other’ to the periphery of sexual respectability (11). Homonormative discrimination is deployed similarly to heteronormativity. Social institutions and policies reinforce the presumption that people are heterosexual, and that gender and sex are natural binaries. Rubin (2011) writes that homonormativity functions to displace the exclusive hold heterosexuality has over normative behaviour, instead selectively privileging cis-gendered homosexuality (that is coupled and monogamous) as worthy of social acceptance. While Rich’s analysis is about lesbian visibility and structures of lesbian sexuality within the normative physical, economic, and emotional institutions, her arguments are also about how compulsory heterosexuality—compulsory means required or obligatory, and heterosexuality as the assumption that all romantic relationships are between a man and a woman—can be thought of as a network of the system of social beliefs, customs, and practices that ensures access and control over bodies, labour, and reproductive capabilities, and supports, legitimizes, and naturalizes a hegemonic relationship between sexuality, gender, race, and intimate relations. For instance, heteronormativity includes, but is not limited to “marriage between one man and one woman, a definition of family that hinges on the presence of dependant children, relationship

based on love and commitment rather than sex, relationship longevity, active participation in capitalism in terms of both employment and consumption, and monogamy" (Schippers 2016: 7-8). Scholars have emphasized the intersections of sexuality with other social locations such as race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, and class. An intersectional lens brought to attention to concepts such as heteronormativity which is the concept that heterosexuality is the preferred or normal mode of sexual orientation. It assumes the gender binary and that sexual and marital relations are most fitting between people of the opposite sex. Heteronormativity "is more than the processes of patriarchy, heterosexism, and compulsory heterosexuality; it also contains elements of racial and class 'othering'" (Battle & Ashley 2008: 5). Heteronormativity is maintained by social and institutional means by "oppressing and marginalizing certain bodies based on certain identity categories" (2008: 5). In "Queer theory, intersectionality, and LGBT-parent families," Few-Demo et al. interrogate the tenants of queer theory to consider how other inextricable social identities such as race, ethnicity, class, age, and culture intersect with sexuality and gender in polyamorous families (2016). Rejecting traditional categories of gender and sexuality, Jiwani (2006) argues that attempts to address the intersecting and interlocking nature of gender, race, sexuality, class, and disability have primarily taken an additive approach that has continued to normalize some experiences while marginalizing others. While effective in disrupting some hegemonic narratives, these ideological moves have had multiple and contradictory effects. For sociologist Mimi Schippers, "The stories told about intimacy, kinship, and family in… popular culture and other media are, with few and isolated exceptions, decidedly mononormative in that they consistently portray monogamous coupling as the very definition of happily-ever-after and non-monogamy including polyamory, as titillating but also difficult and dangerous" (2019a: 4). The popular narrative that equates monogamous love as the way to live

"happily ever after" allows normative relationships to remain unchallenged models for healthy and normal adult relationships and kinship relations. This is even true in stories about non/monogamous relationships; in viewing these texts I have experienced moments of slippage, dis/identification, and dis/orientation. As Queer theorist Jose Esteban Muñoz (1999) describes,

> Disidentification is [a] mode of dealing with the dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counter-identification, utopianism), this working on and against is an on-going survival strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local and everyday struggles of resistance (11-12).

Disidentificatory practices allow individuals to recognize relational forms of mono- / homo- / polynormativity, without neither absolutely accepting nor rejecting them. In practicing disidentification, one can rework identities and cultural practices to simultaneously retain that which is pleasurable while rejecting and problematizing socially prescriptive norms.

Several scholars have engaged with the ways that race and class are bound up with gender, sexuality, and relationship and kinships structures within non/monogamies, specifically polyamory (e.g., Schippers 2018, Sheff & Hammers, C. 2011, Wilkinson 2010). For example, Schippers highlights the important role that mononormativity plays in maintaining gender and racial privilege. She states:

> …the discursive construction of the monogamous couple supports, legitimizes, and naturalizes white, middle class, and Western construction of gender and intimacy as superior to those of non-Western, non-white populations…to secure race, ethnic, or national superiority and to legitimize colonial, imperialist, and racist policy (2018: 315, 319).

Examining how non-European non/monogamies are considered in racist immigrant state policies, Rambukkana (2015) points to examples of differential treatment of white polyamorists and culturally non/monogamous immigrants, refugees, and migrants in Canada. They argue that "due to the intersectionality of privileges and oppressions, some individuals engaging in specific forms of non/monogamy are able to mobilize substantial socio-cultural privilege, while others are not" (2010: 1). The most widespread forms of non/monogamies depicted in popular culture are those most closely aligned with a discourse of mono- / homo- / polynormativity, ones that receive social recognition as part of the Western colonial and imperialist cultural project.

Unpacking the complexities of non/monogamies from the perspective of power and privilege, Klesse states, "Polyamorous people's lives are at odds with the conventions of compulsory monogamy. As a result of this, they may face stigmatization and discrimination. Some are shunned by their families or peer groups, bullied at work or in school, or have custody rights for their children contested. Yet…many poly people, too, hold privileges" (2014: 207). In the Global North, the culture of privilege found in polyamorous communities is aligned with three intersecting and interlocking systems of oppression, namely, "the structural exclusivity of polyamorous communities in terms of class and race, the marginalization of certain groups within polyamorous communities and, the difficulties of intersubjectively negotiating power

differentials within cross-class or cross-racial intimacies" (208). Klesse argues that although everyone involved in non/normative relationships and activities risks social censure, people unprotected by social advantages are more vulnerable to the discriminatory impacts than those shielded by race and class privileges (210). This insulation provides greater social latitude to engage in and redefine their lives and experiences than what is available to those burdened by racism, poverty, inadequate education, limited job prospects, and other forms of discrimination.

Further integrating anti-imperialist, anti-colonial, critical race, and feminist theories and the study of non/monogamies and polyamory, several scholars have considered the social protections afforded by race and class privileges that can provide buffers to particular individuals —and dissuade people of colour, sexual minorities, and other marginalized groups from— participating in polyamory and non/monogamous relationships, facilitating their navigation of the myriad of potential negative outcomes related to sexual and relational non-conformity. Sheff and Hammers state: "The disadvantage of a stigmatized identity, coupled with the added weight of racial strain that white or ethnic majorities do not experience, as well as feelings of discomfort or lack of belonging in the setting, can contribute to people of colour's reluctance to identity with kink and poly subcultures" (2011: 213). Riggs (2006), Patterson and Johnson (2018), and Smith (2016) argue that current, popular understandings of race and ethnicity do not accurately account for the multiple ways that people self-identify. According to the authors, critical consideration of polyamory requires thinking about how it is co-constructed within colonial, white supremacist, hyper-capitalist spaces, histories, and structures (institutions) that confer privilege at the margins of where marginalization and oppression can be seen. Patterson's (2018) analysis of race and representation in polyamorous communities examines white privilege, racism, and prejudice and their impact on people of color and other marginalized individuals navigating non/monogamies.

For Patterson, polyamory, however compassionate an alternative to monogamy, still operates and is rooted in the white ethnostate. They argue that the prevailing problem is that the representation of polyamorous relationships in the media and popular culture resides in a standard of whiteness and white supremacy. While this standard of whiteness may make polyamory more accessible and acceptable to the mainstream, it also erases the experiences of people of colour in polyamorous life.

While not directly, other scholars have considered how settler-sexuality is deeply interconnected with formations of familial relationships and kinship structures within colonialism. Colonialism is the historical and ongoing process of conquest and exploitation of people, land, and resources. Ashcroft et al. state: "The colonized subject is characterized as 'other'…as a means of establishing the binary separation of the colonizer and colonized and asserting the naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view" (2003: 154-155) (also see Loomba 1998, Trask 2004). Belcourt (2016), Morgensen (2012), and Simpson (2017) connect gender and sexuality to historical and ongoing processes of settler colonialism. Morgensen states that "heteropatriarchal colonialism has sexualized Indigenous lands and peoples as violable, subjugated indigenous kin ties as perverse, attacked familial ties and traditional gender roles, and all to transform Indigenous peoples for assimilation within or excision from the political and economic structures of white settler societies" (2012: 4). For Morgensen, settler colonialism and settler sexuality are tied through the regulation of sexual relations, marriage, gender identity reproduction, and all other similar means of restricting or eliminating difference. Colonial violence is always gendered and sexualized, physical, and emotional and those that are furthest away from colonial ideas suffer the harshest of colonial violence. For Simpson, "queer Indigenous bodies are a threat to settler sovereignty, which is why

queer Indigeneity has been and is violently targeted by colonial and settler-colonial powers in an ongoing way in order to dispossess" (2017: 127). Settler colonialism and settler sexuality are tied to heteronormative notions of family, coupledom, marriage, and sexuality. This is the context against which I want to consider how representations of non/monogamies—this backdrop of discursively hegemonic mono- / homo- / polynormativity and the subject subjectivities subtended by them—create social, national, and cultural practices that define and constrain what forms of relationships, embodiments, and subjectivities can be seen as legible, moral, ethical, even real, and desirable in the cultural imaginary.

Representation and Popular Culture

The importance of representation for LGBTQI2S+ communities and individuals has underpinned the large bulk of theoretical work about diversity as represented in media, across the fields of media studies, sociology, and gender and sexuality studies (e.g., Bauer 2010, Deri 2015, Gramson 2016, Hall 1997, and Porfido 2009). As argued by Porfido (2009), "Queer (in)visibility in broadcast media space is not a 'merely cultural' question, as television is perhaps the most powerful and ubiquitous cultural apparatus and plays a central role in daily life" (164). However, "It is exceedingly rare for lesbian, gay or queer non/normative configurations to be included in mainstream representations, even though LGBQ circles are absolute hotbeds of polyamorous activity…Add the mainstream media's desire to show images of poly people who are cute, young, and white and we are getting a very narrow picture indeed…It's a crying shame" (Zanin, 2013: 1). As one of the main sites of public discussion of gender and sexuality, and a central source of how people imagine themselves and their relationships, media products have been a valuable tool for how people build their sexual identities and practices. However,

non/monogamies are often depicted as a marginal alternative, and the lack of diversity in popular culture further reveals the privileges afforded to compulsory monogamy. As Gramson points out:

> …it has not yet made enough room for all kinds of sexualities and relationship forms to be visible and thoughtfully considered; that they still proceed, for the most part, for a heterosexist worldview, in which they speak to their audience as if everyone is heterosexual; and that the images of sexual ad gender minorities currently available remain quite narrow racially and class-wise. The coverage still often centers around sexual minorities as sources of controversy and conflict (2016: 397).

The problem then isn't just that the practice of non/monogamy is represented only in certain ways, but that the representations of these practitioners / practices tend also to be depicted from as a white, middle to upper-class point-of-view. This standard of whiteness and affluence not only excludes the experiences of working-class, non-urban individuals, refugees, migrants, immigrants, trans-folk, people of colour, and Indigenous peoples; it reflects the actual exclusion of these people in polyamorous life and communities. Richardson et al. (2013) contend that mainstream representations have played a significant role in the naturalizing forms of relationships while demonizing others and have a continuing role in creating perceptions of non/monogamies, as a racialized and classed phenomenon. Here, mono- / homo- / polynormative relationships, for the most part, a homogeneous enclave of privileges, including gender, race, class, and citizenship privileges, offer important insights into ways of bringing together feminist, queer, and critical race theories into dialogue with representations of non/monogamies, in terms of symbolic meaning and embodied practice. This dialogue is important in situating how

individuals, who identify as and practice non/monogamies, understand and interpret representations of non/monogamies in popular culture as individuals are informed by ideological and cultural markers of differentiation that shape the meaning of "us" and "them," reinforcing cultural divisions and social hierarchies, where citizenship dictates nationalist notions of normativity, and impact how bodies and subjects have access to power and privilege—especially vis-à-vis the state. For instance, heteronormativity is the pervasive yet invisible political, cultural, and social production of what is defined as natural and "render[s] all other forms of human interaction pathological, deviant, invisible, unintelligible, or written out of existence" (Yep et al. 2002: 167). Heteronormativity both influences the way individuals define and act on their behaviours and constructs gender and sexual identities, definitions, ideologies, and regulations. These are all mediated through ideological and social discourse.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Theory and Queer Theory underpin this research, particularly the work of Judith Butler, Sara Ahmed, and J. Halberstam. Butler is best known for challenging conventional notions of gender and developing their theory of gender performativity in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and re/articulation. This theory has had a major influence on this research because of its emphasis on performativity in discourse, identity, and various reflections of sex, gender, and sexuality concerning social norms. In this thesis, I use concepts of performativity and performance as a metaphor for social action to examine the ways that individuals in non/monogamous relationships perform "relationships" with one another and the outside world. Key themes in Ahmed's work include migration, orientation, difference, and mixed identities. Intersectionality is essential to Ahmed's feminism. She states that

"intersectionality is a starting point, the point from which we must proceed if we are to offer an account of how power works." (2017: 5). Her work—at the intersections of feminist theory, lesbian feminism, queer theory, critical race theory, and postcolonialism—connects to this research because I am deeply interested in both lived experience and the analysis of affect (emotion) as well as considering structures of emotion as social phenomena that dictate the way we lead our lives. For example, in "The Promise of Happiness," she explores the way that happiness acts as "social pressure" to push individuals towards or away from certain experiences, objects, and behaviors which intersects with her study of queerness in "Happy Objects." J. Halberstam engages in the theorizing of contemporary gender relations and their cultural narratives, and the practice of calling for a chaotic upending of normative categories in an act of sociopolitical anarchy. Their work predominantly looks at queer subculture and proposes a conception of time and space independent of the influence of normative heterosexual/family. Halberstam's work is relevant to this research in the exploration of alternatives to individualism and conformity and their relationship to the process of knowledge production and being in the world.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler explains how "othering" plays a crucial role in creating the normative imaginary and the objectifying of non-normative sexual and gender diversities—the queer subject. For Butler, this process is crucial in "constituting a binary distinction that stabilizes and consolidates the coherent subject" (1990: 134). Butler also explains that this process is present in homophobia, racism, and sexism, which involves expulsion, exclusion, and repulsion from society when certain identities become and symbolize the Other. Since the notion of abjection helps in understanding part of the creation of the Other it can also serve to understand Butler's idea of performance. Butler asserts that "heterosexuality is always at risk; in

the act of elaborating itself is evidence that it is perpetually at risk …. [I]t 'knows' its own possibility of being undone" (1991: 23). This signals the possibility of queer transgression and an introduction of difference and instability. I use Butler's analysis of normativity and abjection to consider both the stories we tell (and are told) about non/monogamies and in which ways specific kinds of familial forms and relationship styles have been "Othered" in the popular imaginary.

Like Butler, Ahmed understands that bodies do not simply appear as gendered subjects but that this is an effect of work, over time, as one's body inhabits the world. Working in the tradition of phenomenology, Ahmed picks up the term orientation to argue that "sexuality is about being oriented, of being directed" (2006: 68). Orientation is inscribed in the actual teaching of the performance itself. It is not only in the act(s), but in the landscape in which the acts take place, in which some objects, and not others, are within reach. Ahmed examines what it means for bodies to be situated in space and time—to be orientated. As Ahmed describes it, orientation is about where we are, where we are going, and how we get there. Orientation is about how bodies inhabit and occupy space in the world. She states:

> What does it mean to be oriented? How is it that we come to find our way in a world that acquires new shapes, depending on which way we turn? If we know where we are, when we turn this way or that, then we are oriented. We have our bearings. We know what to do to get to this place or to that. To be oriented is also to be oriented toward certain objects, those that help us find our way. These are the objects we recognize, such that when we face them, we know which way we are facing. They gather on the ground and

> create a ground on which we can gather. Yet objects gather quite differently, creating different grounds. (1)

The emergence of sexual orientation then, is, in Ahmed's account, effectively about "picking what is closest to us; our bodily horizon …puts some objects and not others in reach" (66). Using the metaphor of the path, Ahmed describes heterosexuality as an orientation. A path emerges as a line in the ground from repeated walking, and it exists only insofar as it is walked upon. We walk upon the path because it is there, but paradoxically the path exists only because we walk upon it. Non/normative orientations can be thought of in spatial terms; each following a line of direction. In the social reproduction of things, "heterosexuality as a compulsory orientation reproduces more than itself: it is a mechanism for the reproduction of culture, or even of the attributes that are assumed to pass along a family line, such as whiteness" (161). Only by thinking of heterosexuality as following a line of direction, of being in line, does queerness also appear not to follow the pre-designation direction, which appears out of line (67). Like heterosexuality, however, queerness is a lifelong work, and "if we think of bodies and spaces as orientated, then we re-animate the concept of space" (12). Ahmed's conceptualization of orientation is helpful in this work as it emphasizes the connections among emerging sexual subjectivities and their relational and sociosexual orientation as well as attitudes towards various forms of non/monogamies (e.g., Stephens et al. 2019). These connections are important because identity is associated with the ways that individuals label their relationship orientations as well as their orientations, behaviours, and attitudes towards types of non/monogamies and not others.

By employing the concept of orientation, Ahmed's focus is on the regulatory, the persistence of the normative, and disorientation from the norm and these regulatory regimes. She

argues that it is not the queer effects, how things get out of line, but instead how gender and sexual orientations are kept in line (83). For Ahmed, "to make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things" (161). To make things queer, to view things from a queer angle is to emphasize disturbance, disorientation, fluidity, impermanence, and other ambiguous emotions and perspectives—which often feels unpleasant or downright painful, because human beings tend to crave stability, certainty, and predictability. One of the objects given to us by heteronormative culture is compulsory monogamy. As pointed out by Mimi Schippers, "to live a good life of sexual and emotional intimacy, we must turn away from other lovers. Perhaps, then a queer life would mean reorienting oneself towards other lovers and non-monogamy would constitute a queer life" (2016: 3). In response to once-accepted narrow and binary recognitions regarding sex, gender, identity, and relationship orientations which are still embedded and accepted into social and relationship consciousness, a queer reorientation—because of its messiness, non-normative sexual desires, practices, and identifications—would disturb mono- / homo- / polynormative attitudes and throw state recognition and its rights regimes into chaos and demand a world where the colonial project might be imagined differently and offer other queer possibilities and imaginaries.

Even though Ahmed, Butler, and Halberstam do not specifically mention non/monogamy in their analysis, read together, Ahmed's phenomenological exploration of lines and turning points, Butler's analysis of the role of identity and narratives of sexual subjectivity, and Halberstam's evaluation of the life phases provide a foundation for examining non/monogamies—as a queer practice—and a queer perspective from which to read the selected texts. The multiplicity of perspectives is especially important when reading and interpreting representations of non/monogamies, whereby queer subjects are subject to mono- / homo- /

polynormative models that keep the status quo in place, in that it offers a practically and institutionally queered set of voices, perspectives, and understandings with which to think about representations of non/monogamies in popular culture and the ideological labours—work—these representations are doing.

Intimacies of Empire: The Making of Family, Intimacy, and Nation

Many critical engagements with popular culture and media representations have, for the most part, left out an analysis of non/monogamy and in which ways these representations intersect with "overlapping structures of patriarchy, nationhood, citizenship, heteronormativity, and the mechanizations of neoliberal capitalism" (Ahn et al. 2014: 119). Schippers states that representations of non/monogamy are "deeply embedded within and constitutive of heteronormative notions of intimacy, family, citizenship, and morality" (2020:4). However, at the intersections of non/monogamies, race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age, and the role representation plays in the popular imaginary remain largely unexamined.

For these reasons, this research adopts and expands critically queer engagements in media studies and other fields of study to consider in which ways representations of non/monogamy are deeply embedded and constitutive of mono- / homo- / polynormativity. Popular culture presents a clear set of norms for non/monogamy and overwhelmingly showcases people who speak about and practice non/monogamy within those norms. As discussed in Definitions, non/monogamy is the practice of having multiple relationships at the same time with the consent of everyone involved. While the terms "ethical or consensual" may seem like an additive approach it is intended to underscore the importance of communication. The language around "ethical non/monogamy" (ENM) and "consensual non/monogamy" (CNM) is still

developing and adaptations to these definitions are often in response to problematics addressed by those who identify and practice these kinds of relationship configurations. For instance, the ethical portion of ENM/CNM is the consciousness, honesty, and transparency between all parties involved. A problem arises in centering ethics in that however an ethically non-monogamous person might describe themselves, it doesn't always mean the same thing for everyone. In this thesis, I adopt the term "consensual non/monogamies" to be more inclusive of the various relationship configuration that exists both in traditional and non-traditional arrangements. For instance, there are non/monogamous relationships that exist within marriage and religion that would meet the criteria of consent, such as intentionally monogamous marriage. Transnationally, polygyny, group marriage, walking marriages, and polyandry, for example, can be intentional and consensual regardless of state legality or reason (property division, economic reasons, custom, matrilineal polyandry, as evidenced in the Mosuo people of China, Mali, and certain parts of South America such as Bolivia (e.g., Sheff 2018: 1). Examples of non-consensual non/monogamy, in the Eurocentric white settler context, would include cheating, lying/non-disclosure, lack of consent, coerciveness, sexual violence/rape, and child/adult sexual relationships, etc. By combining an acumen for seeing these norms (as I will discuss in the next Chapter) with an analytic lens for unpacking the deeper social and cultural meanings conveyed in texts, it becomes possible to identify the implicit and explicit messaging which resonates with or work against structures of power and privilege.

The making of family, intimacy, and nation represents a central domain of colonial imagination and an ideological mechanism for building colonial power. Settler colonialism and colonial reforms "in the representation of the colonized Other, in the drawing and policing of racial, ethnic, and cultural boundaries, and how colonial subjects came to produce livelihoods

and imagine futures" (Meiu 2015: 290) does not just construct a norm; "it provides the lens through which we perceive and experience all social, cultural, and economic interaction" (Herman 2003: 144). Premised on a logic of control, containment, and elimination, and as a method to contravene sovereignty, settler regulation of sexual relations, gender identity, marriage, reproduction, and genealogy, and all similar means for restricting difference occurred through a disposition to interpret the difference between self and other. In this construction of self and other, self is "taken to be the normal and paradigmatic form of an interest in the other or, more generally, others" (Warner 1993: 191) thus fulfilling the two crucial arms of colonial rule: outlining the identity of European settlers and why they were superior to all others, and solidifying control over its colonial subjects. As the hegemony of the mononormative nuclear couple is collapsing, segments of a previously subordinate sexual group are offered rights to shore up and secure the dominance of the existing sexual order. In many representations of non/monogamies in popular culture—ones that most resemble, and are thus the least threatening to, the dominant cultural norm of monogamy—I read as a domesticated and depoliticized sexual citizenship which neither challenges narrow definitions of family and queer kinship models nor unpacks strangulated sexual politics, belonging, and possibility (e.g., Walcott 2015). For these reasons, I read these representations as following a long history of colonial practices of containment of the queer subject.

Interrogating how certain communities have been marginalized because of racial or class identity within normative structures, scholars such as Ferguson (2004) suggest that normativity can be positioned to centralize specific racialized (white) and classed bodies through patriarchal normalizing ideologies. For scholars such as Byrne (2015), "intersectionality loses its critical power when race becomes something only relevant to women of colour rather than also being

used to examine the construction and maintenance of structures of power, including whiteness" (1). Here, one way in which the centrality of the subject position of white women can be secured in intersectionality studies is through the focus on the figure of the person of colour. The person of colour is presented as an added extra thus "re-securing the centrality of the subject positioning of white [people]" (Puar 2012: 52). To explore the possibilities of decentering whiteness in non/monogamies, this research will consider how whiteness and sexual citizenship are intersectional to the extent that they are raced, gendered, and classed, for example. In this research, whiteness also became an object of analysis as non/monogamous culture is not outside the world of racism, and class and gender dynamics that pervade many people's intimate relationships.

Puar argues that "no matter how intersectional our models of subjectivity, no matter how attuned to locational politics of space, place, and scale, these formulations may still limit us if they presume the automatic primacy and singularity of the disciplinary subject and its identitarian interpellation" (2007: 206). In the age of homonationalism, the boundaries between family, sexual relations, and nation become blurred as they coalesce into a whole serving the needs of the nation-state (i.e., right to marriage, desire for full citizenship; etc.) and all bodies are casualties of destructive state-identity-formations and the binaries that form (e.g., monogamy/non-monogamy). Understanding that representations of non/monogamies in popular culture are not only about visibility but that what has been presented thus far has been deeply embedded in homonationalism. The term "homonationalism" refers to socio-spatial and political processes that strategically incorporate certain privileged queer bodies into nation-building projects. Homonationalism can be understood as the fourth dimension of mono- / homo- / polynormativity, an imperial dimension, alongside disability, class, gender, and racial

dimensions. In the participation of homonationalism, we become blinded by our privileges and actively work against the well-being of the most vulnerable members of our community "rather than show solidarity with those who are also oppressed by monogamous and heterosexual familial forms" (Haritaworn et al. 2006: 525). Homonationalism is associated with normative, 'normal' or natural social, sexual, and intimate relations. Individuals who do not conform to these standards are 'Othered'.

My research is shaped by Puar's analysis as it brings into focus the contested connections among history, citizenship, and sexuality. These connections have been in the making in Canada for many decades (e.g., Epprecht et al. 2017). The success of neoconservatism and neoliberalism has always depended on combining the political and economic with the moral and sexual, and together, work to define and measure family, marriage, kinship, and what it means to be queer and on what basis decide who gets the privilege of citizenship and who does not. Historically, the Canadian state has defined citizenship not only by barring sexual undesirables from the country but also by purging sexual deviants within its borders (e.g., Rambukkana 2015). For the non/monogamous and otherwise non-conforming, who and what counts as desirable, moral, and legal is a salient reminder that this is, after all, how sexual hegemony is constructed and maintained. While Puar's analysis does not specifically address non-normative sexualities and non/monogamous relationship practices, this framework does help me think through in which ways individuals who identify and practice non/monogamies resist, reproduce, and are oblivious about settler-state cultural norms and governance structures embedded in narratives of mono- / homo- /polynormativity.

Chapter 3: Method/ology

Encouraged by Halberstam's (2003) call for queer paradigms and pedagogies in academia and the everyday, this research has aimed to contribute to the decolonization of knowledge by "resist[ing] the disembodied voice that characterizes traditional academic prose" (Ellingson 2009: 34) and disrupting scientific imperialism by arguing for the value of embodied knowledge. It is striking how little qualitative research exists on how non/monogamous individuals experience and interpret representations of non/monogamies in popular culture. Using qualitative research methods, I draw upon the lived experiences of people in non/monogamous relationships to study the effects that representations of non/monogamies have on individuals and their relationships. The centering of the perspectives of individuals who identity and practice non/monogamies reflects the overall feminist, post-structuralist, discursive theoretical framework I adopted in this research as discussed in Chapter 2. By using feminist post-structural and Queer Studies to examine non/monogamies, I hope to bring those individuals and relationships that are continually marginalized to the center of disciplinary conversations. This perspective has informed my analysis, allowing me to see the shaping of non/monogamies by viewers in unforeseen and different ways and has implications for how I treat media as one of the social institutions in which discourses of non/monogamies, and the subjectivities constituted within them, are re/produced. Ultimately, I strived to answer these questions:

1. In which ways do my participants, who identify as and practice non/monogamies, understand, and interpret representations of non/monogamies in popular culture?

2. What do these interpretations reveal about the ideological labours—work—that the texts about popular representations of non/monogamies examined in this research are doing?

Given the diversity of the non/monogamous communities across Canada, I expect that people who are differently situated along the lines of race, class, ability, age, etc. may have differing interpretations. With increasing social connections between non/monogamous groups and the sharing of curated information, opinion, and popular trends about non/monogamies and related topics including mainstream representation circulating on social media such as Facebook, Fetlife, and other virtual platforms, I am interested in the ways my participant's take up shared ideas across time and space, and in which ways they apply these concepts in their interpretation of representations of non/monogamies in popular culture. This is also the ideological labours—work—I am referring to in the analysis of ideology in terms of a shared belief system which itself becomes a source of tension for individuals, along with popular culture "as a system of representations commenting on ideology" (Bar-Haim 1990: 149). Such discursive constructions allow individuals to make sense of the world and the subject positions available to be taken up with an individual's understanding of sexual subjectivity in the context of non/monogamies.

Methods

Semi-structured Interviews: Participants and Procedure

After receiving ethics approval from the University's Research Ethics Board (REB), and my supervisory committee, the global emergence of COVID-19 in January 2020 necessitated a change to my methods. I had originally intended to do 2-3 in-person film screenings and interviews with individuals residing in Nova Scotia. However, Canadian and provincial

emergency public health guidelines that emerged concerning COVID-19 made in-person interviews impossible to continue safely and responsibly. The in-person film screenings were removed entirely from the research design. As it became evident that the pandemic was long-term, I received REB revision approval to move interviews to online correspondence via text, phone, or video call. Simultaneously, as the recruitment poster began circulating on social media, such as Facebook, I began receiving requests from people across the country to participate. I received a second REB revision approval to include not only people located in Nova Scotia but also those from other provinces, as well as to work with a slightly larger sample (see Appendix I: Recruitment Poster).

Recruitment was opportunistic and purposeful. I posted recruitment posters in various public and private groups on Facebook, such as the Canadian Polyamory Advocacy Association, Polyamory Canada, Halifax Polyamory, and Queer Poly Forum—Nova Scotia. Potential participants were encouraged to contact me directly. When contact was made, I forwarded an informed consent agreement. If they did not complete and return it, they were dropped from the sample after two reminders. In several instances, participants withdrew their consent when the interview commenced. Their data was not included in the dataset (see Appendix H: Informed Consent Agreement). For participants who completed the informed consent form and agreed to answer the questions, interviews commenced, via phone call, text, or video chat, with a series of pre-screening interview questions to discuss the purpose and intention of the research and review the informed consent form.

I conducted several internet searches with keywords such as “open relationships” “polyamory”, “non-monogamy”, “movie”, “television”, and “review”. From the relevant texts identified on list-serves, blogs and journals, podcasts, and websites such as Poly-ish Movie

Reviews, IMDb.com, The Movie Database, and Poly-Land.com. I chose a random sample of texts that were aired or released post-1980 and were identified as publicly accessible. Within the limited scope of this research, the list of films and television episodes was developed with the following criteria: films or television episodes that depict consensual non/monogamy, had at least one character who explicitly demonstrates to have consented to the arrangement, and available in English, or included English subtitles (See Appendix H: List of Films and Television Episodes).

After the pre-screening questions were completed, participants were asked to select one television episode or film from the list provided with the caveat that they select one that they had access to stream or had access to a physical hard copy. Retrieval of television shows and films was accomplished through on-demand television subscription services, online streaming services, publicly accessible online content, or provided a copy from my collection, with interviewees offered $10 as reimbursement for any expenses. The participant then watched the episode(s) or film they selected in their own home.

Participant Self-Descriptors and Researcher Notes

Between April 23rd, 2020, and June 19th, 2020, twelve people took part in semi-structured interviews via email, phone call, text, or video chat, in which they answered a series of questions based on the film or television episodes they had watched. One participant, discussed in the Introduction, did not complete all the interview questions but completed the consent form and watched the selected text. Although I did not collect specific demographic information about the participants, they often self-identified within their responses and offered additional information

to include in my research notes. The diversity of the sample was limited to who chose to participate throughout data collection.

Participant	Self-descriptors	Researcher Notes (Month/Day/Year)
Aly	I am a polyamorous pansexual individual. I am currently in a long-term relationship with my fiancé, and I date other people outside of my relationship	Date of Interview: 5/11/2020 Geographical location: Canada Urban/Rural: Unknown Preferred pronouns: She/Her Relationship w/ Researcher: No
Chris	I am a 30-something Black woman, mother, and gamer originally from West Africa. I am a poly person in an open relationship with my husband.	Date of Interview: 5/10/2020 Geographical location: Canada Urban/Rural: Unknown Preferred pronouns: She/Her Relationship w/ Researcher: No
Erin	I am hetero-flexible, openly non/monogamous, divorced, and kinky.	Date of Interview: 4/25/2020 Geographical location: Halifax, NS. Canada Urban/Rural: Unknown Preferred pronouns: She/Her Relationship w/ Researcher: Yes
Kasia	I am an ethical slut, polyam, queer, non-binary, and a parent. I identify as Indigenous. I have been married, now divorced, and have had other sexual partners but I don't have any other relationships at this time.	Date of Interview: 6/07/2020 Geographical location: Quebec/Nova Scotia, Canada Urban/Rural: Urban Preferred pronouns: They/Them Relationship w/ Researcher: Yes

Laara	I identify as a solo-poly person. As a queer person. As a kinky person. As a female. And as a hidden-disabled person.	Date of Interview: 4/23/2020 Geographical location: Nova Scotia, Canada Urban/Rural: Rural Preferred pronouns: She/Her Relationship w/ Researcher: Yes
Matthew	I am a relationship anarchist and maintain several long-term relationships. I am queer, a social activist, impatient futurist, political deviant, ethical slut, and all-around malcontent. I pride myself in being a nascent feminist killjoy, shameless flirt, and aspiring race and gender traitor.	Date of Interview: 4/27/2020 Geographical location: Halifax, NS. Canada Urban/Rural: Urban Preferred pronouns: They/Them. Relationship w/ Researcher: Yes
Rae	I identify as queer, non-binary, transgender, and a solo polyamorist	Date of Interview: 5/03/2020 Geographical location: Nova Scotia, Canada Urban/Rural: Unknown Preferred pronouns: They/Them. Relationship w/ Researcher: Yes
Raven Blue	I am monogamish. I have a primary partner. Sometimes I am dating others, other times I am monogamous, in practice, for periods of time.	Date of Interview: 5/04/2020 Geographical locations: Canada Urban/Rural: Unknown Preferred pronouns: She/Her Relationship w/ Researcher: No
Robert Smith?	I am a privileged white dude, a solo poly bi male, and I have several boyfriends, friends with benefits, and casual partners.	Date of Interview: 4/28/2020 Geographical location: Canada

		Urban/Rural: Unknown Preferred pronouns: He/Him The "?" after Robert Smith?'s pseudonym is not in error. It has been included here and used throughout this thesis as requested by the participant as a preferred name. Relationship w/ Researcher: No
Victoria	I am one-third of a polyfidelitous closed triad. I'm bisexual and have been with my husband since we were 15. Married for 11 years now. Last year we opened our marriage to our girlfriend. We have two children and live all together as one family unit with two moms and one dad. We're not seeking any other partners and are committed to each other and our family.	Date of Interview: 4/27/2020 Geographical location: Canada Urban/Rural: Unknown Preferred pronouns: She/Her Relationship w/ Researcher: No
Willow	I was monogamous for 25 years before I divorced my husband. I am now solo polyamorous and have several partners. I am a single parent of two adult children. I also identify as kinky.	Date of Interview: 6/07/2020 Geographical location: Nova Scotia, Canada Urban/Rural: Urban Preferred pronouns: She/Her Relationship w/ Researcher: Yes
Winter	I am polyamorous if I had to label it, or even just as a consensual non-monogamist. I value honest communication and allowing relationships to grow naturally, without placing artificial roadblocks on myself or my partners,	Date of Interview: 6/19/2020 Geographical location: Halifax, NS. Canada Urban/Rural: Urban Preferred pronouns: She/Her. Relationship w/ Researcher: Yes

Some participants chose to use pseudonyms. Additional information was added in my researcher notes when known. Preferred names and pronouns were used throughout the interview process and transcription. The participant descriptions used throughout the thesis are not meant to reduce participants to demographic or categorical markers. Instead, I sought to seek to help situate the participant within the context of their relationships and how they posited themselves within the world of non/monogamies. If there was an existing relationship between participant and researcher, either as a friend, acquaintance, or member of the local non/monogamous community, or if no previous relationship existed prior to data collection, a notation was added in researcher notes. Confidentiality was maintained by securing documents on a personal computer, with encryption access. All participants were over nineteen years of age at the time of the study and resided in Canada.

I utilized a voice recorder for interviews completed via phone or video call and then transcribed the interviews. In cases where the interview was completed by text message, I compiled answers into a single document. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim. I then sent the transcribed/copied interview to participants and invited them to review the document using the comment feature. A deadline of one week was provided for responding, though in some instances the deadline was extended for personal reasons. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations were taken from interview notes. In the quotations, redundant words like "Uhm" were removed for greater readability. Brackets are used within quotes for greater clarity.

The benefits of online work include being comfortable, non-intrusive, and safe; engaging and convenient; online communication ease, and easy set-up. Some considerations occurred during data collection, such as compliance with public health regulations as well as local social distancing norms, as well as recognizing the logistical challenges that some participants with

children, elderly parents, or employment, for instance, faced with school and daycare facility closures, transitioning to work from home programs, and working with a pre-scheduled timeline. The limitations I encountered relate to lack of non-verbal communication, poor set-up, privacy, and access as well as relational issues.

As Ellis et al. suggest, "researchers… live connected to social networks…. Consequently, when we conduct and write research, we implicate others in our work" (2011:281). Relational concerns are a crucial dimension of all inquiry, but relational ethics are heightened for researchers who are both insiders and outsiders. In using personal experience, I not only implicate myself in this work but also intimate others. For example, in the case of this research, my partner/s or metamour/s may be easily recognizable to some readers. To navigate these relational and ethical concerns, I offered the participants the opportunity to review their responses, remove identifiable information, and amend their self-descriptors. In the gathering and analysis of data, I acknowledged my obligation "to show my work to others implicated in or by their texts, allowing these others to respond, and/or acknowledging how these others feel about what is being written about them and allowing them to talk back to how they have been represented in the text" (Ellis et al. 2011: 281). Opportunities to modify these methods in future research may encourage further inclusion and lessen relational issues.

Feminist Reflexivity

Feminist reflexivity involves a conscious effort on behalf of the researcher to consider themselves at each step of the research process. Many feminist researchers consider this process helpful in addressing issues related to how knowledge itself is produced and by whom. Reflexivity broadly defined, means a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference. In the

context of social research, reflexivity at its most immediately obvious level refers to the way in which the products of research are affected by the persons and processes involved in of doing the research (Pillow 2003: 178). The use of reflexivity in research began as a response to critiques within the social sciences of "issues related to power and exploitation within classical, colonial methods of ethnographic research, and an uncritical acceptance of the researcher's privileged position within the research relationship" (178). Feminist researchers recognized the need to do research differently; reflexivity is considered useful in exposing and highlighting the intersections between self, other, text, and historical/political contexts.

As an approach to research and writing that aims to describe and systematically examine personal experiences to comprehend cultural experiences, reflexivity challenges positivistic ways of doing research (Ellis et al., 2011). The use of personal narratives and the practice of reflexivity helped me acknowledge my relationships with others in the process of figuring out what to do, and how to live (e.g., Adams, Jones and Ellis 2015, Lapadat 2017) and offered a way to integrate stories of "contemporary everyday life among friends, in the family, and in the broader community" (Poulos 2009: 17). Writing one's story is a challenging task. As Pathak points out, "to examine oneself and one's life in a way that fosters thoughtful, engaged, genuine, and rigorous critique requires immense time, introspection, honesty, and courage" (2013: 595); In personal narratives, "[W]e write to leave room for interpretation, for misunderstandings, for not knowing. We write to leave things unfinished and unanswered" (Adams et al., 2011:108-109).

As a key, long-time member of the non-monogamous community in Halifax, including as a grass-roots educator and community organizer, personal reflection allowed me to bring my rich lived experience into this research project. While narrative inquiry challenges canonical ways of

doing research and representing others (e.g., Spry 2001), it emphasizes my relational ties to cultural members, and treats research as a political, socially-just, and socially-conscious act (e.g., Adam and Holman Jones 2008). It also demonstrates a commitment to a theoretical agenda of understanding lived experience (e.g., Anderson 2006). Thus, the purpose of using personal narratives in this research is to help facilitate understanding of a culture for insiders and outsiders (e.g., Ellis et al. 2010). Believing that research can be rigorous, theoretical, analytical and emotional, therapeutic, and inclusive of personal and social phenomena, I incorporated personal reflections into this research and analysis as my stories and experiences often intersect with larger patterns and processes of cultural experience (e.g., Tedlock 1991 and Jorgenson 2002). My use of self-reflexivity is at best, a means to situate myself as both a researcher interested in looking at representations of non/monogamies in popular culture, which is under-researched, and as a queer feminist relationship anarchist who recognizes the need for our stories to circulate within the larger society.

Personal Reflection Process

Thematic analysis aligns with feminist reflectivity as an analytical method to allow the researcher to organize and make sense of their personal experiences with the guiding theoretical framework (e.g., Braun and Clarke 2012). For this reason, I maintained a journal throughout my research, in which I reflected on salient events that occurred during that period. When writing my stories, I was able to reflect and expand on these events using hindsight to add rich detail. In my journaling, I also drew on various texts I was reading, conversations and interactions I was having, and memories these evoked. In telling my story, explicit theorization about and reflexivity of representation of non/monogamies also became analytic questions. I asked myself:

What can my lived experiences add to social theories of bodies, identities, sexualities, performativities, and subjectivities? In which ways do I identify (or not) to narratives—the stories we tell—about non/monogamies concerning my knowledge and lived experiences? To address these questions, I watched each of the episodes that the participants selected and made notes of my own interpretation of the depictions of non/monogamies in the television show or film. From the preliminary codes, themes were developed and organized. My personal commentary and reflections were derived from my journals, in which I reflected on the thesis as a process, on the texts my participants chose, and on my discussions of those texts with the participants. From the notes in my journals, I linked the material within them, thematically, to the themes which I identified as emerging from the analysis I conducted of my participants / interview data? Like my participants, I answered each of the questions in the interview script. In each analytic chapter, I included my reaction to the selected text. Non/monogamous subjects often occupy positions of contradiction, certainty, and ambiguity about representation. As noted in my Conclusion, discussions around relational privilege (Rambukkana 2015) and the politics of relating (Cardoso 2019) to expand, to recognize the politicalness of non/monogamies and their subjects will be our future work.

In the "Personal Reflections" at the end of each Chapter, I offered further elaboration and interpretation of the participant's responses as well as my own lived experience, situatedness in time, place, and context relative to the current discourses non/monogamies which draw on more nuanced theoretical frameworks of intimacy, family, and kinship (e.g., Rambukkana 2015). Non/monogamies is not the same object that it was over a decade ago when I first conceived of this project. As noted in the Preface, I am not more radical than my participants. I am commonplace; my lived experience and social location are likely shared by many others and

informative to a broader project of understanding non/monogamies in everyday lives. My commentary also focused on how the mundane trappings of mono- / homo- / polynormativity orchestrated by texts, interactions, and social structure illuminates the relations of power and privilege in our lives.

Analysis

My examination of the participant's responses was conducted using feminist thematic analysis—a systematic method to identify and organize insights, with intersectionality in mind, into meaningful themes across data. Constructing a personal identity, or a subjective and evolving story of how an individual came to be the person they are and how they understand the world around them is widely recognized as a crucial developmental task across the lifespan (McAdams 2013). Analysis began with repeated readings of the transcripts to familiarize myself with the complete data set. In the next stage of the analytical process, the recurrent patterns and meanings in the dataset were coded using transcript notes and highlighter pens and these codes formed the basis for organizing the data into broader themes relevant to my interests. The data within these themes were then subjected to more detailed analysis around both the meanings being produced in the text and the discourses theorized as informing those meanings. Through a process of reading and re-reading, collation and reorganization of the thematically coded data were undertaken. In some instances, a participant's quotes were chosen over another if similar experiences were reported. This process allowed for further refinement and review of themes, by collapsing several themes into each other, followed by the development of a thematic map of the data to identify main themes, subthemes, and interconnections between themes and subthemes. Through focusing on meaning across the dataset, I was able to see and make sense of collective

or shared meanings and experiences to render visible issues such as mono- / homo- / polynormativity. This means that the dataset was both interpreted based on the participant's experiences and more broadly, within a feminist and a queer theoretical and ideological framework. This involved asking questions like, how does this participant make sense of their experiences? What assumptions do they (and I) make in interpreting their experiences? What kind of worlds are revealed through their stories? For my dataset, I generated several main themes that presented sufficient depth and detail to convey the richness and complexity of the dataset:

> On Orientating Ourselves Towards Non/Monogamies: Maps the participants orientation towards non/monogamies in which ways it manifested in their lives and highlights tensions experienced in relating to others amidst the mono- / homo- / polynormative narratives circulating in popular culture. These narratives were typically framed as a to-be-expected part of everyday life.
>
> On Non/Monogamies in Popular Culture: Outlines how participants talk about various experiences they had interacting with representations of "non/monogamies" in popular culture and they interpreted these narratives in relation to their lives.
>
> On Mono- / Homo- / Polynormativity and the Colonized (happy) Queer Subject: Expanding on how the participants negotiated their non/monogamous identities and relational practices in a un/familiar and un/comfortable world, this section focuses on the

ways in which participant's frame representations of non/monogamies at the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age.

On Moments of Resistance, Reproduction, and Ambivalence in the Un/Comfortable and Un/Familiar: Focuses on participant's interpretation, reframing, and reimagining of several texts that have been identified as having potential non/monogamous themes and characters.

In the analytic chapters that follow, these themes coalesce with the participant's responses as well as my personal reflections of the selected texts and issues raised in conversation.

Chapter 4: Orientating Ourselves Towards Non/Monogamies

In this chapter, I discuss some of the stories my participants shared about their lives, their experiences of being orientated towards and navigating relationships within non/monogamy, and their preliminary thoughts on representations of non/monogamies in popular culture. When we think about popular culture, we probably imagine the images, stories, and products that represent our culture: what is trending, recent drops, or television shows that our friends are all talking about. Popular culture is more than just these cultural products—it is a phenomenon that also reflects "overlapping structures of patriarchy, nationhood, citizenship, heteronormativity, and the mechanizations of neoliberal capitalism" (Ahn et al. 2014: 119), mono- / homo- / polynormativity. These dynamics are also shaped by the social imaginary of non/monogamies in The Global North and narratives circulating in popular culture (e.g., Pascar 2018).

Many of the participants talked about non/monogamies as intentional acts of resistance through a desire to open new possibilities in relation to themselves and others. Some participants questioned the notion of respectability and what counts (and doesn't) as healthy or normal relationships. Some shared their experience of being the target of moralizing judgments and stigmatization despite building more balanced relationships for themselves. Each story demonstrated the varied ways this group of individuals came to accept non/monogamies in their lives and relationships; their stories are "rubrics [which] have their own logics, their own contradictory relations to temporality, and their own sets of insights about embodiment, counterhegemonic practices, and subjugated knowledges" (Dinshaw et al. 2007: 182). By interrogating mono- / homo- / polynormative narratives of non/monogamies and by encouraging those at the center of non/monogamous stories to speak for themselves, I have intended to expand and trouble normative understandings of intimacy, kinship, and family.

On Intentional Acts of Resistance

Some participants shared stories of being orientated towards various types of non/monogamies, others of being oriented toward other queer bodies and spaces. Several talked about specific moments in their lives that oriented them towards non/monogamies. For Matthew, embracing non/monogamies was a political stance aimed at challenging the privileged status of coupledom, as well as a personal choice and social identity:

> I am a queer relationship anarchist; each relationship is grown out of the intentions of myself and my partner as we co-create what we want in our relationship in whatever shape we try on. I want to be anti-supremacist in my choices of social reproduction so I'm trying to learn a more authentic way of relating by doing. I spent most of my life self-restricting and I want to create a better space for myself and others.

Robert Smith?, who identifies as a bisexual man, spoke of re/orientating himself towards different types of non/monogamies over the course of his adult life:

> I identify as solo poly, although I came to that having tried almost every other variant over the past 20 years. I don't live with any partners, but I'm in four serious relationships, all of whom have other people (who in turn have other people). I also have several friends with benefits, and I keep space for casual partners as well. My overriding philosophy is people are not property. So, my partners are free to do anything they wish, as am I. I neither accept nor impose veto power.

In this context, the term "veto power" refers to an agreement in relationships that gives one person the power to renegotiate, modify (or even end) their partner's other relationships. In many instances, veto power is a coping strategy used in non/monogamies to avoid dealing with jealousy, loneliness, and other types of triggering feelings (e.g., Le Cunff 2018). It is not uncommon for primary relationships to have a negotiated power to veto other relationships. For Robert Smith?, veto power creates a false sense of control and security; while using veto power might neutralize one set of threats, it will inevitably produce other problems that do not have a quick fix. I understand Robert Smith?'s response as suggesting that veto power shifts the delicate balance of trust and power dynamics that may be at play in the relationship to be potentially harmful.

It is the privileged status of monogamous marital relationships that Matthew questioned. For them, state marriage is a forced power imbalance. That is, anything that is recognized by, sanctioned by, and of benefit to the State is rooted in a power imbalance. Relationship anarchy, by contrast, is an inherent critique of oppressive systems and explicitly (re)configures relationships to resist normative social and relational formations and to move them away from a focus on legal, social, and financial pair-bonding. Robert Smith?'s rejection of veto power and other related rules comes from his lifelong exploration of non/monogamies; like Matthew, his ideas about non/monogamy have shifted and developed over time where alternatives such as open communication, vetting, siloed relationships, and ending the relationship may come into play.

On Compersion, Intentional Family and Communities

For Robert Smith?, going beyond normative relational frameworks can result in more choices. Non/monogamy is a practice he does with other non/monogamous individuals as they navigate relationships, people, and personal boundaries through the process of compersion: an empathetic state that one experiences when another individual feels happiness and joy. He states:

> Non-monogamy to me is symbolic of the fact that you don't have to do everything they told you…. As an identity, it embraces for me the fact that love is born of abundance, not scarcity. I have a lot of love to give (familial, friendship, romantic) …Living a non-monogamous life to me means being bold and proud of who I am, a living example to all who follow me that you can be whoever you want to be, no matter what you were told…I embrace radical happiness, including a stigma-free embrace of sex and sexuality. It means truly living, not living half a life.

Robert Smith? describes choosing not to participate in normative relational goals and values as an intentional act of resistance and a commitment to willfully eccentric modes of being that bring one joy. The term "compersion", now in widespread use, was originally coined by members of the Kerista Commune, a polyfidelitous community in San Francisco (1971-1991). However, the term itself is a millennia-old idea; compersion exists in other languages and has a significant historical, cultural, and social etiology. For example, "Mudita," in Sanskrit, means the pleasure that comes from delighting in other people's well-being and is part of one of the four core pillars of Buddhism. "Unne," is Norwegian for being happy on someone else's behalf (Anapol 1997).

In the context of intimate, romantic, and sexual relationships, the experience of compersion has the potential to challenge mononormativity by demonstrating that it is possible to thrive within non/monogamous relationships. Within non/monogamous communities, it is common for people to state that jealousy comes with the territory of open romantic relationships; some advocates state that through time and experience compersion becomes an efficient method for combating jealousy. For instance, psychologist and polyamorist advocate Elisabeth Sheff (2017) writes:

> Popular images of romance cast jealousy as an emblem of true love because someone must really care if they are jealous, right? The flip side of jealousy, compersion or the warm glow of happiness that comes when one's lover is happy with one of their other lovers, is so little known that the polyamorists had to make up a word for it (1).

However, the idealization (and weaponization) of compersion as the opposite of jealousy situates these emotions as mutually exclusive. Often, compersion is held up as the holy grail of polyamory: an evolved emotion we should all aspire to—the alternative is, of course, a shameful state of being.

On Creating New Meanings and (Queer) Possibilities

For several of the participants, queering socially accepted (and familiar) norms and conventions of coupledom is a deliberate act. For Rae, who identifies as queer, non-binary, transgender, and a solo polyamorist, disrupting normative ideas about relational responsibility, stability, and durability is made possible by solo polyamory, a practice of engaging in consensual

non-exclusive relationships involving sex, romance, and/or emotional intimacy, without coupling:

> Well, I guess I am a solo poly. I don't really have an interest in coupling up in the common sense of the word. Long-term living situations I strongly prefer to be platonic. I prefer to be the third person in a preexisting secure couple because I like not feeling the pressure of primary romantic expectations. I could never be monogamous again personally but totally respect those who do; to each their own.

As I describe below, heteronormative principles, or the relationship escalator (Gahran 2017), typically include hierarchical goals or benchmarks such as sexual and romantic exclusivity, merging life infrastructure, and identity, that determine success or failure. Solo polyamory, as an expression of personal values, such as personal autonomy and independence, for instance, does not align with these normative benchmarks.

In the practice of detaching sexuality from sexual identity, and love from sexual exclusivity, intimacy, and romance come opportunities to "rethink the practice of cultural production, its hierarchies and power dynamics, its tendency to resist or capitulate" to the powerful processes of hetero- /homo-/mononormativity (Krishnamurti 1970: 19). For instance, Erin described her life's journey as a path of discovery and re/orientating towards a non/monogamous life after the breakdown of her marriage and subsequent divorce. She described creating new benchmarks (and meanings) that better fit her preferred relational style:

> Since leaving my husband a few years back I have done very little dating of any kind. More working my way back to finding myself as it were after allowing myself to get lost along life's wrong paths. As people who were, or still are in my circles have figured out that I am returning to open non-monogamy, and new friendships learn for the first time, no one seems surprised or questions my self-identifying within the term. For the little bit that I am involved within the non-monogamy realm, I'm giving me the ability to explore all the parts of myself and my life. I am solo polyam. I am dating and open to my changing that dynamic as it suits me to do so. This works for me right now.

Erin's reshaping of meaning in relation to non/monogamous norms and values, is akin, in my view, to what Hall described as the politics of representation: "we give things meaning by how we represent them—the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them" (1997: 3). Hall's most important conclusions inform the view that meaning is never truly fixed. Meaning is "always being negotiated and inflected, to resonate with new situations" leaving, in turn, space for alternative definitions" (10). Meaning is also deeply embedded in historical, social, political, and ideological dimensions. Like compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980), monogamy has been framed as a prescriptive cultural ideal to the exclusion of other forms of intimacy (e.g., Richie and Barker 2006, Emens 2004). For individuals who identify as non/monogamous, creating new meanings alongside internalized stigma is a life-long journey, which also involves developing new languages and new ways of defining relationship structures to find ways to talk about those experiences, as Erin describes.

With the exponential growth of non/monogamous communities since the 1990s, due in part to the internet and social media, the language used to describe identities, relationships, and emotions has changed despite being constrained by the conventional, mononormative language of partnerships, infidelities, and jealousy (e.g., Richie and Barker 2006). For example, in *The Ethical Slut: A Practical Guide to Polyamory, Open Relationships and Other Adventures*, Dossie Easton and Catherine Liszt describes the difficulty of talking about polyamory without developing a new language: "most of the language available for us…has built-in value judgements, just like the word 'slut'—the legacy of a sex-negative history" in the Global North (39: 1997). When Erin stated: "I am solo polyam. I am dating and open to my changing that dynamic as it suits me to do so," she created an identity, an orientation, and situated non/monogamies as a practice that has given meaning to her chosen relational style, offered her more personal control, and made her understandable/visible to others. When Erin describes choosing solo-polyam as an identity, an orientation, or a practice, she is influenced and constrained by the social structure of non/monogamies and by normative monogamies. At the same time, her choice leaves room for a creative and radical reinterpretation of relationships, and forays into the previously unthinkable and unsayable.

On Observing the "Parade of Terribles Marching Down the Slippery Slope"[2]

Several of my participants articulate the links between mono- / homo- / polynormativity and hegemonic notions of intimacy, class, gender, sex, and sexuality. Raven Blue, a participant who describes herself as monogamish, recounted their experiences and frustrations of seeing

[2] See Lithwick 2004

representations of non/monogamies in popular culture that they perceived as inaccurate or unrealistic:

> I can recall a few instances where non-monogamy is represented in various TV series or movies. In most cases, it is presented as a novelty item, as it tends to cater to an assumed audience that would be shocked or surprised, and the treatment of the subject matter is often focused on the reactions of hetero-normative people around the main characters, either trying to keep in the closet, or turning it into an overly dramatic or comedic scene. I have yet to see a portrayal that presents it in an accurate or realistic way. It's sort of like *Three's Company*, in the '70s, when the only way to treat the idea of an openly gay man on television was to turn it into a kind of slapstick.

Similarly, Erin talked about their experiences seeing stereotypical tropes of "the cheater, the polygamist, or the swinger":

> I do have some familiarity with having seen non-monogamy in various episodes of *The L-Word*, I believe. Also reports of polygamist marriages on shows like *Oprah* or something. Always very sensationalized and not in my view a true portrait of the depth and reality that could be and is possible within the poly/non-monogamist community. More so swingers lean toward the idea of polyamory in shows like *CSI* or other dramatized "real life" based series. There is always some amount of secrecy and two people yearning to be together more so with each other and not knowing how to tell the other. Or some such heightened theatrics added.

Raven Blue and Erin's accounts of their experiences seeing various representations of non/monogamies speak to the exclusion / invisibility of forms of non/monogamous relationships amongst the queer community. Their interactions with mainstream depictions of non/monogamies tended to be the ones that most closely mirror heterosexual / monogamous lives / histories. When texts do explore somewhat more diverse aspects of non/monogamies, these representations are almost always treated as bizarre, deviant, or as an individual failure rather than a legitimate manner by which to approach relationships, romance, and sex (e.g., Monson 2017).

Another topic that rarely gets explored in mainstream discourses of non/monogamies appears at the intersections of BDSM. My own experience of seeing representations of non/monogamies in popular culture began two decades ago. One evening in 2001, my domestic partner and I decided to watch *KINK*, a documentary television series on Showcase, a Canadian English language specialty cable channel known for showing non-traditional programming. Focusing primarily on Canada's kink and fetish communities, *KINK* takes viewers into the storied lives of everyday people queering sex and gender, and practicing non/monogamies, including polyamory, swinging, BDSM (group) play, open couple relationships, and other consensual multi-adult configurations. On the surface, I found much to celebrate about *KINK*, particularly its frank portrayal of the personal lives of its subjects. As a cultural text, *KINK* offered a view of non/monogamous relationships that were rare within popular culture in the early and mid- 2000s. While *KINK* may now seem like a cultural fossil, ripe for reminiscence but hardly relevant to current conversations, the series hints at how representations of non/monogamies in popular culture can enduringly be productive of new or deeper understandings of sexuality, gender, race, ability, and how these intersect with mono- / homo- /

polynormative values and beliefs. Speaking about the overlap of BDSM and non/monogamy in marginalized communities, Erin said: “I've seen parts of the series KINK when it had its initial run-on Showcase. There is big overlap within the kink and polyam-communities, I'm part of both so I feel it is of specific interest.”

Speaking about the way non/monogamies appear in *KINK*, Erin states:

> I’m very aware that poly is displayed in this show as a valid choice after the ol’ college try at monogamy. Couldn’t make it work or be successful at monogamy? No worries, here is another barrel of defective monkeys. Play amongst yourselves. I just feel the narrative is that non-monogamy is the fallback position for people who fail at ‘real’ relationships. That there is inherent inequality and a sinful / wrongness about it, where the people in non-monogamous relationships aren't really happy or they are just fooling themselves or have been tricked/ seduced/ taken advantage of.

Like Raven Blue and Erin, I am familiar with the desire to see non-normative bodies, identities, and relationships in popular culture and with the disappointment of finding familiar tropes (which center on monogamy) repeatedly recycled. This renders most visible the narratives that implicitly suggest and rely on “the unintelligibility of polyamory, as well as a heterosexist conflation of homoerotic desire with inferiority” (Schippers 2016: 105). As Elizabeth Sheff points out, non/monogamies, such as polyamory and BDSM play relationships, are included in “the parade of horribles marching down the slippery slope that same-sex marriage would propel families” (2011: 494). These framings contain and distance non/monogamies and queer sexualities from normative forms of intimacy and sexual desire.

Victoria, who describes herself as one-third of a polyfidelitous closed triad, bisexual, and a parent, tells of her frustrations when seeing the strategies used to depict gender, sexuality, intimacy, and kinship. She says:

> From what I've ever seen on television shows is the promise of polyamory and everyone starts out so happy. For example, I watch a show called *Swat*. And this season I was so excited to see one of the characters get into a poly relationship and stood up for herself against friends who were against it. But in the end, it ended up the two women were more attracted to each other, the husband got jealous, and the wife wouldn't say anything or leave the husband. And the character ended up going back and being like "you were right" which just made me angry. The whole thing left a sour taste in my mouth.

In Victoria's account of the narrative of *Swat*, jealousy and competition are applauded and then reanimated / repackaged as growth. Any potential for this text to establish legitimacy in non/monogamous relationships is stripped away to re-establish the rule of mononormativity and to legitimize toxic behaviours as normal.

Reflecting on their experiences of seeing representations of non/monogamies in popular culture, Matthew spoke of various examples over time that did not resonate with them:

> Since monogamy is portrayed as commitment and maturity, and as a virtue, non-monogamy is typically portrayed as a bad quality of poor character, or a lack of maturity or a mistake to overcome on the journey to (self) righteousness... Much like how same sex-relations began showing up one or two decades ago for the sake of titillation… I was

> hopeful to see some representation of plural relations but since media planning is typically myopic or otherwise profoundly simplistic… I'm trying to think of specific examples but they're so numerous and generic that they smear together in recollection.

In my interpretation of Matthew's account, non/monogamies are both titillating and moralized within media representations; monogamy (or the closest thing to it) is presented as a solution to any problem and as the hegemonic norm. For Matthew, who described themselves as a relationship anarchist and ethical slut, appeals to cultural conformity and monogamy reinforce its cultural dominance. Non/monogamy is exhibited within cultural productions, such as media and popular culture, as a threat to the moral social order of families while monogamous bodies are marked as normative, self-evident, and have and continue to operate as a marker of identity. Nation-building projects are violent; they rest on processes of colonization. For settler-sexuality and white hegemony to saturate everyday life, "it has to be secured by a process of domination, or those acts, decisions, and policies that white subjects perpetrate on people of color" (Leonardo 2004: 137). White hegemony is deeply connected to socioeconomic, legal, and spatial acts and processes that secure its domination (e.g., Butts 2020).

Professor Marston and the Wonder Women is a 2017 American biographical drama film about American psychologist William Moulton Marston, who created the fictional character Wonder Woman. The story, directed and written by lesbian director Angela Robinson, is told in flashbacks set during a 1945 testimony that William Moulton Marston gives to representatives of the Child Study Association of America. When asked how mainstream narratives of non/monogamies maintain and legitimize social inequalities, what resonated most for Chris, a

30-something Black woman, mother, and gamer originally from West Africa, occurred at the intersection of race and non/monogamies:

> I wanted to see *Professor Marston and the Wonder Women*. People…friends… had been raving about it but I am so afraid to watch it because I am afraid to be disappointed, but also, I find it kind of hard as a Black woman as all the representation I have seen is of Caucasian people, so I don't really have anything related to polyamory as a Black person. So, I guess, in my head, I thought "maybe this is a Caucasian thing?"

Of all the responses I received from my participants, Chris' response to seeing (and not seeing) Black representation in many popular cultural texts helped to reveal, for me, what a person of colour might experience navigating representations of non/monogamous individuals or communities and also what is missing from cultural discourses about non/monogamies. I interpret the exclusion of people of colour in representations of non/monogamy as an effect of colonial-imperialist systems in the Global North whereby white supremacy, patriarchy, and misogyny bleed over into (representations of) lives and experiences.

Chris' response to not seeing Black representation reveals at least one thing that is missing from the cultural discourse of non/monogamies. Relationship styles like tribes, plural marriage, walking marriages, open arrangements, and polyamory have been well documented all around the world (e.g., Butts 2020). Black bodies and Black sexualities represent a deviation from the neocolonial white ethnostate, and they also disrupt entrenched narratives about Black female subjectivities. Despite this, Black bodies and Black sexualities are subject to specifically Western contours of African American representation, and often, depictions of the Black body in

popular culture illustrate how the queer(ed) black body is produced through voyeurism, fetishism, and erotic imagination (e.g., Collins-White et al. 2016). For me, Chris' response speaks to how depictions of family, kinship, community, and nation are subject to implicit and explicit racial and social inequalities; factors that rarely get explored in mainstream conversations about non/monogamy.

Personal Reflection

For many individuals, the nuclear family, couple-centricity, and compulsory monogamy are the most idealized forms of culturally acceptable and legitimate ways to relate to others in a heteronormative, patriarchal, and colonial society. Though polyamory has not been pathologized to the extent that BDSM has been, academic, political, and popular discourses have historically presented essentialist mononormativity as the only morally correct relationship structure, and considerations of consensual non-monogamy have been rare (e.g., Barker and Langdridge 2010).

Reflecting on the docuseries KINK, I considered how much has changed around and within me since I first watched *KINK*. Many discourses around gender, sexuality, sexual ethics, normativities, resistances, and non/monogamies have changed; there have been ideological and representational changes in how intimacies are thought of. And as I carried this documentary series with me through time and space, my response to it has also changed. The world has changed. As noted by Eleanor Wilkinson, the scholarship about non/monogamies has also changed; "to move beyond popular narratives that position non/monogamies as nothing more than a personal sexual preference" (2010: 344) it now offers more nuanced and complex vocabulary with which to think through these tensions rather than resolving them. Working with those tensions has been very satisfying; it has allowed me to ask the unanswerable, seek indeterminacy, and consider my own unforeseen.

Our identities and sexual subjectivities both shape and are shaped by the social spaces in which we are orientated towards and inhabit. Much like what Robert Smith? describes, in many of the depictions of non/monogamous families that I have watched on television over the years, such as Nick Payne's (2018) Wanderlust, were presented as having something wrong with them. They were either in denial about their unresolved traumas or their choices were offered as

evidence of their inability to make a commitment or their emotional immaturity. Further, these characters were often framed as immoral and as "deviant, a perverted spectacle and thus, evidence of psychological pathology" (Schippers 2019a: 69) which reinforced the notion that conventional relationships, conversely, were serious and should ultimately be what one aspires towards.

Chapter 5: On Non/Monogamies in Popular Culture

In this Chapter, I consider the responses I received when I offered a platform for the participants—as experts—to interpret types of non/monogamies offered by the texts they watched and to share their reflections on representations of sex, sexualities, and multi-adult relational and familial configurations with me. The term "non/monogamies" is not fixed or immutable, and while each of the participants identified as non/monogamous, their definitions of it and how they employed it in their lives and relationships differed and thus demonstrating the variety of ways non/monogamous individuals are orientated towards and away from homo- / homo- / polynormative notions of romance, sexuality, sex, family, and kinship structures. As you will see in what follows, the responses I received demonstrate the myriad ways that non/monogamies can be read, understood, and interpreted within and through engagement with popular culture. The participants' responses not only speak to the role popular culture plays in shaping the experience of individuals who are non/monogamous but also to the possible role popular culture has in disrupting harmful stereotypes and introducing more accurate and realistic portrayals of non/monogamies.

While some television series or films were chosen by the participants for personal and political reasons, others made their selection based on previous lack of access to or unaware of a text prior to participation in this project. For instance, Chris said, "I love *Black Mirror*, but I haven't seen that episode. I originally selected *She's Gotta Have It*, because I have seen a few episodes before and the protagonist is also Black, so I wanted to see polyamory from that perspective." Robert Smith? said, "I had a friend recommend *Magicians* to me, saying that it was very clever. I like clever shows, and my supposition was that magic was a great idea for

demonstrating cleverness." For Laara, who describes herself as a solo-poly person. As a queer person. As a kinky person. As a female. And as a hidden-disabled person:

> I have never seen *Shortbus* before. I never even heard about it until finding it on your list. I watched the trailer for it. And it very much resonated with me as a person. Especially as a queer person. As a kinky person. As a poly person. It just hit me on a bunch of different levels. I am interested to see all the different types of representation that are in there. I also really enjoy independent films. It is hard to find though because it is an independent film, which I also find frustrating, but I was able to get a copy of it. And so, I am excited to watch it. I have never heard of it before.

While their reasons for choosing differed, each of the participants described not finding representations that resonated with them; for many, seeing inaccurate or stereotypical portrayals, or ones they considered demeaning and highly sensationalized, were common.

For Matthew, the way that texts reinforced specific (white) kinships structures (nuclear family, monogamy, and so on) was a way of erasing other cultural and relational ways of engaging within multi-adult configurations: "In teen dramas, the term 'cheating' was accompanied by music intended to sway the feelings of the audience portraying a partner connecting with another as a personally harmful act; the lying was never the problem, just the act of relating with another outside the primary couple." My experiences with representations of non/monogamies in popular culture are like Matthew's. In many representations I see, there is resistance to shifting the paradigm from mononormativity to consensual non/monogamies (CNM). Such relational changes are not intuitive, however, nor are these lessons taught in social

institutions, such as public schools, or made visible in public discourse, popular culture, or social media. There are few enclaves where conversations about enthusiastic consent in highly sexualized spaces, body positivity, shame, survivor and trauma awareness, non/monogamies, as well as sexual violence and abuse circulate. Most people do not have the skills and abilities needed to engage in multi-adult relationships, be they non/monogamous, friendship, or many other multi-adult configurations. Most people have not been exposed to these concepts, either due to lack of accessibility or simply not knowing anyone who has. In the texts I watched, much of the discourse that constitutes mono- / homo- / polynormative models of relationships encourages couple-centric codependency and couple privilege. Even in representations that purport to challenge these models, couplecentric codependency and couple privilege often remain in place, even long after the relational dynamic changes.

When asked to elaborate on his understanding of the connection between the ways that mono- / homo- / polynormativity are embedded in representations of non/monogamies in popular culture and normative constructs of settler-sexuality, Matthew stated:

> the normative language that proliferates and follows individuals into differing relational styles is also a way for our institutions to support colonial kinship structures by devaluing relations that are not part of ethnostate nation-building.

I interpret Matthew's response as an acknowledgment of the various mono- / homo- /polynormative concepts that circulate within non/monogamous circles. For instance, I have observed notions of an awakening (claims of being more "enlightened") whereby sexuality, identities, or forms of oppression that have previously been denied, exiled, or completely

unacknowledged were suddenly expressed / realized simply by transitioning from one relational style to another. For me, such transitions are never intuitive but learned over time. Because the institutions of Western society—as a heritage of social norms, ethical values, traditional customs, belief systems, political systems, artifacts, and technologies—rarely teach these nuanced concepts, and media texts often depict regulatory, constitutive, and prescriptive norms, the effects of mono- / homo- / polynormativity are often invisible even as they encourage us to align and orientate ourselves towards normative modes. And while mononormative values, customs, and beliefs can be oppressive, stigmatizing, and marginalizing, and can make self-expression more challenging when that expression does not conform to the norm, homo- / polynormative values, customs, and beliefs can be just as oppressive, stigmatizing, and marginalizing. For instance, poly-perfectionism, a phenomenon that occurs within non/monogamous communities, refers to the relentless pressure to present non/monogamous relationships as the way to fight against normative ideas of sexuality, romance, and partnership, a haven from the problems of the monogamous world. The quest for perfectionism is deeply engrained in many of us. It is, however, a tool of white supremacy and patriarchy to enforce white supremacy culture and normative power structures that work to maintain the status quo. Perfectionism shows up in our lives in various ways, such as mistakes are seen as personal, i.e., they reflect badly on the person making them as opposed to being seen for what they are — mistakes, and making a mistake is confused with being a mistake, doing wrong with being wrong. We have a lot of decolonizing work to do to let go of the perfectionism we have been taught, especially in the marginalized spaces and queer communities we inhabit. And so, ditching the notion of perfect is a tiny contribution to the dismantling of current capitalist, racist, patriarchal systems that support mono- / homo- / polynormativity.

Coded and codified as normal, the privileging of some types of non/monogamies (but not others) is rooted in commodity, social, and emotional capital. These relational models are deeply intertwined with the expansion and maintenance of the internationally structured capitalistic and imperialistic worldwide system which does not "dislodge the privileges of normativity" but rather, reinforces, accommodates, and reanimates them (Stryker 2008: 145, 154). For instance, when asked what narratives about consensual non/monogamies and polyamory are represented in "Striking Vipers," an episode from the fifth season of *Black Mirror*, Kasia, who describes themselves as an ethical slut, polyam, queer, non-binary, and a parent, said:

> I think the narrative that was presented wasn't great. Sure, the wife had desires in the end, that she was able to fulfill, but prior to that, it was about cheating turning into poly. I've seen this in the poly community where people think cheating will be able to be fixed with polyamory which doesn't help as there's always some deeper-rooted issues that need to be fixed instead. It just doesn't work, as it creates a terrible and toxic dynamic; one full of lies, deceit, and unfaithfulness. There is a mention of homosexual relationships in the story between two Black men, but around the end of the show; there is a brief mention of homophobia, as one of the men is confused about his feelings.

Black Mirror is a British dystopian science fiction anthology television series created by Charlie Brooker. It examines modern society, particularly regarding the unanticipated consequences of new technologies. Episodes are standalone, usually set in an alternative present or the near future, often with a dark and satirical tone, although some are more experimental and lighter. In the first episode of season five (2019), the show tackles how disconnected people are because of

modern technology. The episode "Striking Vipers" raises many questions about how sex, relationships, and identities are defined. The episode remains one of the series' rare explorations into queer desire. The episode "Striking Vipers" follows two old friends, Danny Parker and Karl Houghton, reconnecting over a virtual reality fighting game. They begin having virtual sex in the game, which affects Danny's marriage with Theo. The fluidity of sexuality and gender, infidelity, love, and friendship are major themes, and the episode raises questions about whether Danny and Karl are gay and whether their relationship can be considered monogamous infidelity. A generous reading of "Striking Vipers," in my view, is that the relationship between Danny and Karl represents some of the struggles and tensions Black bi+ men face exploring sexuality, male friendship, and the barriers to communication between men (i.e., Yussuf 2019). For instance, when Danny and Karl agree to meet to learn if their feelings for each other in the game universe translate into real life, I read their reactions as signifying the precariousness of socially constructed notions of manhood which can create anxiety among males who feel that they are failing to meet cultural standards of Black masculinity, gender identity, monogamy, and fidelity.

Black masculinity, race, sexuality, gender identity, and non/monogamies are not really explored in "Striking Vipers." For Danny and Karl, their relationship exists entirely in secret—on the down-low (DL). The narrative does not allow them to explore more radical possibilities around gender, sexuality, poly-relationality, and race in real life. Only in gameplay are they able to explore race, gender, and sexuality, for instance, and so it keeps them on the DL. The term on the down-low is a "colloquial term that emerged in the Black lexicon to refer to any covert sexual behavior and was picked up by the mainstream media to refer specifically to Black men who identify as heterosexual, maintain relationships with women, and secretly have sex with men" (Schippers 2016: 73). The narrative of the down-low can be read as "refusal to allow bi+

characters to find certainty in their own individual ambiguities, sexuality, and gender identity" (Yussuf 2019: 1).

Chris felt troubled by the idea that people might see "Striking Vipers" as representative of non/monogamies and struggled with how racialized bodies and sexualities emerge in this episode. Reflecting on the presence of Black bodies and sexualities in the episode, and on tropes of Black men as liars and cheaters, and Black women as decadent, demonized, and sexualized regardless of education, class, and affiliation, Chris said:

> I was happy that there were Black actors and Black representation, but I don't think as a story [about non/monogamies], the episode did anything in a positive way. Two bi+ men having an affair, and not wanting to talk about the emotions they experience. The wife engages in one-night stands as a response. We are talking about what should be normal adult conversations.

In Chris' response, the lack of positive representation of Black bodies and Black sexualities points to a one-dimensional representation of love, romance, and sex and its proximity to Whiteness. Beyond the fact that many representations of non/monogamies in popular culture are focused on White bodies—which is incredibly limiting—it creates a space where it's not only problematic for Black people but also where Black masculinity and Black bisexuality cannot exist. I agree with Chis in that there are many ways to interpret this episode of *Black Mirror*. For instance, it can be read as a critique of how difficult it is for Black subjects to escape from normative forms of representation, despite the pleasures (as seen in the episode) to be found in alternative ways of being / living. However, as hooks notes "representations of black female

bodies in contemporary popular culture rarely subvert or critique images of black sexuality which were part of the cultural apparatus of 19th-century racism, and which still shape perceptions today" (2019: 62). This criticism is also relevant for Black men. While many aspects of black males' real lived experiences tend to be missing from the collective media portrayal, some aspects are very much present, and are, in fact, exaggerated (e.g., Calabrese et al 2018). For these reasons, I question how Black bodies and sexuality in this episode become the site of social, political, and racial contest and entanglement and contradictorily also the site of collaboration between white and black men.

"Striking Vipers" focuses on the idea of melancholy and relationship dissatisfaction, the perils of pornography and virtual world sex experiences making people desensitized to real sex, and the potentially disastrous implications of technologies. However, in a series that focuses primarily on technology and risk, normative understandings of romance, desire, and relationships in "Striking Vipers" end up centering on possession, transaction, cis-heteronormativity, codependency, and control, requesting that its characters in the world they inhabit, to lay claim to another body, to monogamy (or the closest thing to it), and to embracing and celebrating notions of social respectability, class privilege, and relational fidelity.

KINK is a Canadian documentary television series, that first aired in 2001 on Showcase. The series profiled some of the more unusual edges of human sexuality, primarily the kink and fetish scenes. It was filmed in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and Winnipeg; the fifth season, set in Halifax, Nova Scotia, first aired in September 2006. KINK was produced by Vancouver's Paperny Films. KINK highlights different people's real-life kinks, as defined by the person being observed. Each episode takes an in-depth look at the lifestyles of two or three people (or couples), and how their kink [and non/monogamy] figures into and affects their life and lifestyle.

Erin felt troubled by the way several of the characters—Fanny and Fogg—were presented in Season 1 of KINK:

> I just wanna say that I wanted to like the characters and it bothers me that I don't. I feel it's most likely that I am frustrated with having unattainable expectations of these people. At no point do I recall Fogg or Fanny claiming to have or do non-monogamy right. Yet I have judgments about their relationship, or possibly more accurately the relationship that was cut and pasted together for a television show. Am I being overly dismissive of their struggles? How much possible personal growth I have done in my life so now I am projecting onto their situation whether real or imagined?

In Erin's response, the underlying threat and fear of abandonment that is ever-present in Fogg and Fanny's relationship are read as trauma since monogamy is often packaged as a necessary precondition for establishing safety and security. As most cultural work is still done on the implicit level, Erin's interpretation is that the stories presented in the Season One of *KINK* are built upon stories of deviance and pathologization, trauma and healing feel apt. Commenting on trauma narratives in mainstream popular culture, Matthew said:

> These kinds of narratives speak to a patronizing framing of psychology imposed by mainstream society *a la* 'people who practice BDSM must be working through trauma thus have something wrong with them mentally as people who don't practice don't have trauma through which to work' and other such erasing of outliers.

Personal Reflection

I distinctly remember the first time that I encountered the word polyamory. Like many individuals who entered the world of online dating in the mid-2000s, I was swiping right or left on profiles looking for my next great love. In some of those profiles, I kept seeing this word strategically placed in bios—usually paired or associated with consensual non-monogamy. As someone interested in communal living and more ethical ways of relating to others, I was intrigued as suddenly the possibility to be in a committed relationship with more than one partner became a possibility and an opportunity to challenge myself in different ways. However, as I navigated dating, engaged with individuals, and was introduced to the broader community through play-parties[3], munches[4], meet-ups, and educational events, I soon realized that the face of polyamory was often white, and (upper) middle-class. Further, for a full-time student like myself, much of the scene was cost-prohibitive. Until very recently (and with the emergence of COVID-19), most PolyCons, for instance, required travel and hotel expenses. But once I gained entry, I was able to connect with a collective of people that not only had the same relationship interests but also similar intellectual interests as well. Many of them were wonderful and truly practiced the spirit and intent of radical inclusiveness and radical acceptance. Polyamory ideally fosters sexual autonomy, radical honesty, and more effective communication with partners. However, when it came to issues of race, class, and culture, there seemed to be a distinct

[3] In BDSM culture and various non/monogamous communities such as swinging groups, a play party is a social event in which attendees socialize with like-minded people and engage in activities. Generally, there is an area for drinking, eating, and socializing, an area for changing into more appropriate attire (such as fetish wear), and an area for "play" or sexually arousing activities.

[4] A munch is a casual social gathering—at a restaurant, bar, or coffee shop—for people involved in or interested in non/monogamies, the kink and fetish lifestyle, and other related interests. The primary purpose is socializing, although some munches also have announcements or demonstrations from local organizations or individuals. Munches are meant to help those who are curious about non/monogamies, BDSM, other related activities meet others, become more comfortable, and become better informed. Munches can also be a place to get advice or pass on anecdotes about personal experiences.

uneasiness. At the same time, I also began to recognize that in representations of non/monogamies in popular culture, there was a prevailing problem I could not ignore: the standard of whiteness. This standard of whiteness not only erases the experience of people of colour but also reflects an actual exclusion of people of colour in polyamorous life and communities. Even if some white polyamorists are aware of the issue of exclusion, there isn't a clearly defined solution to reducing barriers to entry and creating a more accepting community.

Normative narratives for how to live a good life—such as sexual and emotional exclusivity, desire, love, romance, and marriage—fold neatly into institutionalized practices and ideological notions of family, kinship, community, and nation. When I consider how my participants understand and position themselves in relation to consensual non/monogamies, I read their responses as a rejection of normative notions of romantic love; that is, ones that most people grow up to believe / assume what intimate relationships should look like, how they are supposed to work, and indeed, what any emotionally healthy adult should want; whereby shortcomings and failure to live up to normative models for family, relationships, romance, and intimacy was a personal responsibility.

In my reading of "Striking Vipers," mono- / homo- / polynormative discourses silence and pathologize Black lives and Black bodies. The episode relates to the question of when porn stops being a healthy distraction and becomes an affair. Karl's attempts to persuade Danny to keep the relationship going is needy and manipulative and characteristic of an imbalanced relationship, with Karl going back and forth between defending their virtual trysts as meaningless fun and claiming they mean everything and are worth any risk. Further, queer desire is treated as a disorienting byproduct of technology rather than a matter of the heart. While queer desire can be important place of resistance, the script was written without the race of the

characters in mind (e.g., Strause 2019). The ever-present white supremacy and white privilege in many representations of non/monogamies in popular culture is "designed to make racism, sexism, poverty and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (Collins 2004: 77). For instance, in gameplay, the character Danny inhabits a virtual body coded as Asian. Within popular culture, the bodies of Asian women are often exoticized and hypersexualized, and the perceived submissiveness of some Asian cultures is glamourized and erotized. This fetishization reduces Asian women to an inaccurate and detrimental stereotype which further reinforces attitudes that permission is granted to Asian women's bodies. Far from harmless, this hypersexualized narrative leads to sexual objectification and violence.

While Chris is disappointed that we are not given resolution in "Striking Vipers," I feel that we are, albeit perhaps not the one I, or Chris, would have preferred. After Karl and Danny kiss in real life, they tell each other they felt no desire for each other, which I interpret as a refusal to have characters who acknowledge or explore bisexuality. They argue, and, amid a highly emotional and physical fight, the police arrive, and they are arrested. The scene ends with Theo bailing out her husband from jail and, on the car ride home, demanding to know what is happening between him and Karl. As the credits roll, we are treated to Della Reese's "Not One Minute More"—a song about cheating. Theo is aware of her husband's cheating and the virtual relationship he is engaging in with his best friend. Danny and Karl are still closeted. The (monogamish) couple come to an agreement—a compromise to save their marriage—once a year (on his birthday), Danny can spend the night in the game with Karl, and Theo is free to enjoy a one-night stand "on the down-low," fulfilling her fantasy of sleeping with strangers; their "happy ending."

Cranny-Francis makes the point that "bodies are a text on which are inscribed historical and discursive contexts of sex, ethnicity, class, gender and race" (1995: 66). She elaborates this point further, saying that "the bodies of the colonized are the grounds on which colonization is maintained" (1995: 47). Popular culture, an industry deeply embedded in the dominant discursive formations of the cultures out of which it emerges, draws on the same set of discourses that circulate in other spheres of power (i.e.. politics, law, medicine, etc.) and affects who and what gets on the cultural map in the first place. As explained by Gamson (2007), "sexual statuses, populations, behaviours, and so on, all get processed through popular culture. Some become visible in it, others are rendered invisible; some are celebrated or treated as legitimate, others are denigrated or delegitimated" (2007: 337-8). Even when my participants encountered resistive moments within otherwise more normative texts, dominant discourses about gender, sexuality, and kinship are filtered through and by heteronormative institutions and colonial authorities as part of the nation-building process which hinges on a fantasy of 'living a good life' only by "following the heteronormative path to happiness, safety, and security" (Schippers 2019a: 113). The primacy of mono- / homo-/ polynormative-centricity in representations of non/monogamies, and in the stories we tell, is engendered by the same colonial institutions and normative values that produce the same models for family, relationships, romance, and intimacy we resist. However, two of the central ways that non/monogamies challenge and interrupts status quo understandings are normalizing behaviours and practices that which was previously considered to be abnormal, immoral, and deviant.

Chapter 6: On Mono- / Homo- / Polynormativity and the Colonized (happy) Queer Subject

In this chapter, I take seriously the ways in which my participants describe their happiness and disappointments with representations of non/monogamies in popular culture. In each of their stories, the participants shared many challenges—disclosure, stigma, and shame—and described using adaptive strategies to make sense of and in response to the television shows and films they watched. For instance, when I asked Victoria what her experiences of seeing representations of non-monogamy in popular culture have been, she said:

> The assumption that you must only love one of your partners more than all the rest and the wife choosing the husband over the girl as the normal thing annoyed me so bad. I'm just so upset with what they did (in *Swat*) with the possibility of this beautiful story arc and just crashed it into hetero monogamy.

When representations of relationships, regardless of the configuration they take, convey the message that romantic love and settler definitions of coupling are the key to happiness, and non/monogamies are represented as impossible, difficult, or dangerous, it steers us toward mono- / homo- / polynormative coupling as the path to living a happy life. My interpretation of Victoria's response is that she can identify opportunities for shows like *Swat* to represent non/monogamous relationships and multi-partnered families, but each moment of non/monogamy and queer sexuality offered by the text is accompanied by a displacement— "a reinscription of heterosexuality and a containment of queer sexuality" (Raymond 2003: 100).

What returns in its place are narratives of mono- / homo- / poly-normativity, leading to her disappointment.

I read the anger—a sour taste—that Victoria spoke about—as resistance to the idea that love is found when you abandon all others for the "One True Love." This narrative is a common romantic trope in popular culture texts where multiple characters are competing for each other's love. We know that only two will pair off thus manufacturing tension since the viewer wonders who will pair off and who will be left alone with their painfully unrequited love. Non/monogamous relationships are not typically attached to the notion of love but of intimacy. Victoria's frustration comes knowing that she must overcome normative notions of romantic love to make sense of this text in relation to her own non/monogamous familial relations. However, poly-normative love does not necessarily challenge these narratives, because at least some aspects of the "One True Love" discourse have been absorbed into representations of non/monogamies in popular culture. In *Swat*, this works by making the opportunity of non/monogamy a possible choice for the characters, only to bring back monogamy as the only real and meaningful choice.

The stories told by my participates about non/monogamies influenced how they understand their place in the world. For several of the participants who identified as LGBTQI2S+, connecting those stories to what it means to be living a queer life in a normative culture felt necessary to make sense of other stories that have historically dismissed, denigrated, or excluded them in various ways not explicitly connected to the practice of non/monogamies. For instance, Robert Smith? felt that contemporary non/monogamous narratives in popular culture echo other histories of LGBTQI2S+ marginalization and discrimination:

> I've seen little bits here and there. The ones that come to mind are *Big Love*, *Savages*, the movie *Threesome*, the TV series *Swingtown*, and a few others I'm forgetting. But even there, the representations are often crude approximations or skewed from what is clearly a monogamist's idea of what polyamory/non-monogamy is or has the potential to be. I'm sure this must be very similar to being gay in the 1970's and seeing either no representation or outrageous clichés.

I interpret Robert Smith?'s response as embracing his queer identity and queer life. He connected the stories that are being told about non/monogamous lives to the ways they resonated, for him as a queer, bi- male, with other normative assumptions about sexuality, gender, intimacy, kinship, and family and how these narratives connect to what it means to live "the good life" and "the bad life." For Robert Smith?, not only are these stereotypes a result of actual experience, but they are also bound up in pervasive assumptions about identity categories that play a key role in determining how we define our own and other identity groups. The construction and presence of these stereotypes in media is important not only because they are inaccurate and limiting but also because non/monogamous portrayals in media become integrated in a collective consciousness of these groups. And even if individuals think these stereotypes are inaccurate or problematic, they have an influence on how we behave towards others.

Reflecting on their experiences of seeing representations of non/monogamies in popular culture, Matthew spoke of various examples that demonstrate implicit assumptions about non/monogamies based on harmful stereotypes. They then considered how these have tended to underrepresent, marginalize, and caricature non/monogamous individuals and groups of people:

> Generally, antagonists of stories are either asexual or philanderers (or have slave pits) so non/monogamy is associated with bad, evil, immature, and other ways of portraying a lack of virtue. Often the growth of men is a trail of harmed women who are used as objects of convenience for the sake of the journey of the protagonist.

Matthew's response points to the hierarchical and socially constructed binary between masculine and feminine identities that exists within normative notions of romance, desire, and sexuality. They note, specifically, how masculinity is defined as desire for the feminine object and femininity as the object of masculine desire. This discursive construction of gender appears in the various depictions that Matthew has observed; these narratives assume not only particular bodies, behaviours, personality traits, and desires but model ways of coordinating, evaluating, and regulating social practices. When hegemonic features are characterized by and depicted through the sexual dominance of masculinity in relation to feminine objects of desire they "provide the rationale for what to do and how to do it, and collectively do so on a recurring basis in different institutional settings, not just gender difference, but also the implicit relationship between genders become a taken-for-granted feature of interpersonal relationships, culture, and social structure" (Schippers 2007: 91). When hegemonic features appear in representations of non/monogamies, these narratives can be read as a mimetic manifestation of male-dominated social structures in non/normative familial configurations and kinship structures.

In today's techno-savvy era, plotlines in contemporary television shows and movies have increasingly focused on non/monogamies to explore a wide range of issues such as hook-up culture, casual sex, dating, relationships, romance, and love. Newness is a 2017 American romantic drama directed by Drake Doremus from a screenplay by Ben York Jones. The film taps

into a topic historically thought of as a taboo in mainstream media and popular culture, exploring other relationships or openly having other partners. When asked what narratives about non/monogamies are represented in *Newness*, Raven Blue's general interpretation of the film was that:

> …the narrative presents pleasure-seeking and the desire for "newness" as a symptom of failing to deal with past traumas or difficulties in previous relationships. This story casts non-monogamy as an immature and superficial approach to relationships; to avoid intimacy, disappointment, and emotional risk [and is part of] a kind of addictive side-effect of our culture. This story presents the idea that choosing one person is part and parcel with closeness and intimacy…and ultimately, monogamy as evolutionarily more mature which leads to deeper relationships.

For Raven Blue, the narrative of *Newness* begins as potentially offering a different trajectory from more familiar narratives about exclusive relationships, but then reverses course or relies on recycled tropes to reframe monogamy as a/the respectable ideal. From her perspective, the privileging of love over sex mobilizes mainstream values of romantic love and intimacy. Jealousy and possessiveness are presented as normal, "part of our emotion world; it is held up as the epitome of love and commitment, and hence any digression from this path is constructed as if it should be met with distrust and jealousy" (Deri 2015i: 4). The depiction of jealously as normal is evidenced in Raven Blue's description of the story arc in *Newness*:

> the depiction of online dating, and the feeling of loneliness and disposability that goes with it, and the complications of jealousy that can come into play in non-monogamy resonates throughout the film.

When asked how this story maintained, legitimized, and/or challenged normative views of relationships, she said:

> I found that while the film had an accurate and thoughtful depiction of a younger couple experimenting with non-monogamy and dealing with the inevitable emotional fallout of not being fully prepared for it, it ultimately re-enforces heteronormative views of non-monogamy. Esther's contribution did have a lot of value, as she touches on the potential of non-monogamy in terms of understanding our personal desires, and the importance of striving for a better self, but I was disappointed this aspect was not explored further.

As Aly, who identifies as a polyamorous pansexual, pointed out, there are numerous instances that indicate the social and culture norms in the world in which *Newness* takes place:

> …the main characters are white, heterosexual, cis-gendered, middle class, as are most of the individuals in their social circles who [either] appear to be engaged in heteronormative monogamous relationships [or hookup culture]. There is no mention about gay or other type of couples. No mention of other genders or same-sex relationships, bi or pansexual individuals.

My interpretation of Aly's responses is that she read *Newness* as a cautionary tale about the indecisiveness, instability, sexual/gender inequalities, and the dangers of hookup culture, and as equating non/monogamy with promiscuity, irresponsibility, hedonism, failure to care or love, and even sexual exploitation, as depicted in the text. Here, sexuality plays an important role in the drawing and policing of racial, ethnic, and cultural boundaries, and in the ways colonial subjects—white men—come to produce relationships, lived realities, and imagine futures. In *Newness*, monogamy is equated with "real" relationships, relationships organized around exclusivity, love, stability, maturity, trust, and fidelity. Conversely, non/monogamy is evidenced in, for example, "no-strings attached" sexual encounters, one-night stands, casual sex, and transactional arrangements, between two or more individuals transpiring without any promise of or desire for a more traditional romantic relationship. For example, there is a scene in which Martin and several male acquaintances discuss their experiences using WINX. Martin's friends jokingly laugh about all the non-white women they have hooked up/had sex with and how the app meets their tastes, preferences, and sexual appetites for various types of women. Presented as male bonding, white male sexuality is left unmarked and unproblematized in this scene which inscribes whiteness as the embodiment of legitimate citizenship and belonging. Racialized women are fetishized—through racialized notions of excessive sexualities—and presented as sex objects available to (temporarily) satisfy the desires of white men. I interpret this specific scene as a reaffirmation of hegemonic masculinity and the structures of power and privilege incorporated into not just social rules that individuals accept or reject, but also into desires and fantasies about women and women's bodies.

Personal Reflection

Until the early 2000's, it was not unusual for activists and scholars alike to bemoan the virtual absence of queer subjects in popular culture (Raymond 2003). When they did appear, most examples constructed queerness along normative lines in terms of gender, race, and family and kinship structures. Today's even casual television viewers, however, would find such critiques out-of-date. And while contemporary media texts are full of queer characters, mono- / homo- / polynormativity continues to be promoted as the only normal, acceptable, desirable, or even possible, familial, and intimate relational forms. Mono- / homo- / polynormativity inform our expectations of what people, families, and communities should look like; these systems are supported and perpetuated when queer sex, transactional sex, sex between multiple partners, BDSM (group) play, premarital and extramarital sex, sanctioned infidelity, and sex for recreational purposes, for example, are represented as deviant by normative standards.

In many representations of non/monogamies, I read couple-centric narratives and normative arrangements notions of romantic love and sex as emerging from a broader and deeper settler framework in which (a) all things which fall outside accepted settler practices must be derided / denied, (b) settlers are entitled to everything, including that which falls outside of settler culture. Colonial reforms of bodies and politics, economic production and social reproduction give rise to new forms of intimacy, desire, and pleasure, as well as to new sexual subject positions, such as mono- / homo- / polynormativity, which represent further colonial conquest. I read the participant's stories as "rubrics [which] have their own logics, their own contradictory relations to temporality, and their own sets of insights about embodiment, counterhegemonic practices, and subjugated knowledges" (Dinshaw et al. 2007: 182). Meiu states: "Sexuality represented a central domain of colonial imagination and intervention through

which various social actors, who were involved in the politics of the empire, constructed and contested arguments about race and culture, difference and sameness, superiority and inferiority, morality, and indecency (2015: 197). In the Global North, non/monogamies in polynormative communities have been ballyhooed as the antidote to colonial sexuality—offering different ways to partner and create intentional families and queer kinship structures—while at the same time, they continue to be presented as the antithesis to normal happy and healthy relationships and partnering styles. This replicates key conditions that uphold settler-colonialism such as property, consumption, and privilege. The oversaturation of hyper-sexualized and stereotypical representations of non/monogamies in popular culture appears to have created (an often unresolved) tension between how non/monogamies play out in the everyday lives of queer subjects and what is depicted in social texts as "the happily ever after". For some my participants, these tensions were linked to normative assumptions about non/monogamies in the cultural imaginary and in which ways they transgressed these norms.

In my journaling, I have often questioned the settler-colonial imposition of specific forms of gender / sexuality / familial structures and kinship (and not others) as both a historical and an on-going nation-building project. The representation of non/monogamies in popular culture shapes how power and knowledge are conceived, shaped, and transferred, who gets to wield them, in which ways they are perceived, recognized, and interpreted, and in which ways they are prescribed value and worth. Through this anti-colonial lens, I have interpreted instances of mono- / homo- / polynormativity and how it is inscribed in representations of non/monogamies as part of the ideological labour of gender, sexuality, and relational normalcy. By privileging certain aspects of non/monogamies (and not others), mono- / homo-/ polynormative values are assimilated into non/monogamous communities and employed to "reinscribe the same cultural

assumptions and restrictions around gender, sexuality, intimacy, and kinship that it purports to dismantle" (San Filippo 2013: 12). For instance, I read Raven Blue's responses on what they found troubling in Newness and the idea of finding the "One True Love" as part of the realities of gender, sexuality, and sexual citizenship within the colonial project—motivated by the concern with how bodies and subjectivities are produced by, and taken up in, relational projects of inclusion. Staking a claim of ownership (conquest) on another person is not only gendered and racialized, but it also reflects and maintains capitalist ideologies and the inevitability and desirability of private property. This dichotomy is part of a dominant narrative (not only in the film, but more broadly) that tells us that "when love and intimacy are considered…the dyad or couple remains a definitional or assumed feature of intimate and sexual relationships" and what constitutes happiness and living a good life (Hidalgo, Barber, and Hunter 2008: 173). In popular culture, the non/monogamous subject is often represented as transgressive, yet neoliberal logics sometimes condition these subjectivities in ways that often feed into the generative force of homonationalism. For these reasons, I was also disappointed that the text did not explore the potential of non/monogamy in terms of understanding our personal desires, and the importance of striving for a better self as it may have brought a more nuanced understanding to normative concepts of sexuality, sex, and desire.

I have found that the non/monogamous community is incredibly concerned with maintaining a reputation of perfection for fear of reprisal and interpretation by mainstream society as a reason to condemn the validity of non/monogamy. In trying to maintain that respectable and ethical image thus legitimizing ourselves, individuals are often compelled to do everything they can to prove that they are. For instance, the phrase "fluid bonding"—which is conferred in the narrative of *Newness*—is used to indicate in which ways a partner or a part of a

network negotiates the exchange of bodily fluids through sexual contact. In the context of non/monogamous communities, individuals have slightly different agreements on when they use barriers, and for what activities, and with whom. The practice carries many connotations and social currency within many emotional charged issues: emotional investment, life commitment, relationship status or hierarchy, etc. Fluid-bonding is a common socially recognized marker of relationship status or progress in the world of standard (ostensibly) monogamous relationships. Within sex positive, queer, and non/monogamous communities, sexual health history, risk profiles, STI testing, and disclosure, and particularly practicing safe sex skills are crucial considerations in any relationships or connections that involve sexual contact and fluid exchange. And while conversations around sexual health and practicing safer sex practices are important, I take the activity to stand in for the emotionally fraught issue of lack of communication and as a badge of privilege of committed emotional and relational intimacy which further centers on couple-centricity within non/monogamous configurations. The performativity of fluid-bonding in non/monogamous relationships and group dynamics— by way of poly-perfectionism—are what interrupt stories of transformation; these are the specters—the history, legacy, and persistence of mono- / homo- / polynormativity—that shape narratives of non/monogamies and queer subjecthood in popular culture.

In my academic work, advocacy, and community engagement, I sometimes encounter indignant individuals who have just seen examples of non/monogamies in popular culture and their response begins with: “Think about the children!” or “It’s always just about the sex!” In telling my story, I assert the constructed nature of mono- / homo- / polynormativity: its adherents are people who have been brought up hopelessly, tragically, and deceitfully to believe that they are normal, even perfect. In these moments, I feel a sense of profound sadness. I imagine people

jabbing their own eyes out so they can feel better about what they have made themselves unable to see. And I am left with a sense that the very practice of institutionalizing or mainstreaming non/monogamies functions in such a way as to go hand in hand with social, relational, and political myopia. Colonial and imperial nation-building projects rely on white supremacy, tyranny, assimilation, and genocide to contain "others" and eliminate perceived, imagined, and manufactured state threats, masking itself as progressive through which life-stories are shapes and then, reanimating itself over time and space.

Prescriptive romantic love and normative sex are culturally revered and systematically reproduced in celebrations of commitment, specialness and oneness which shapes cultural perceptions of what love should be and look like. Invoking historian Scott Morgensen, queer scholarship, and emerging critiques on mono- / homo- / polynormativity "has been effective at marking colonial relations and discourses and inviting the study of settlement…Centering scholarship— on how settlement shapes queer formations and the state will create spaces where the powers of sexuality and settlement together can be interrogated and transformed" (2010:118, 125). Mono- / homo- / polynormativity are foundational discourses of relationships and kinship structures and are central to narratives about gender, sexuality, race, class, and intimate relations how the political nature of non/monogamies is negotiated, and what ideal of the political is mobilized in that negotiation, in connection with other elements of sexual citizenship and modes of systemic discrimination" (Cardoso et al. 2021: 1326). The interesting—and complicated—thing about colonization is that it encompasses not just politics and economics, but consciousness. And while settler relations are mostly absent from the participant's responses, I feel that people who identify and practice consensual non/monogamies are both subjected to societal pressures to conform to mono- / homo- / polynormative narratives, their stories can also

serve as a basis on which reconceptualize, expand, and modify settler representations of non/monogamies in popular culture.

Popular culture presents a clear set of rules when representing social conduct and related norms when depicting —mono- / homo- / polynormative assumptions and expectations—and overwhelmingly depict people who speak about and practice non/monogamies within those norms. Two decades ago, my perspective was different in that I thought: individuals who identify and practices non/monogamies could consider themselves to have something in common, something that's different from the norm. Perhaps, I thought we share a certain kind of oppression in a world that considers us broken or deviant and doesn't acknowledge or recognize non/monogamies as consensual as we have constructed it in our lives. I have since come to understand that we don't all share the same connections to or have the same challenges with normative models of relationships and the mainstreams media's insistence on framing others' ways of being in specific ways. The norms with which we are familiar and comfortable present consensual non/monogamies into the arena of public awareness and discussions from a perspective which reinforces those norms and so shapes the discourse along those narrowly defined parameters.

I feel that the danger with mono- / homo- / polynormativity is that the first encounter to non/monogamies are often from these settler colonial systems, and they have become prevalent and prolific within non/monogamous communities. Individuals are limited in understanding these social systems because all we have is what we already know. Without the social license afforded by recognized legibility, social supports are not made available to non/monogamous individuals thus outcomes are reduced, and harm occurs, sometimes as far as structural violence.

When I first began this research, I wanted to approach what it means to do the work of decolonizing non/monogamies from a place of respectful authenticity and I decided to commit to learning more about my decolonizing responsibilities as a scholar, doing the emotional labour—work—of unlearning and consciousness raising as a white settler person, and contributing to the critical dialogue which continues to investigate normative ideologies of sex and sexuality, romance, intimacy, family, and kinship that shape the oncoming colonial structures at play in contemporary Canada. We, as settler readers, engage in an ongoing process of colonialism in our reproduction of settler modes of relation making which obscure, legitimize, and even support contemporary power relations. The presence of characters with multiple partners in media texts (or our personal lives) does not necessarily alter structures of power and privilege, reconfigure our sexual, gendered, or racialized selves, or alter our interpersonal relationships or kinship structures. These processes are transformed through identifying the mono- / homo- / polynormative systems that inform and animate our lives and understandings of the world. I believe telling our stories can serve as a launch point for critical dialogue and that it can evolve through its use in lived contexts. This is our future work.

Chapter 7: On Moments of Resistance, Reproduction, and Ambivalence in the Un/Comfortable and Un/Familiar

In this Chapter, several participants and I look at the *Magicians* episode "A Life in the Day" and the film *Shortbus* as potential sites of resistance to, and unsettling of, mono- / homo- / polynormative concepts of romantic love, family, and intimacy. In both texts, the focus on pleasure, desire, and boundary-expanding representations of family offered the participants potential to reimagine and blur the lines between respectable sexuality and sexual desire(s).

On The Magicians "A Life in the Day"

The Magicians is an American fantasy series based on the novel of the same name by Lev Grossman (Syfy 2015-20). Queerness and non/monogamy are ever-present in the story arc, sewn into the fabric of a universe where sex is magic and the relationships between its main characters freely disregard the borders of platonic and romantic love. Quentin and Eliot's friendship grew in a myriad of ways over the first two seasons. In the fifth episode of the third season, "A Life in A Day," a quest brings them together in an alternate timeline in which Quentin and Eliot leave the rest of the group, get stuck in a remote country cottage, and grow old together. In this episode, Quentin initiates a hookup with Eliot, and then Eliot gently decline to talk about it the next morning. Quentin pursues a woman and have a child with her, and then mourns when the woman dies. Quentin and Eliot raising the child together, living a life together, growing old and dying together. When the two eventually return to the main timeline, young and alive, they retain their memories of their alternate life together. Lacking other evidence, the hookup could easily be read as a one-off, born out of boredom and lack of other options. However, the fact that Quentin and

Eliot remember the life they built together and are permanently altered by the experience suggests that this episode makes space for exploring queer desire, family, and intimacy.

Robert Smith? interpreted the way relationships, intimacy, partnership, kinship, and family are represented in *The Magicians* episode "A Life in the Day" as poly-oriented. He described the story as presenting sexuality, relationships, and orientation as somewhat fluid:

> Quentin initiates kissing Elliot, despite being previously read a straight character, whereas Elliot never comments on the woman in the relationship; he gives her a significant glance early on, when Quentin is kissing her, but once it's established that they're in a polyamorous arrangement, this is presented as no big deal. The triad appears to be intimate, even though we never learn whether Elliot and the woman are sexually involved. However, I see this as irrelevant, because they are clearly all together in a relationship and emotionally intimate sense, regardless of who is sleeping with whom. Their unit becomes a family, which is further strengthened by their having a son.

I interpret Robert Smith?'s reading as understanding that Quentin and Elliot's feelings for one another constitute love and intimacy. By making Quentin and Eliot explicitly intimate, typical normative assumptions about what constitutes normal relationships is disrupted and a completely new set of criteria for what constitutes relational and familial configurations is constructed in this single episode arc with an alternative timeline. Further, the dynamic between Quentin, Eliot, and the unnamed woman can be read as a model for an intentional poly-family, whereby "in contrast to compulsory monogamy, polyamory can allow for more than one partner, which can challenge

conceptions of what is a normal/natural relationship and enacts a queer form of relation" (Song 2012: 1).

For Robert Smith?, while "A Life in the Day" disrupts normative notions of love and intimacy, it still offers a normative narrative about non/monogamy, as it features a (presumably closed) triad raising a family. Indeed, the romance between Quentin and the woman only starts once it is established that her previous male partner left her, rather than allowing her to have multiple poly-families. The members of the relationship are all white and conventionally attractive; the only societal boundary pushed — other than the existence of a triad in the first place — is the romance between the two men:

> I particularly liked that this queer aspect started first, predating of the involvement of the woman. The moment when Quentin kissed Elliot showed me that this episode was committed to being more than just safe television. Since Quentin is primarily read as straight, his initiating the kiss with Elliot was a fantastic moment for me, because it demonstrated the truth of sexuality and attraction: that they don't just live in simple boxes, which is something that really resonates with me, as it was through polyamory that I realized I didn't have to follow the script or ride the relationship escalator. The fact that this kiss is what led to the poly setup was just glorious.

While I struggle with Robert Smith's interpretation of the relationship between the main characters (as I discuss further in this section), I also understand their need to find a moment of joy and happiness in the narrative of the story. In "On the importance of trans joy — even if it's just finding comfort in watching *Schitt's Creek*," Gwen Benaway stresses that joy is essential for

survival. Describing the everyday pervasive oppressions she experiences in navigating healthcare, employment, education, and dating, Benaway notes that "[I]n our pleasures and happiness, we find freedom from the everyday oppressions of our lives. …I think joy is more essential to our survival and wellbeing in the world than is often recognized" (2020: 1). Reflecting on Beneway's words, I interpret Robert Smith?'s response as a deeply personal and self-reflective understanding of the oppressions that he has experienced. As non/monogamous and queer subjects become more visible in televisual worlds, the importance of finding joy in the moments that resonate strongly with our experiences becomes the anchor that grounds and affects our behavior, attitude, opinion, or emotion of the individuals depicted. I read Robert Smith?'s response as an attempt to find joy in engaging the two main characters and their queer romance as a response to the call of "the promise of happiness" where "bad feelings can and must be converted into good feelings to maintain the promise of happiness even (or perhaps especially) for those affective economies to secure and obscure the veil of suffering in big and small ways" (Ahmed 2010: 44-45). For Robert Smith?, these is a hopeful message in this episode of *The Magicians*, in that individuals find ways to be resilient even amid a world that feels prescriptive and limiting. He finds hope in the comfort and familiarity these moments offer.

For Robert Smith?, the fact that this episode of *The Magicians* focuses on "three white people in a cushy life suggests that polyamory is only for the well-to-do with lots of time on their hands, which is most assuredly not the case." Further, he notes that the text offers us familial structures in which men work and women work by serving men:

> …all three characters in the triad are read as white, including the guest character. The two men are there [in the alternate timeline] to solve a puzzle, which they devote their lives

to, while the woman brings them food. This suggests an upper-class life of leisure. For the two men, the puzzle-solving becomes their daily job, but it's not done for sustenance, and their house is provided as soon as they arrive. We do learn elsewhere that Elliot was in fact working class but hid his upbringing to move in different social circles, but this is not addressed in this episode.

In some ways, I agree with Robert Smith?'s interpretation of the romantic love affair between Quentin and Elliot. It can be read as a celebration of hope—the possibility of further representations of non/monogamies in popular culture—amidst the culturally prevalent, essentializing portrayal of non/monogamies in popular culture. It can also be read as celebrating the possibility of the myriad ways that joy finds us in life. However, the normalization and privileging of some types of non/monogamous relationships but not others in this text perpetuates and sustains rigid notions of gender and sexual relations and supports settler colonialist ideologies, particularly around race and class. Robert Smith?'s desire to encounter non/normative representation of queer desire, may allow him to compartmentalize the pieces of the narrative that do not match his social and relational perspectives and worldviews and those that do (or might).

In my reading of "A Life in the Day", I read the dis/appearance of the woman in the story arc differently from Robert Smith?. I read the narrative as reproducing normative gender hierarchies. The domestic and motherhood labours of the female-coded character are defined and simultaneously displaced by the work Quentin and Elliot do to decode the puzzle, and the homosocial bonds between them that deepen and develop as they do it. According to Eve Sedgwick (2016) homosocial bonds between men are often narrated as markers of class

difference or sameness, but they are distinct from men's relationships with women through the erasure of homosexual desire (1). Normative representations of sexuality often still marginalize or largely exclude bisexuality and force a rigid concept of sexuality in its place and are often played off as confusion and misunderstanding.

The desire for an escape from normative constraints in a mono- / homo- / polynormative world, even temporarily, was a common theme articulated by many of the participants. For Matthew, what resonated the most in "A Life in the Day" was its:

> …attempts to ground fantastical (magic in this case) in real-world settings, and I found the acting was good enough to carry the story. I don't yet know enough about the characters to know if there were any relations before the time-loop which isolated the characters from social spaces, so they were freer to explore intimacies more openly. What resonated with me was the desire to help others, where characters found themselves in extraordinary circumstances but grounded themselves in helping each other; very anarchist, and the relationships seemed to be consistent with that anarchism. The episode also touched on consent violations and trauma which I appreciated and seemed to be handled well.

Matthew views anarchism as a political philosophy and movement skeptical of authority, that rejects all involuntary, coercive forms of hierarchy, and connects these to the form of non/monogamy represented in this text. For them, alternative intimacies are not served by the marriage model in "A Life in the Day" as the episode demonstrates that there are many ways of creating family and kinship intimacies that exceed privileges typically afforded long-term

permanent arrangements such as shared parenting arrangements and blended families. For Matthew, the narrative presented in this story is one that could be read as centering relationship anarchy. Anarchism is a living philosophy upon which social life depends (Ward 2004). In my interpretation of Matthew's response, the common characteristics of anarchist politics—mutual aid, free association, and direct democracy—in a series about monsters, magic, and interdimensional social and political politics, seemed ordinary and non/monogamy, same sex relations, and non-normative kinship structures between men became something quite mundane, ordinary, even natural:

> On a basic level, it was a story about people being decent and helpful and living their lives according to prosocial kinship structures and facing adversity together as just the way of things. The tone and the circumstances positioned the dynamic as natural and not in need of special consideration; that kind of implicit messaging seemed to me to support non monogamy and challenge some aspects of status quo kinship structures with that ease of navigating an alternative. The level of intimacy shown between the relevant characters was above and beyond the level seen in other shows/series between colleagues or friends and it was natural and normal to those involved and I enjoyed that as other series are almost sterile of affections between friends, and I appreciated the granularity; the lingering closeness felt good to watch.

Elaborating on the value and necessity of difference between the two main characters, Matthew said: "The puzzle was solved because of the love expressed in the home, something not known to them at the time. It reminded me of other instances of men in closed or trapped circumstances

where they could be more freely intimate, the escapism from the expectations of society." Here again, the expression of happiness—joy—that Matthew felt watching this episode reminded me that once characters stray away normative representations modes of relational affiliations and all the cliché-ridden formulae they entail, surprisingly new narratives of life, love, and intimacy are bound to appear.

In my reading of "A Life in the Day," the possibility joy and celebration of a non/monogamous triad that I experienced slipped away at the end of the episode. The depiction of a queer kiss, disrupted by a mono hetero-pairing ending in tragedy, leading to a seemingly inevitable return to a homosocial pairing between the two main characters demonstrates how the mobilization of mono- / homo- / polynormative notions of intimacy and romance operate to keep coupledom central. More specifically, I read Eliot's affirmation of Quentin's marriage, "You had a wife," and Quentin's response, "And we had a family" to imply that Quentin's marriage to the unnamed woman as a return to mononormativity. And while the relationship between the three characters offers the possibility of a functional, loving, and emotionally compelling triad, I interpret the longing expressed by Eliot towards Quentin as unrequited romantic love; Eliot is left to process feelings of pain, grief, and homosexual desire on his own.

Compulsory monogamy and coupledom are so deeply normalized in the Global North that we hardly recognize, and rarely question, them when we see them. While the status of the couple has not gone unchallenged, it remains the primary tenant of normative relations—gay or straight:

> Despite coupledom's widespread and much-advertised failures and disappointments, alternatives are rarely discussed or represented in the mainstream. When they are, rather

> than calling into question the naturalness and desirability of monogamy and the nuclear family form and rendering their compulsory status strange and problematic, the visibility of alternate possibilities for relating often makes the inevitability of monogamy seem all the plainer (Willey 2015: 622).

Sexuality, gender, and race (among others) are deeply emmeshed concepts within coupledom and compulsory monogamy. Marriage, as a state institution, is heavily invested with notions of reproduction, inheritance, and possession—all things I see celebrated in "A Life in the Day."

On *Shortbus*

Shortbus is a 2006 American erotic comedy-drama film written and directed by John Cameron Mitchell. *Shortbus* takes us on a series of vignettes of random people with no other connection to each other except the Shortbus—an alternative club that features just about every sexual desire you can imagine. The characters converge at Shortbus—a weekly Brooklyn artistic/sexual salon loosely inspired by various underground NYC gatherings that took place in the early 2000s—where they put their erotic and emotional limits to the test while participating in a variety of explicit scenes, alternative sexuality, BDSM, "free love," a women-positive circle discussion room, which of course accommodates the entire spectrum from butch to femme, the exploration of various polymodalities such as polyamory, consensual and ethical non-monogamy, and swinging.

For several of the participants, the depiction of escapism, chosen family, and communal solidarity in *Shortbus* resonated strongly. The main characters include a sex therapist who has never had an orgasm, a gay couple who want to add a third to their couple dynamic, a voyeur

who lives across the street from the gay couple, and a struggling artist, turned dominatrix, who yearns for a meaningful relationship. According to Bryant (2009), a significant feature of *Shortbus* is that "[U]nlike traditional hard-core porn films, in which the sex scenes interrupt the narrative in much the same way that songs do in a bad musical, here the sex is actually integral to moving the story forward… alongside myriad sexualities, gender expressions and kinks" (189). The social gathering of non/normative individuals, like those depicted in *Shortbus*, occurs far more frequently than members of the public would be aware of, or popular culture might portray. For example, Willow, a kinky solo-polyamorist, felt that *Shortbus* and the characters depicted in it "were more like people I know then a lot of others shows I've watched. They were relatable; kinky folk, different kinds of relationships styles, and more variety of personalities, which I really liked. The *Shortbus* reminds me of places I have attended and it's what I would imagine some places I haven't been locally might be more like, which was kind of neat to see."

For me, the practice of holding seemingly contradictory ways of knowing in tension with one another is the starting place for the stories my participants talked about non/monogamies and non/normative kinship structures, as well as the ways in which this film resonated with them. For Laara, this film was about "relationships and human emotions, mental health and awareness, and just all the intricacies of life and some of the places where they intersect." When asked to elaborate on her interpretation of the way relationships, intimacy, partnership, kinship, and family are represented in this story, she stated:

> Intimacy is huge in this movie and is an underlying theme. There is an exploration of physical and emotional intimacy woven into every relationship… It doesn't really get into families, like familial bonds, but if you look at a broader scope of what family is, in

> which case, then I feel like it fits into that. The people in *Shortbus*, especially near the end, with the blackout and everyone coming to that space together, as Justin Bond's bullhorn baritone croons "Everybody Gets It in the End," shows that kinship and chosen family very much becomes a thing that is important. Because again, relationships are messy, they are not all the same, and they are not all straight-forward. They don't all have easy solutions. I really liked that about it.

In Laara's response, I read the experience of shared trauma and trauma awareness as the foundation upon which community is built and celebrated (e.g., Khadem 2014). At its core, *Shortbus* depicts a sex-positive community, and its explicit orgy scenes reinforce the notion that the road to living a life without fear is through raw emotional, physical connections, and uninhibited sexual desire rather than normative romance; sex radicalism is presented as redemption. For instance, in the salon of sex positivity, Sofia learns how to pleasure herself, and Severin makes emotional connections that would have otherwise not been possible in a strictly transactional sexual exchange. For Laara, the story arc of Jamie and his suicide attempt resonated most strongly:

> The other scene that really resonated with me was the attempted suicide where you feel like you don't belong, to anything, because James doesn't want his partner to know, to feel any guilt over this action and choice he is about to make and do. James has thought through it and doesn't want to leave any harm behind but thinks, "I can't continue doing what I am doing." And so, he creates this video, sitting by pool, and he is holding the necklace, and has the video ready for him, and then he gets into the pool, and as he is

> looking up and seeing …In my own life, I have experienced that. I attempted [*suicide*], in the past. So that scene, to be in that place of there must be something wrong with me because things aren't feeling the way that they should, and that disconnect that you have, and trying to figure it out and you can't and then not wanting to hurt the people that you know you are going to be leaving behind even though you feel that in that moment that they are going to be better off with you not there. You just can't deal with it anymore. So, that was also a very poignant scene for me, that I really identified with. I think they did a good job [*capturing that moment*] and dealing with such a heavy topic. (Italics mine)

One of the consequences of being confronted with traumas—ones that are on-going and continuous with no immediate solutions—is that they can rupture notions of shared identity, community, and cohesion (Fern 2020). Likening her own experience to trauma and feelings of disconnect to what she imagines James has experienced, I read Laara's response as an acknowledgement of that rupture of self, community, and cohesion and a refusal to live in fear, anger, or shame in her retelling. Such moments are powerful reminders that we are all hurting and healing and where "we live in a political and social moment where joy is often misplaced in favour of fear" (Beneway 2018: 1). In the film, James overcomes his trauma—and finds literal and metaphorical salvation—only after confiding in the stranger who prevents his suicide attempt, preparing the way for a sexual encounter in which James finally allows himself to be sexually penetrated. This act, which registers James' new-found permeability, lifts him out of depression, securing his relationship with his partner.

In many representations of non/monogamies, normative ideas and values that most closely resemble white, gender-conforming, class privileged couples determine what constitutes

"happiness" and about who gets to live a happy life. Commenting on race, gender and sexuality represented in *Shortbus,* Laara pointed out:

> I liked the fact that there was a lot of different forms of sexuality, which was great to see, a lot of ways that people do queer, which was nice. Now background folks, there is a lot of different shapes and sizes and a few different ethnicities but other than that, most of the cast was white, standard sized bodies, your traditional forms of pretty and beauty. …The same with different body types. Everyone was your more traditional pretty, slim type except for background characters. That was one thing that I found disappointing.

For Willow, many people simply do not know about these kinds of spaces as depicted in *Shortbus*, and do not know anyone who does. For her:

> *Shortbus* is the most representative of the all the shows about non-monogamy that I have seen, in a way that I could relate. Shows like *Wanderlust* weren't realistic to me, the way they went into it. In *Shortbus*, there were lots of what society would consider odd characters and odd situations, which are a normal part of the people I know and the spaces I attend, which was nice to see.

While Laara's and Willow's responses may appear incongruent, their subjective realities are authentic for them. For Laara, the film's depiction of gender, sexual, and racial difference while simultaneously homogenizing sex radicalism is problematic. In particular, the text presents a deracialized and nonhierarchic understanding of sexual utopia yet also, paradoxically, lapses into

essentialist understandings of non/monogamy, queer spaces, and non/normative bodies. Racialized stereotypes of Asian-ness, for instance, through the character of Sofia whose dogged, intellectual attempt to achieve orgasm is, of course, exactly what stands in her way. Willow, on the other hand, is commenting on what she interprets as difference between the queer spaces she has participated in and other depictions of highly-sexualized spaces unlike those found in *Shortbus.*

Personal Refection

As evidenced throughout this thesis, I am not only interested in the representations of non/monogamies that we do have in popular culture, but I am also interested in the representations we do not have and considering the possible reasons why, for instance, where are all the fat non/monogamous bodies? In Laara's responses, she both pointed to attitudes and perceptions about own bodies and bodies in general, which are shaped by our communities, families, cultures, media, and our own perceptions and acknowledged her disappointment. In white Western culture, fat people's bodies have been labeled as deviant, out of control, unhealthy, undesirable, dangerous, and lazy. As Munro (2017) explains, "we live in a world that resists the notion of fatness as a facet of body diversity; as such, fat bodies are rarely represented in a positive light. Fatness is labeled as a disease and the treatment is eradication" (502). Much of the justification for the negative treatment of fatness and fat people rests in arguments related to health and medicine. Thinness, beauty, and normative notions of gender and gender expression are, at heart, preoccupations of the Global North. Every major industry and social institution have some investment at stake (usually monetary) in perpetuating harmful stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination which have direct social and political implications for the continued war on bodies (e.g., Braziel and LeBesco 2008, Braziel and LeBesco 2008, Wann 2009, Weinstien 2012).

Our bodies, and relational models for romance, desire, intimacy, and kinship structures are sites of "cultural and social battles for power, privilege, and dominance" (Bordo 2004:1). Within the cultural production of sexuality, gender, race, and class, our bodies are attached to "messages that circulate in popular culture in the form of privileged ideal bodies and denigrated fat bodies [which] reinforce and codify the boundaries of desirable bodies" (Burns-Ardolino

2009: 272). In many representations of non/monogamies in popular culture, a pervasive system of discrimination and exclusion oppresses and stigmatizes many people (and bodies) who do not conform to ever-narrowing and unrealistic beauty standards and neo-colonial and imperialist notions of morality and modernity.

Despite the growing recognition of non/monogamies in popular culture and the demand for inclusivity and diversity in social texts available in mainstream discourse, I have not found a single instance of explicitly non/monogamous fat characters or bodies in any English-speaking movie, television show or series, or entertainment production, aside from the depiction of "Pat" in the first season of *KINK*. What I have found are fat bodies that are often framed in non/monogamous themed texts in deliberately ambiguous ways. For instance, When Sofia, one of the main characters in *Shortbus*, is introduced to the "Sex not Bombs" room, the audience is given her perspective as she surveys the space. In the background of this panacea of white, conventionally attractive bodies, a fat body, ostentatiously inviting overweight bodies into Shortbus' erotic party, is partially depicted with another deliberately ambiguous body. Further, "the actors' palette of melanin tips heavily toward the lighter registers, especially in the centerpiece "Sex Not Bombs" room of the Shortbus salon, and at least on surface evidence, no one manifests any of the forms of disability that might secure passage on an actual short bus" (Davis 2008: 626). In another scene in the film, one dietetically abrupt shot frames one of the subjects so that their head is cropped right out of the image. The viewer is given no indication that these two bodies are of the same individual and the character has no speaking part in the film. Further, the mere existence of this character (or characters) does not preclude an orientation towards non/monogamy.

Further, the text frames technology as a mediating force that isolates individuals, keeping them separated from one other—cameras, vibrating eggs, masturbation, even a social networking PDA used to facilitate hook-ups only exacerbate interpersonal distance as illustrated in various personal conversations that occur in the film. The solution to trauma, it seems, is to "overcome the fear of penetration, to risk the dangers posed by permeability to cultivate the interpersonal connections necessary for a healthy social body" (Koutras 2010: 1)—especially on the level of sexual contact and "finding queer community through aromantic sexual relationships" (Schippers 2019a: 123). Or more simply, the solution to the problem of sex is more or better sex (e.g., Shahani 2012). The notion that non/monogamies being linked almost exclusively with sex (and lots of it) is a myth and speaks to the eroticism that occurs when describing non/monogamous relationships and other queer forms of relating. As a result, most non/monogamies in popular culture are not only otherized but are portrayed in a way that goes against how these relationships work in the real world.

Ultimately, this brings me back to the question of non/monogamous representation and nation-building projects: about the intersection of race, class, size, and the white non/monogamous experience, modernity and citizenship, and the pornographic exercise of power and race privilege. In my reading of *Shortbus,* the depictions of non/monogamies occur between participants who are mostly young, conventionally attractive, and predominately white. The characters all live and congregate in the urban setting of New York City where many of them have left or are leaving normative and sexually-repressive spaces. This narrative appears to embrace what Halberstam describes as "metro-normativity" which refers to "the conflation of urban and visible in many normalizing narratives of gay/lesbian subjectivities" (2005: 36). My own experience participating in these spaces is that they often appear in cultural "vacant lots."

This describes urban spaces cleared of Black bodies and the working poor, where notions of community are built by white people seeking to escape their own colonial cultural spaces and find kinship and community for themselves and other gays/lesbians/queers. However, queer-positive *Shortbus* is, it articulates a cruel optimism lurking in discourses about non/monogamy as exceptionally progressive, transgressive, and normal (e.g., Berlant 2011). And it does so by embracing mono- / homo- / polynormative reproductions of intimacy, sexuality, and gender and normative versions of what happiness is and what it can look like. The affect is understandable as "sensual matter that is elsewhere to sovereign consciousness but that has historical significance in domains of subjectivity" (Berlant 2011: 53). As Moors et al. point out, "consensual non/monogamous relationships are perceived by the public as less satisfying and lower in relationship quality, those involved in consensual non/monogamy are perceived as fundamentally flawed" (2015: 222). For many people, their only experiences with non/monogamies are through the lens of hyper-dramatized portrayals of non/monogamies, they do not realize that for many people, intentional families, and communities, a transformation of human relationships and ways of relating is occurring in the social milieu of the Global North, and there are many people currently participating in this transformation in their everyday lives which leaves me to wonder what is really gained (and lost) when non/monogamies begin to appear as normalized in popular culture.

The fact is most portrayals of non/monogamies are absurd and we don't exactly have a wealth of polyam-related content in popular culture to choose from. I was reminded of a conversation with Michele Byers, my thesis supervisor, friend, and mentor. We were discussing the introduction of topics related to non-monogamy and polyamory into the university classroom experience and how, for many students, their first reaction was: "Oh, like *Sister Wives* or *Big*

Love"? Always searching for answers, "Why do you think that is?" I asked. Pausing, Michele handed me a copy of Ahmed's *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* and then said something along the lines of: "If there is an opportunity to learn something different or new, but no one around you knows, how do you find out? You don't know what options there are because you don't know what you don't know." In that text, Ahmed states: "The question is not so much finding a queer line but rather asking what our orientation toward queer moments of deviation will be. If the objects slip away, if its face becomes inverted, if it looks odd, strange, or out of place, what will we do?" (2006: 179).

Would you see how absurd the portrayal of non/monogamies are if that was your only point of exposure? Perhaps we should also be asking ourselves if we were to imagine our own polyam-queer futurity, what would that look like? How do we—as queer subjects—imagine representations of non/monogamies in popular culture differently?

In asking these questions, feminist reflexivity as both a research process and a product of the approach to analyzing the self and personal experiences in the context of the social environment that shape oneself, may provide insight into possible alternative perspectives or theoretical lens, and connect to the wider society and further sociological understanding of non/monogamies (e.g., Ellis et al. 2011, O'Hara 2018, and Rambo and Ellis 2020).

Chapter 8: Conclusion (or, Non/Monogamies at the End of World)

With *The Stories We Tell: On Representations of Non/Monogamies in Popular Culture*, I hope to initiate a critical discussion of non/monogamies and the role mono- / homo- / polynormativity plays out in the popular cultural imaginary—whether as a colonial imperialist construction located in the fissures between bodies and discourse, as a (queer) transgressive and performative response to prescriptive social mores, and as unresolved problematic, painfully caught in the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age. Indeed, mono- / homo- / polynormativity are dense, complex, oft contradictory social constructions, they play all those roles in the cultural imaginary, and more. Beginning from a premise that discourses surrounding monogamy and non-monogamy are intersectional, I have used the term 'non/monogamies' throughout this research to acknowledge in which ways the sexual subject practicing (or connected to) relational intimacies is posited within various forms of power and privilege. This research works with the presumption that non/monogamies are social constructs that have real world consequences. It also presumes that race, gender, sexuality, and other social locations always coexist and so shape and are shaped by other ways of knowing the self. While the role of popular culture is changing public views of non/monogamies is promising, as with any form of cultural change, the transformation of attitudes and perceptions about non/monogamous lives and experiences will be the result of a multitude of efforts. The specific pathways through which forms of culture or stories will alter perceptions remain ambiguous.

For many of my participants, consuming media representations of non/monogamies was a deeply pleasurable experience and provided some semblance of normal feeling in a world that is often ambivalent, or outright rejects them. In the cultural milieu of the Global North, "the desire

for social legibility is a compelling one, which most sexual minorities—most people, even—understand as being necessary if one is to have a livable life" (Griffin 2017: 2). In this way, social legibility is alluring. In the shifting tide of seeing more diverse representations of non/monogamies in popular culture, for me, to read social narratives imbued with mono- / homo- / polynormativity against the grain has become a practiced habit to find the queer potential for pleasure and joy, which may occupy and inhabit the un/comfortable and un/familiar, will help us imagine and discover more avenues for non/monogamies and their various expressions.

In the practiced habit of telling stories about how our social world came to be, our stories become "a form of radical imagination…. Our stories are also a mechanism that forces us to examine, process, and build past societal dilemmas, and linked to this, how we understand non/monogamies in relation to transformative politics" (Sobers 2020: 1). Reading with and against narratives of mono- / homo- / polynormativity, I have tried to orientate myself towards other non/normative people not only to better understand ourselves and our place in the world but to also interrogate, expose, and challenge assumptions about power and privilege and how they function to obscure structural inequality and facilitate social inequities in non/monogamous communities and other queer spaces. I do not wish to aspire to current representations of non/monogamies in popular culture (via assimilation) nor abandon popular culture (via resistance) altogether. Doing so would be to miss the potential to search for, see, analyze, and archive what ideological labours current representations of non/monogamies are doing. Instead, I imagine in which ways stories about non/monogamies in popular culture could inhabit norms differently.

Acknowledging the work that needs to be done in seeking significant change in the "cultural death machine," as Matthew called it:

> Capitalism only assigns value to the dead; the yet-to-be commodified must be objectified as in robbed of life and agency i.e., killed. Since this cultural necrovoreurism needs simple and sanitized products to fit industrialized mass production there is no room for real, dynamic, and complex relationships so the authentic vibrancy of life is replaced with titillation, tokenization, and manufactured demand for the empty husks which remain. These trophies of appropriated culture can be seen displayed throughout imperial media, with satirizing condescension, in Blackface minstrel shows and select Halloween costumes, as a form of vanity serving taxidermy and idolatry of power and conquest.

Rather than what initially felt like a fatalistic view of the potential for challenging deeply problematic views to class, ethnicity, nation, and mono- / homo- / polynormative notions of relationships and family structures in popular culture, I read Matthew's response as a pragmatic understanding that representations of non/monogamies become more diversified once we leave colonial modes of production and "stray from representational modes dependent upon human forms and all the cliché-ridden formulae that they entail" (Halberstam 2012: 67). In the intentional shaping and telling of our stories, the potential for these new narratives might arrive from those who identify as non/monogamous will be most welcome.

As I write this Conclusion, the television series "Conversation with Friends" was released on BBC Three. The series is based on the 2017 novel of the same name by the Irish author Sally Rooney. There are some people in non/monogamous community chat rooms claiming that the show makes a good case for polyamory. I feel it does not. Polyamory is not the same thing as tolerating an affair, which is what happens in *Conversations with Friends*. The show is not a

modern coming-of-age love story about, can you love more than one person. It is a coming-of-age story about a self-centered person finally learning that their destructive actions have impact and that they need to communicate with the people they love. I feel that *Conversations with Friends* is just yet another drama with incredibly messy, impulsive, and uncommunicative people fucking up each other people's lives.

If I were to imagine and design a non/monogamous television show, what might that look like? I would love to see more couples dating couples, singles dating singles and forming a massive polycule, or all the above in the same space. I would want to see more sex-positive conversations on enthusiastic consent, open communication, negotiation, and boundary setting. It would be glorious chaos. When asked would be an ideal representation of non/monogamies be, Chris said:

> I would love to have representation where non-monogamy doesn't have to be a threesome. It can be solo-poly, it can be or about people having an open relationship, all those different forms are valid but if people are not shown those forms on TV, they don't know. I would just love to see a non-monogamy story that doesn't end in disaster. I would love to see a non-monogamy story of people who have kids. I would like to see queer people. There really is a lack of representation about all those things.

For Robert Smith?, ideal representations of non/monogamies in popular culture were not something he desired:

> I can't wait for the day when Hollywood realizes that polyamory has so much potential for drama. Once they do, we'll never see a monogamous movie again. The poly relationships are likely to be terrible, but it'll be a fun ride. I don't particularly need polyamory to become mainstream, because the more mainstream it becomes, the more likely we are to see a proliferation of bad polyam (unicorn hunters, hierarchies, one-penis policies, et cetera). I'm perfectly comfortable being on the fringes, and every step forward that we gain in representation, we probably lose at least that much in making it normative. I'm sure it will eventually become a lot more normalized, which media will play a large role in. That'll probably be a bit dull, but a piece of me will nevertheless squee like a 14-year-old every time I see it.

Within the various ways my participants considered what an ideal representation of non/monogamies might be, many of them felt that watching these texts and reflecting on the questions posed in conversation, opened avenues for conversation and critique about representation and imagining new ways of thinking about the futurity of non/monogamies in popular culture. For Aly,

> It opens the possibility of other type of relationships that are not only what we see on TV. I like the fact that you question the regular type of relationship seen everywhere.

Commenting on future possibilities, Laara said:

> I think there are lots of opportunities for conversation from people from many different backgrounds, thought processes, to start conversations and communicate from there.

In the spirit of honoring my participant's insistence that we can do better, that we acknowledge, thematize, and challenge our intellectual investments, I invite scholars to reflect on the development of non/monogamies in television, films, and digital media in the Global North while at the same time, track a growing body of queer media that challenge normative ideas about kinship, family, intimacy, and empire in ways that might not strictly adhere to a politics of visibility and recognition.

Strengths and Limitations

Participant interviews and personal reflections as methods used in this research, offer several strengths and limitations. These qualitative approaches provide "anecdotal and case study information about the personal impact of a media project on an individual, but it does not reveal the full numerical scope of the impact" (Godsil et al. 2016, 9). In asking questions about the intersections of lived experiences and representation, future work might begin reorientating from ways of relating to ways of knowing to make space for new subjectivities and social formations to appear (e.g., Wiley 2016, Vil et al. 2021).

This research also brings to light the need to bring theories of non/monogamies into explicit dialogue with conversations on transnational capital, media, and television studies, feminist theory, queer theory, women and gender studies, and other critical social theories. As Schneider (2004) points out "Stories have the potential to advance social change particularly if we imbed issues and ideas under the surface. But we need to drill down: identify the stories and

the ways we tell stories that have the greatest impact" (1). What might this look like without further stigmatizing a multiplicity of non/monogamous lives and experiences already bound to constraints and barriers imposed by gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, nation, age, ability, for instance? What sorts of alliances can be forged between feminism, queer theory, consent-based politics, and non/monogamies?

The fact that this research, which centers first-person perspectives, is part of a larger undeveloped enclave in the social sciences and gender and sexuality studies points to the necessity of developing of theoretical non/monogamies as part of the complex and multi-dynamic questions surrounding "the political project of undoing all forms of structured and institutionalized domination, coercion, and control" (Shannon and Willis 2010: 433). Perhaps, in the end, this means a collapse of non/monogamies itself and a (radical) embrace of multiple theories so we can act creatively depending on the context of the struggle—dis/identification—we are involved in. One of my goals in undertaking this research was to make sense of these representations by asking how individuals who identify as non/monogamous read these texts alongside of and against their own experiential knowledge, perspectives, and worldviews. In doing this work, I have tried to shift away from my own categorical framing of the texts as "good" or "bad," toward a consideration of the social and cultural effects of mono- / homo- / polynormativity and the personal narratives of my participants have on non/monogamies, race, class, sexuality, intimacy, and privilege.

The qualitative researcher's perspective is perhaps a paradoxical one and relevant to this research as I played such a direct and intimate role in data collection, analysis, and personal reflections. There are benefits and costs to being both an insider and outsider scholar. In the case of my research, all the participants knew I had connections within the non/monogamous

community. None of the participants seemed to perceive this as an impediment to the research process. Although my membership status in relation to the participants did not seem to affect the interviews negatively, it did raise an important point that must be considered in all research endeavors. The membership role—real or perceived—gave me a certain degree of latitude to gain access to online community groups and more acceptance by community members and potential participants. Therefore, I believe my participants were more open with me than they might have been otherwise, and that there may be a greater depth to the data gathered because of this. My membership may be viewed by some as "creating a heighten level of research subjectivity that might be detrimental to data analysis and even collections" (Dwyer 2009: 58), but the bodies people move through the world in inevitably influence how researchers think about their work, even if they wish it didn't. This is true for all researchers. While this tension can't be easily resolved, once you take that step towards recognizing it, expectations and assumptions (sometimes) become more apparent. Unpacking the privilege and power associated with the space in-between is part of my future work to do.

The participant's responses revealed to me the various ways individuals who identify with and practice non/monogamous engage with representations of intimacy, relational models for living a good and happy life (constrained as they be), and in which ways they mediate the normalizing processes and patterns of mono- / homo- / polynormativity in popular culture amidst their queer ways of negotiating intimacy, relational configurations, and kinship forms. In the mono- / homo / polynormative context of the Global North, my personal narratives have helped to reveal the mechanisms of mono- / homo- / polynormativity in the stories we tell (and are told) about non/monogamies. It is not enough to be soothed by or merely accept representations of non/monogamies in popular culture; we must also question in which ways these stories articulate

about how happiness is achieved and who is deserving of a good life. The pull towards mono- / homo- / polynormativity is compelling in the political arena of social recognition and legibility. I remain deeply concerned with how deeply problematic the reproduction of imperialist and neo-colonial racial, sexual, family, and relational hierarchies as the rationale for deciding how resources, privileges, and deservedness are distributed remain the ideological labours—work—these representations of non/monogamies in popular culture are doing. Through calls for more politized visions of non/monogamies as well as explorations of the hegemonic forces of mono- / homo- / polynormativity, I urge scholars across disciplines to further interrogate normative concepts and asking what new stories we might tell, what new conversations we might engage in, what new terms we might use to conceptualize these queer ways of living and loving.

Future Research

Nearly twenty years have passed since I first watched *KINK*. As my talisman and cursed sword, I carried *KINK* with me into graduate studies, the front lines of grassroots activism, and my personal life. I have used it, in various ways, to help serve my vision of doing work that will enhance knowledge, inform policy, programs, and interventions that improve the lives of those who practice non/monogamies, contribute to their health and well-being. Thinking with and through *KINK* has also helped me understand how representations of non/monogamies in popular culture shape what it is possible for bodies and queer subjects to do and be. I started this research with the assertion that representations of non/monogamies in popular culture rely on the workings of mono- / homo- / polynormativity and are articulated within a popular culture complex in which they serve colonial and imperial interests of a white ethnostate (e.g., Warner 1993, 2000). In future research, I might seek what Ahmed (2015) calls a queer affect might have

on new and transformative ways of relating and understandings of romance, sex, love, and a happy life.

While representations of non/monogamies have emerged as a worthy subject of study within the academy, a methodological problem has arisen in qualitative and quantitative studies, participant homogeneity as in most study groups are comprised of mostly middle-class, educated, heteronormative, cis-gendered, able-bodied, and White (e.g., Rambukkana 2010). In my own personal experiences with non/monogamous communities over the last few decades, this portrait is no longer entirely accurate. In 2022, many of the community members I encounter are poor, working poor, (hidden) disabled, and many do not or cannot work typical jobs, either relying on economic supports from family, friends or loved one, or from government aid. Fat bodies are plentiful, as are bisexual men, MSM (men who have sex with men), trans-bodies, non-binary, asexual, and queer bodies. While few, there are Black, Indigenous, and other ethnic members. While my experiences are limited to in-person and virtual events over the last decade I do point this out to add weight to the call that researchers aim to the fill the large methodological holes that currently exist in scholarship. We need more information about non/monogamous people who are non-white, differently abled, and from educational and class backgrounds other than the middle class. We need more representation from those who practice various configurations of non/monogamies, not just polyamory (and variants of this).

Mono- / homo- / polynormative models for love and intimacy are basic concepts in imperial-capitalist economics and inform and shape not only how we interact with and determine the value we place on objects but also informs in which ways we place value on ourselves and our relationships. certain core issues have remained underexplored; more work needs to be done. Further qualitative work, which centres the experiences and perspectives of non/monogamous

individuals and other ways non-normative ways of doing relationships, their encounters with nation-building projects, and other mechanisms of a neocolonial and imperialist world can be used as a model for future work. Some of us have already begun that work. For instance, while imagining the distinctions between different ways of relating I stymied myself when I chose normative definitions of "finite love" and "infinite love" as an attempt to contrast the dyad theoretically and conceptually. When I described my struggle to Matthew, they mentally mapped out what I had and said: "You're using transactional language to describe both cohorts; you're trying to squeeze too much into two boxes, but you need four." They started to diagram what I was describing and expanded the items to six, which are as follows:

> "Love as finite" orientation (1); viewing from experiential knowledge and worldview (1a); understanding and interpreting "love is infinite" model as a devaluing of love and the relationships and the people involved i.e.: "If you don't have a price on love, you must not value it, or the people involved" (1b). "Love as infinite" orientation (2); viewing from experiential knowledge and worldview (2a); understanding and interpreting "love as finite" and seeing commodification and patriarchal control vs agency, i.e.: "How can you so limit and demean people to restrict their expression of love according to inventory control?" (2b) See Appendix C: "In Conversation: Napkin Scribblings")

Talking through the new mono- / polynormative model, they said:

> we are all brought up by and within the colonial structures of transactional language, valuation, and kinship so you were using the language of commodity (1a) as the language

> of how non/monogamous people situate themselves (2a) which of course (happens in your struggle to describe it) is representative of the struggle of many who transition from 1 to 2. (See Appendix D: In Conversation "Fraught Intimacies")

These models are embedded in many narratives of non/monogamy in popular culture and are often posited in opposition to each other. Further interrogation of these models would be of benefit to expand discourses around mono- / homo- / polynormativity more generally (see Appendix E: Normative Models of Mono- / Polynormativity).

Chris' resistance to watching portrayals of non/monogamy, which often exclude recognizable narratives of Black lives and Black sexualities, speaks to her acknowledgement of the omission of stories that reflect and resonate with her understandings of Black sexualities and identities, relationships, communities, and her place in the world. Participants like Chris are conversant with what kinds of representations are available, and which have yet to be written into existence:

> I know Black Mirror is famous for not giving any resolution, I know that watching other episodes, but we have so many limited representations on Black non-monogamy that sometimes, maybe don't leave it unresolved. Instead of making it implicit, invisible, and unspoken, give us more. Something different.

Future research that considers the study of people on the production end of popular culture is another avenue of that would benefit identifying the contours of stories about non/monogamies and the creation of such stories.

Certainly, greater diversity among content creators—understood broadly to include writers, producers, and executives—is crucial to increasing the representations of non/monogamous individuals and communities, as well as other stigmatized groups in popular culture. It may well follow that increasing diversity and inclusion of non/monogamous stories in popular culture will be sufficient to alter the proliferation of negative stereotypes and introduce representation that alters those stereotypes. The creation of independent documentaries and other forms of media production which are co-produced, informed, and influenced by insights from members of non/monogamous communities, such as Lucy Gillespie's (2017) webseries project *Unicornland*, would demonstrate the social, ethnic, sexual, racial diversity found within non/monogamous lives and relationships.

Future research that problematizes the ways in which popular culture shapes our understanding of relationship configurations and queer kinship structures, questions normative assumptions about non/monogamies, and recognizes the ways in which we all participate in maintaining and reproducing mono- / homo- / polynormative ways of relating to others, is important. These systems buttress the violence of racism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism, and the ways that violence is lived out in the politics of desire and the organization of sex and bodies. The individuals who participated in this research, the non/monogamous communities and their advocates and allies, are key to future transformative work and systemic and structural change. In the service of highlighting strengths, assets, and acts of resistance by non/monogamous individuals and communities, the possibility of future work to advance social equities at multiple marginalized intersections and social–structural systems of power and privilege becomes imaginable.

The development of a theorization of non/monogamies would further the fields of gender and sexuality in various directions. Some authors have playfully suggested applying a polyamorous approach to theories themselves rather than adhering rigidly to one particularly theoretical or political stance (e.g., Shannon and Willis 2010). While such a conceptualization of non/monogamies may prove valuable, I maintain that building on anticolonial models for non/monogamies will aid in producing innovative research-creation and open up opportunities to hold space for individual stories to be heard in response to intersectional structural and social inequalities that constrain the health and well-being of non/monogamies lives and queer subjects (see Appendix F: The Futurities of (Anticolonial) Non/Monogamies in Popular Culture). Foregrounding in which ways privilege and power is institutionalized and experienced around different configurations of 'race', gender, class, sexuality, age and able-bodiedness, will help us to imagine and sustain solidarities across these boundaries (e.g., Stella et al. 2015). Research that probes the ways in which representations of non/monogamies appear in popular culture, how people interpret and understand it, and how these texts inform individuals about the world they live in, and how they imagine them differently, will also be part of our future work. The questions that have been spurned in this research, and more, point the way to new terrains to be discovered, mapped, interrogated, and discussed.

With the idea that emotional and relational literacy is a practiced habit, at the end of the world—the end of normal—I want to hold onto my joy despite the terror, sadness, loss, and grief that inhabits the basket of terribles. Whether it comes vicariously through representations of non/monogamies in popular culture, my queer non/normative relational connections, or from the ways in which I show up in the world as a non/monogamous person, my joy is what keeps me grounded and able to reorientate in new directions and through new territories. Invoking

Beneway's desire to feel joy, if I must live with mono- / homo- / polynormativity, and all other forms of power and privilege which mark and constrain our queer joy in the world, I want to have hope in the ability of joy to make everything a little more bearable (2018: 1). For these reasons, and more, I look forward to future research that further explores the possibilities of representations of non/monogamies in popular culture and I challenge others to further contribute to this important work.

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List of Appendixes

A: Glossary of Terms

Asexual: One who has little or no desire for sex or sexuality. Asexuality should not be confused with lack of interest in romantic relationships. Asexuals can and do form romantic relationships, though those relationships may include little or no sex (The Trevor Project 2021: 1).

BDSM (group) play: Play, within BDSM circles, is any of the wide variety of kinky activities. This includes both physical and mental activities, covering a wide range of intensities and levels of social acceptability. The term originated in the BDSM club and party communities, indicating the activities taking place within a scene. It has since extended to the full range of BDSM activities (Wikipedia 2019: 1)

Cheating: In a relationship, any activity that violates the rules or agreements of that relationship, whether tacit or explicit. Commentary: In traditional monogamous relationships, any sexual activity with anyone outside that relationship is generally viewed as cheating. In a polyamorous or swinging relationship, sexual activity with people outside the relationship may or may not be seen as cheating, depending on the context of that sexual activity and whether it violates the agreements of the people in that relationship. Even in such relationships, most commonly sexual activity without the knowledge and explicit consent of the other members of the relationship is likely to be viewed as cheating (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Closed relationship: Any romantic relationship, such as a conventional monogamous relationship or a polyfidelitous relationship, that specifically excludes the possibility of sexual or romantic connections outside that relationship (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Comet: Colloquial An occasional lover who passes through one's life semi-regularly, but without an expectation of continuity or a romantic relationship (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Compersion: describes the feeling of experiencing joy because another is experiencing joy. In the poly community, compersion usually refers to feeling happy when a partner is happy about their metamour, the term for your partner's partner (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Emotional fidelity: A belief or practice that emotional intimacy or love must be kept exclusive to a particular relationship, though sexual activity or other forms of physical intimacy may occur outside that relationship (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Heteronormativity: is the belief that heterosexuality, predicated on the gender binary, is the norm or default sexual orientation. It assumes that sexual and marital relations are most (or only) fitting between people of opposite sex. A "heteronormative" view therefore involves alignment of biological sex, sexuality, gender identity and gender roles. Heteronormativity is often linked to heterosexism and homophobia (Wikipedia 2021:1).

Homonationalism: is the favorable association between a nationalist ideology and LGBTQ people or their rights (Wikipedia 2021:1).

Intentional family: A family made up of people who have consciously and deliberately chosen to consider one another as a single family, as opposed to family that is the result of birth or marriage (i.e., family in law). Most often used to describe a family of three or more adults (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Kitchen-Table Polyamory: refers to a style of polyamory that emphasizes family-style connections even among people in a network who are not dating each other. So named because the people in a network can gather around the kitchen table for breakfast (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Life partner: A partner, usually a romantic and sexual partner, with whom one has the intent of a long-lasted and intertwined committed relationship. A life partner need not necessarily be a

spouse, though most often a spouse is a life partner. In some cases, someone may consider a partner's partner to be a life partner even though there is no direct sexual or romantic relationship with that person (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Long-distance relationship (LDR): A relationship in which the people involved do not live together, and are separated by great distances; as, for example, partners who live in different cities, in different states, or even in different countries (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Marriage: A relationship, most commonly between one man and one woman in Western countries, which is sanctioned by the State and/or by a religious institution and which confers upon its members certain social and economic conditions, typically including rights of joint property ownership, rights of inheritance and of decision-making in legal and medical matters, and certain legal rights and responsibilities concerning mutual child rearing. These rights and responsibilities have varied over time and today vary from place to place, but common to all of them is the expectation that people who are married are in a legally recognized, financially entwined, committed relationship that is not trivial to separate. Traditionally, marriages in most Western countries carry with them expectations of sexual and emotional monogamy (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Metamour: refers to the partner of one's partner, with whom one does not share a direct sexual or loving relationship (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Monogamy: is a form of relationship in which an individual has only one partner during their lifetime — alternately, only one partner at any one time or serial monogamy (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Mononormativity: Mononormativity, a term coined by Pieper & Bauer, means the presumption of coupledom and the unfair discrimination against those whose relationships do not fit into the

conventional couple form and heteronormativity – a complex social, economic, and cultural system—positions heterosexuality as normal and natural (Pivec 2018: 95).

Non/Monogamies: a term employed for discussing monogamy and non-monogamy as parts of a multi-locational, dynamic, and multidimensional system, and as a mode of conceptualizing the cultural naturalization of monogamy with a cultural denaturalization of nonmonogamy (Rambukkana 2010:1).

Non-monogamy: is an umbrella term for every practice or philosophy of intimate relationship that does not strictly hew to the standards of monogamy, particularly that of having only one person with whom to exchange sex, love, and affection. Individuals may form multiple and simultaneous domestic, intimate, sexual, or romantic bonds (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Normalization: A term associated with Foucault and Foucauldian work interested interdisciplinary power. It is used to refer to the ways that certain events, people, and objects may be categorized, and presented as either natural and normal, or deviant and abnormal (Adams, 2017:1).

One Penis Policy: An arrangement within a polyamorous relationship in which a man is allowed to have multiple female partners, each of whom is allowed to have sex with other women but forbidden to have any other male partners (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Parallel Polyamory: A style of polyamory in which the relationships a person has are largely independent of one another, and there may be little or no contact or relationship between a person's various partners (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Paramour: refers to your partner's other partner's partner/s (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Poly/Mono: Of or relating to a relationship between a person who self-identifies as polyamorous and a person who self-identifies as monogamous (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Polyamory: is the practice of, or desire for, intimate relationships with more than one partner, with the consent of all partners involved. It has come to be an umbrella term for various forms of non-monogamous, multi-partner relationships, or non-exclusive sexual or romantic relationships. Its usage reflects the choices and philosophies of the individuals involved, but with recurring themes or values, such as love, intimacy, honesty, integrity, equality, communication, and commitment (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Polycule: refers to a grouping consisting of poly partners and their partners akin to an extended poly family which establishes its own rules of engagement and can necessitate communication, from scheduling arrangements to STI testing to childcare. The sexual/romantic relationships within the polycule can vary as well: For example, members of a polycule can decide if the group is closed to its participants or open to playing or having relationships outside of it. If sex and romance is confined to the people in the polycule, this is also known as polyfidelity (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Polyfidelity: A romantic or sexual relationship which involves more than two people, but which does not permit the members of that relationship to seek additional partners outside the relationship, at least without the approval and consent of all the existing members. Some polyfidelitous relationships may have a mechanism which permits adding new members to the relationship with mutual agreement and consent of the existing members; others may not permit any new members under any circumstances (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Polygamy: The state or practice of having multiple wedded spouses at the same time, regardless of the sex of those spouses. Polygyny is the most common form of polygamy in most societies that permit multiple spouses (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Polynormativity: refers to the privileging of certain aspects of non-monogamies (and not others) and the assimilation of normative ideas and constructs into non-monogamous cultures (Rambukkana 2010:1).

Primary/Secondary: A polyamorous relationship structure in which a person has multiple partners who are not equal in terms of interconnection, emotional intensity, intertwinement in practical or financial matters, or power within the relationship. A person in a primary/secondary relationship may have one (or occasionally, more than one) primary partner and one or more additional secondary or tertiary partners. A primary/secondary relationship may be "prescriptive" (that is, a primary couple consciously and deliberately creates a set of rules whereby any additional partners are secondary, often because this is seen as a mechanism which will protect the existing relationship from harm caused by additional relationships) or it may be "descriptive," and emerge from the nature and the situation of the relationship (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Primary: In a primary/secondary relationship, the person (or persons) in the relationship with the highest degree of involvement or entanglement, or sometimes the person accorded the most importance. A person may be primary either as a natural consequence of the circumstance and nature of the relationship (because that person has the greatest degree of financial entanglement, for example), or as a deliberate consequence of the relationship structure and agreements (as in the case of an existing couple who set out to add additional partners only on the condition that those existing partners are seen as "less important" than the couple). People who deliberately

seek to construct a relationship along prescriptive primary/secondary lines typically designate one and only one relationship as the primary relationship. People who do not seek to construct a relationship along prescriptive primary/secondary lines may have more than one primary relationship; a relationship becomes primary when it reaches a certain point of emotional commitment, practical entanglement, or both (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Privilege is a social advantage, rooted in membership in the dominant social group (e.g., whiteness, middle-class status, maleness, high social/economic capital, living in an urban area, cisgender, able-bodied, neurotypical, citizens (Pivec 2018: 95).

Relationship Anarchy: A philosophy or practice in which people are seen as free to engage in any relationships they choose, spontaneity and freedom are desirable and necessary traits in healthy relationships, no relationship should be entered into or restricted from a sense of duty or obligation, any relationship choice is (or should be) allowable, and in which there is not necessarily a clear distinction between "partner" and "non-partner." (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Secondary: In a primary/secondary relationship, the person (or persons) in the relationship who, either by intent or by circumstance, have a relationship that is given less in terms of time, energy, and priority in a person's life than a primary relationship, and usually involves fewer ongoing commitments such as plans or financial/legal involvements (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Serial monogamy: A relationship pattern in which a person has only one sexual or romantic partner at a time but has multiple sexual or romantic partners in a lifetime and may change partners frequently (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Solo poly: An approach to polyamory that emphasizes agency and does not seek to engage in relationships that are tightly couple-centric. People who identify as solo poly emphasize

autonomy, the freedom to choose their own relationships without seeking permission from others, and flexibility in the form their relationships take. Such people generally don't want or need relationships that look like traditional couples, and may not, for example, seek to live with a partner/s or combine finances with a partner/s (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Spouse: A person's husband or wife (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Swinging: The practice of having multiple sexual partners outside of an existing romantic relationship, most often with the understanding that the focus of those relationships is primarily sexual rather than romantic or emotionally intimate (Veaux F. 2020:1).

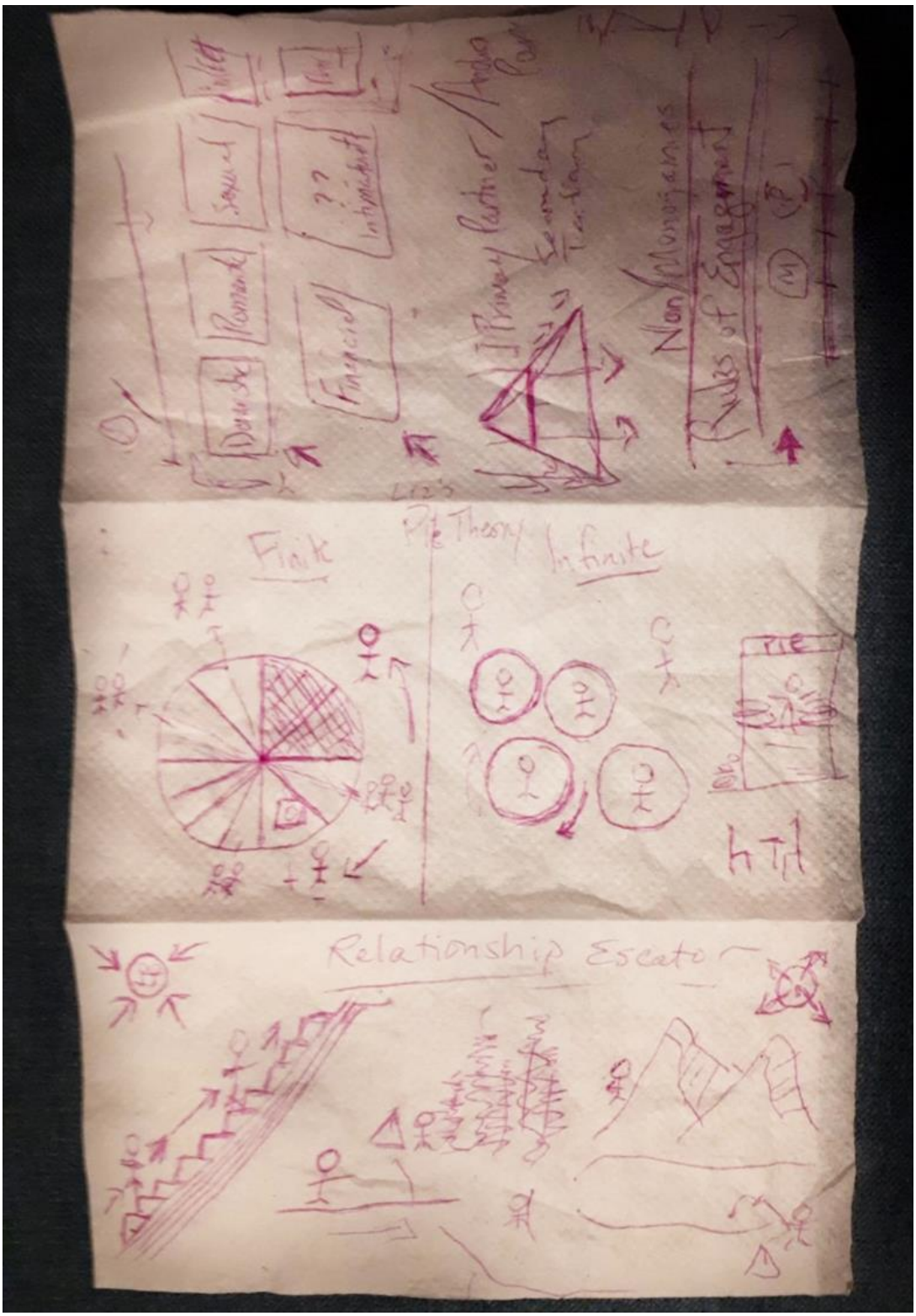
Tertiary: A person (or persons) in a relationship that is generally quite casual, expects little in the way of emotional or practical support, or is very limited with respect to time, energy, or priority in the lives of the people involved. Contrast primary; See related primary/secondary, secondary. A tertiary relationship may be very limited in scope or priority for many reasons, one of the most common of which is often distance (Veaux F. 2020:1).

Veto: A relationship agreement, most common in prescriptive primary/secondary relationships, which gives one person the power to end another person's additional relationships, or in some cases to disallow some specific activity, such as some specific sexual or BDSM-related activity. A veto may be absolute, in which one partner may reject another partner's additional relationships unconditionally or may be conditional and used more to indicate a serious problem in a relationship (Veaux F. 2020:1).

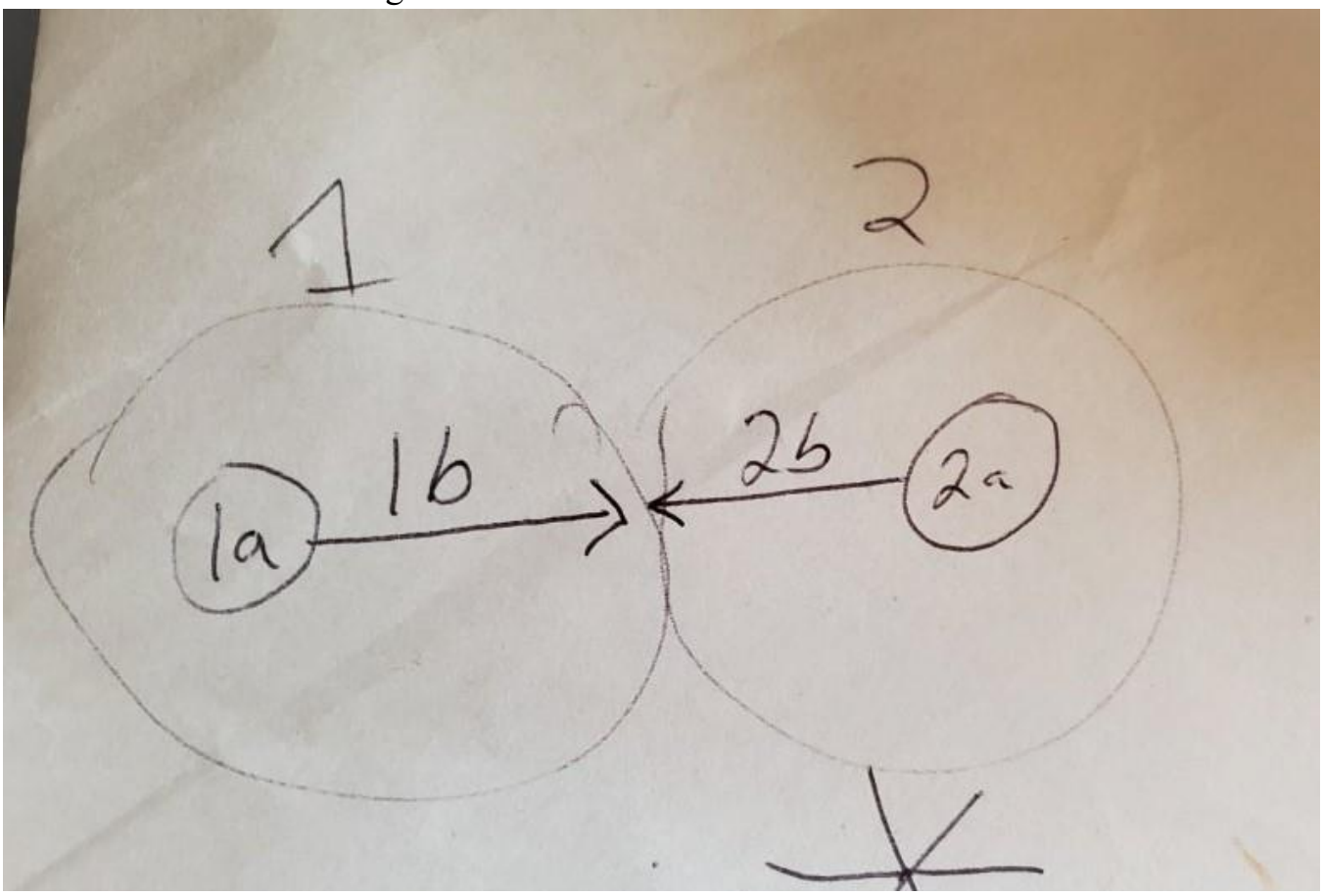
B: The Types of Non/Monogamy

Veaux, Franklin (2010). The Types of Non-monogamy" https://www.xeromag.com.

C: In Conversation: “Napkin Scribblings”



D: In Conversation: “Fraught Intimacies”



Borden, L and Richey. M. “Conceptualizing the Mono-/ Poly- normative Binary of Love of Material Objects”

E: Normative Models of Mono- / Polynormativity

Mononormative Model	Polynormative Model
The normalization of jealousy as an indicator of love	The normalization of compersion as an indicator of love
The idea that a sufficiently intense love is enough to overcome any practical incompatibilities	The idea that compersion is enough to overcome any unrealistic/impractical expectations and assumptions
The idea that you should meet your partner's every need and if you don't, you are either inadequate or they're too needy	The idea that you should meet your own needs and if you do, you are either mature/adequate or your partners are secure/content
The idea that a sufficiently intense love should cause you to cease to be attracted to anyone else	The idea that a sufficiently abundant love should cause you to be attracted to everyone else
The idea that commitment is synonymous with exclusivity	The idea that commitment is synonymous with inclusivity
The idea that state-sanctioned marriage and children are the only valid teleological justifications for being committed to a relationship.	The idea that non-exclusivity and multi-adult configurations (in very specific ways, i.e., OPP, non/hierarchical, autocratic/egalitarian, polyfidelity/polyamory, solo/polycule) with/out children are the only valid teleological justifications for being committed to a relationship
The idea that your insecurities are always your partner's responsibility to tip-toe around and never your responsibility to work on	The idea that your insecurities are never your partner's responsibility, and always your responsibility to work on
The idea that your value to a partner is directly proportional to the amount of time and energy they spend on you, and it is in zero-sum competition with everything else they value in life	The idea that your value to a partner is unrelated to the amount of time and energy they spend on you, there is no competition, your relationship will not be equal, but it will be fairly dispersed with everything else they value in life

The idea that being of value to a partner should always make a large chunk of how you value yourself	The idea that being of value to a partner is measured by your self-worth and what you bring to the table in a relationship

F: The Futurities of (Anticolonial) Non/Monogamies in Popular Culture

The idea that normalizing non/monogamies benefits everyone. The goal is not to abolish monogamy, but to abolish it as the default of relationships. Partner can be defined as someone with whom you have an emotional, sexual, romantic, domestic, intimate connection with. (See Appendix C, Napkin Scribblings, 1st frame)
The idea that feelings of love, jealousy, and compersion are normal and can be overwhelming. Don't objectivity your partner/s and their relationship/s for your consumption.
The idea that your life does not and should not have to revolve around pleasing your partner/s.
The idea that you cannot enjoy non/monogamies without also taking on the responsibility and consequences of multiple relationships.
The idea that couple privilege, just like other types of privilege, should be something you are conscious of when moving through the world and relating to others.
The idea that there is nothing inherently natural, moral, or ethical about non/monogamies. There are plenty of good and practical reasons to want a non/monogamous relationship that have nothing to do with trauma, possessiveness, insecurity, or love.
The idea that just because someone is a good partner, it does not necessarily mean they will be a good domestic partner, co-parent, or spouse.
The idea that rugged individualism is a myth. Your feelings and insecurities are yours to manage. Your partner/s will support you and reassure you, however they can.
The idea that you can learn how to be alone without feeling lonely. Spending your time with a group is not a substitute for one-on-one quality time with each of your partner/s.
The idea that sex, kissing, and cuddling shouldn't be reserved for romantic, pair-bonded couples. We deprive ourselves from platonic affection to the point where we are literally isolating ourselves from everyone except those kinds of partners.

G: Informed Consent Agreement

You are invited to take part in research being conducted by Liz Borden, a master's student in Women and Gender Studies, as part of a Master of Arts degree at Saint Mary's University.

Intent of Research

Representations of non-monogamy have grown in the last two decades, non-monogamous lives and experiences remain extremely underrepresented in popular culture, political discourse, and academic research. In the proposed project, I begin to remedy this gap by inviting participants with lived experience of non-monogamous relations to consider some of the ways media representations of non-monogamies operate--by identifying how the implicit and explicit messages, images, and meanings conveyed within them resonate with or work against prevailing understandings of non-monogamy.

Eligibility Criteria

Participants in the research will self-identity as non-monogamous and will be over the age of 19 years. All identities, orientations, relationship configurations and statuses, and experience levels are welcome to participate. Over 19 only.

Confidentiality

This is a qualitative study in which your voices are important. However, every effort will be made to ensure the confidentiality of the participants in this research. Some participants may not want their identities to remain confidential, but those who do may use pseudonym—a name chosen to conceal their identity. The researcher will work with participants to mitigate risk of exposure by ensuring that identifying elements of their lives / identities are obscured in the research. Having participants review a draft of the analysis is one way of ensuring that confidentiality is maintained if desired by participants.

Research Location and Participation

With an abundance of caution, concern for those with existing health issues, the working poor, families with children, and responsibility to follow the emergency public health guidelines that are in place for COVID-19, participation does not require in-person meetings. Instead, participation will be virtual if these public health measures are in place. We will commence, via phone call, text, or video chat, with a brief interview to discuss the purpose and intention of the research and review the informed consent form. The participant will then watch the selected episode(s) or film separately. Following the screening, participants will participate in an interview, via phone call, text, or video chat, in which we will discuss reactions, share stories, and answer questions to what they just watched.

Should public health measures be lifted, and the university reopens before the end of data collection, participants will be given the option of watching the television show or film at Saint Mary's University, Arts Media Lab (Room 314, Burke Building) or by themselves, in their own home, if for any reason an in-person meeting is a limiting factor in participation.

When the first draft of the data analysis is complete, the researcher will circulate the draft to all participants and will invite them to comment and / or offer further feedback on the project. To do so is fully at the discretion of the participants.

Withdrawal

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Participants do not have to answer questions that they do not want to answer. Participants are welcome to withdraw from the research process at any time by informing the researcher in writing, that they wish to withdraw. Requests to withdraw can be made to coppersunflower@hotmail.com. All data collected will be destroyed if consent is revoked.

Recognized Risks

There are always risks associated with engaging in research. The physical, psychological / emotional, and economic risk associated with participation in this research are considered minimal. The risks associated with participating in this study are no greater than those participants would encounter talking about this topic in their everyday lives.

Every effort will be made to create opportunities for participation that do not incur financial costs. If transportation costs are prohibitive, for example, participants may choose to watch the television episode or film at home and/or do their interviews via telephone interview.

Researchers are required to report adverse events to the REB. Should an adverse event occur, please inform the researcher immediately. Some potential resources, should you experience an adverse event related to psychological or emotional risk, include the Mental Health Mobile Crisis Telephone Line. To access this service during a mental health crisis, call 902-429-8167 or 1-888-429-8167 (toll free). Crisis is self-defined by the individual calling for support.

Compensation

To respect physical distancing protocols in relation to COVID-19, compensation will be offered in the form of a $10.00 e-gift card or email money transfer.

Time Commitment

Length of participation will be approx. 2-3 hours which will include review of informed consent form, pre-screening interview, the length of the television episode or film, and a post-screening interview.

Participants will also be invited to review a copy of their transcribed interview and to offer feedback. This may involve another 1-2 hours, at the discretion of the participant.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to participating in this research, aside from the opportunity to speak about their experience. The research, however, will contribute new knowledge on non/monogamy and polyamory and will expand the research in women and gender studies.

Audio-recording

With permission of the participants, the debriefing interviews will be audio-recorded. The audio recordings will be stored in a secure location in the researcher's home office. Besides the participants, only the researcher will hear the audiotapes or read the transcripts.

Storage of Data

Physical documents will be securely stored in the research's home office. Electronic documents will be stored on a personal computer, which is password protected. Physical documents will be shredded and disposed of securely. Electronic documents will be destroyed through degaussing and physically destruction of storage media devices.

Permission to Use Findings

The researcher may describe and share general findings to the Women and Gender Studies Department at Saint Mary's University as part of their Master's thesis. You will be provided with a draft copy of the report. You will have an opportunity to read, verify, comment on, and contribute to the report. You understand that if you do not wish for certain information to be used in the report, it will be removed. You understand that if Liz wants to use the material in ways other than for the purposes of their thesis, you will be asked for permission at that time.

I understand that my participation in this research is entirely voluntary. I understand that I do not have to answer questions that I do not want to answer, and I am welcome to stop the interview at any time if I no longer want to participate.

I understand that the risks associated with this study are no greater than those I would encounter if I talked about this topic in my everyday life. There will be no direct benefit to me in participating in this research and I will not receive compensation. The research, however, will contribute to new knowledge on polyamory and expand the research in a variety of sociological and anthropological fields, furthermore, it aims to destigmatize the practice.

If you would like to see how your information is used, please feel free to contact me and I will send you a copy of my Master's thesis after August 2022.

If you have questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me or my MA supervisor. My contact information is (902) 410-2609 or coppersunflower@hotmail.com. You can contact my supervisor, Dr. Michele Byers, at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Saint Mary's University by email michele.byers@smu.ca.

Participant's consent:

☐ I have read the above information and I agree to participate in this study.

☐ I consent to the audio recording of my interview.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____

H: List of Films and Television Episodes

Six Feet Under. TV Series. 2001–2005. (Select episodes)

Newness. Film. 2017.

Shortbus. Film. 2006.

Professor Marston and the Wonder Women. Film. 2017.

Wanderlust. TV Series. 2018. (select episodes)

Savages. Film. 2012.

The Magicians. TV Series. 2015. (select episodes)

Unicornland. TV Series. 2017.

Splendor. Film. 1999.

You, Me, Her. TV Series. 2016. (select episodes)

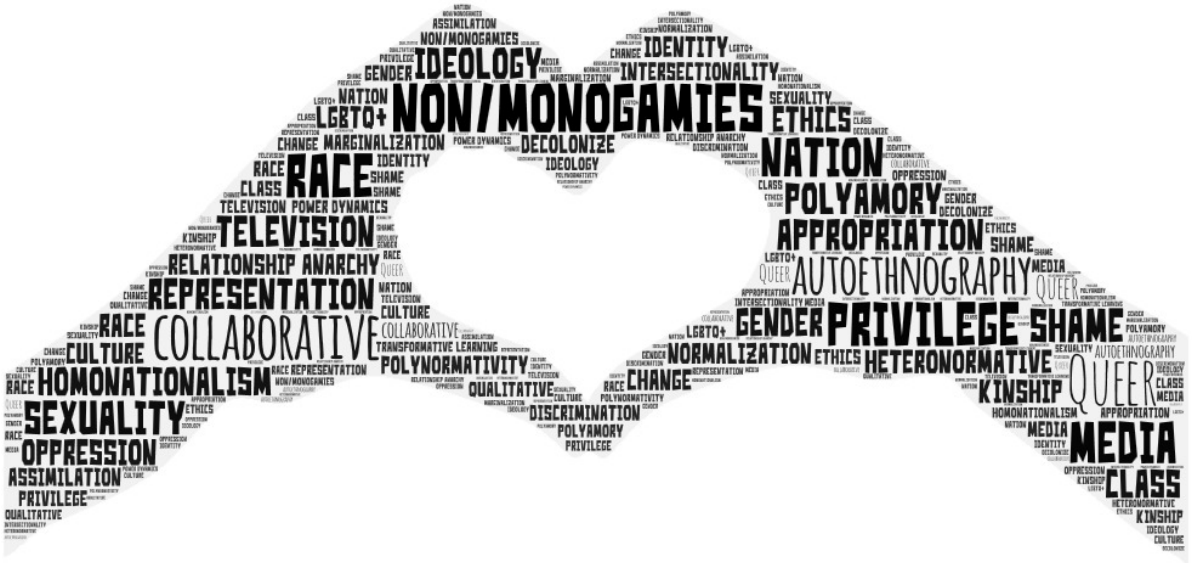
Black Mirror. TV Series. 2011- (select episodes)

KINK. TV Series. 2001-2005. (Select episodes)

Grace and Frankie. TV Series. 2015- (select episodes)

She's Gotta Have It. 1996. TV Series (select episodes)

I: Recruitment Poster



As Seen on TV: Deconstructing Non/Monogamies & Polyamory in Popular Culture

Are you someone who identifies as non-monogamous (includes (solo) polyamory, polyfidelity, relationship anarchy, open, swinging, etc.)? Would you like to talk about your thoughts and reactions to representations of consensual and ethical non-monogamy on television and film?

If so, I'd love to hear from you.

This research focuses on discussions about our relationship with pop culture and experiences connected to Western representations of consensual non-monogamy and polyamory. Participants will watch episodes of select television shows then reflect and share how they connect with the content (or not). The duration of the study will be approximately 3hrs. All identities, orientations, relationship configurations and statuses, and experience levels are welcome to participate. Over 19 only, please.

All participants will remain confidential.

Please contact Liz Borden for more information.
Email: coppersunflower@hotmail.com. Phone: (902) 410-2609

Saint Mary's University – Women and Gender Studies (MA)

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board.
If you have any questions or concerns about ethical matters, you may contact the Chair of the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board at ethics@smu.ca or (902) 420-5728.

SMU REB File #20-007

J: Interview Questions and Script

Pre-screening

1. Can you tell me what your experiences of seeing representations of non-monogamy in popular culture have been—these representations might be television shows, movies, or web series that you yourself have seen or have heard about.
2. Why did you select the film or television series you are going to watch and discuss? Have you seen it before? How many times? When?
3. How would you describe yourself within non-monogamy?
4. What does it mean to you to embrace non-monogamy as a social identity and/or to live a non-monogamous life?
5. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me before we watch the television episode or film?

While you are watching the television episode or film, I ask that you keep in mind how non-monogamous relationships are represented. I would also like you to consider how non-monogamous characters are represented in terms of race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, nationality, and family and kinship relations. I would like you to consider what are you are seeing **and** what aren't you seeing.

You are welcome to take notes during the screening.

Post-screening

1. What resonates with you in this film or television show? What doesn't? Why?
2. What narrative about non-monogamy is represented in this story?

3. What is this story telling you about what constitutes happiness and living a good life? How is non-monogamy figured as part of this story?
4. How would you interpret the way relationships, intimacy, partnership, kinship, and family are represented in this story?
5. Whose identities are represented in this story. Whose aren't? How and why?
6. How does this story maintain, legitimize, and/or challenge monogamy / mono-normativity?
7. How does this story maintain and legitimize social inequalities along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and nationality?
8. What, if anything, troubles you—makes you feel conflicted—about this television episode or film? How and why do you think it makes you feel this way?
9. What, if anything, in this television episode or film, makes you feel affirmed? How and why do you think it makes you feel this way?
10. If you have watched this television episode or film before, has your reading of it changed since then? How? What do you think is responsible for this / these change(s)?
11. Will you describe a specific moment in the film or episode that resonated most strongly with you? How and why do you think it made you feel this way?
12. What are the dominant values and / or cultural norms of the world in which this story takes place? Does the story offer alternative systems of value and / or cultural norms—particularly in relation to sexuality, family, and relationships?
13. Do you think that this story opens new conversations about monogamy and non-monogamy? If so, which ones?
14. How do you imagine it differently? Is there anything else that you wish to share with me?