Polyamory – A Labor of Love

Boundary Work and Legitimization of

Non-Normative Intimate Relationships

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Abstract

Polyamory is a relatively new concept that is receiving an increasing amount of attention in research, popular culture and in society at large. Although polyamory has been, and continues to be, conceptualized in a number of different ways, there is agreement that it involves intimate relationships that are not limited to two people. As such, polyamory stands in contrast to the mononormative notion, in contemporary Western culture, that such relationships should be restricted to the realm of monogamous coupledom. Those who identify as polyamorous or engage in polyamorous practice contest monogamy in their daily lives through the way they understand love and the way they form affective relationships.

This thesis examines the culture of polyamory in a Scandinavian context, where there, thus far, has been limited research on the subject. My exploration is based on the following research questions: 1) What are the most important narratives that emerge in the accounts of those who are affiliated with the culture of polyamory? 2) What elements characterize those narratives and what meanings do these individuals attach to these elements? 3) And finally, how do they use these narratives to create symbolic boundaries in an effort to present polyamory as a legitimate way of doing relationships? To answer these questions, I use a combination of naturally occurring and researcher-provoked data, drawing on online conversation threads, interviews and participant observation.

Ann Swidler's view of culture as a repertoire of resources serves as the theoretical backdrop for the analysis in this study. Drawing on Sveinung Sandberg and Willy Pedersen, I consider polyamory to be a subculture in the sense that it is provides a set of cultural resources, which can be utilized by the individuals affiliated with the subculture. My analysis of participants' boundary work rests on Michèle Lamont's understanding of symbolic boundaries. These boundaries are linked to the establishment of in-groups and out-groups and determinations of status and legitimacy. I draw on Henri Taifel and John C. Turner to give extra insight into the process of how participants determine comparative dimensions and relevant comparison groups in their legitimization efforts.

In the analysis, I identify three main narratives: 1) the narrative of polyamorous love, 2) the narrative of honesty, and 3) the narrative of relationship competence. I find that these narratives are activated by the participants in the construction of boundaries between

themselves and three main groups. The narrative of polyamorous love and the narrative of relationship competence are used by participants to differentiate themselves from specific sub-groups of monogamous individuals who are seen to be either lacking in critical thinking about relationships or complacent in their relationships, or both. These two narratives serve also as resources in participants' boundary work toward those who engage in sexual relationships of a more casual nature (promiscuity, swinging, open relationships). The narrative of honesty is activated by participants in their efforts to differentiate themselves from individuals who engage in infidelity.

Acknowledgements

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1 Introduction

There's a very standard curve of how you [first] fall in love, and [next] you are in love, and then it tapers off. And that's when you meet someone else. And that's, that's sort of the standard we live by. … It's serial monogamy, and they often overlap. … But you meet someone else, you might be unfaithful, or you're not. … I looked at that in my mind and said, "There's no way she can love him and me at the same time … and she doesn't love me any more. She can't." And I think that's what people refer to when they go, "I could never do that" or "How does that work?" or "That is unethical." 'Cause [in their minds] you can't love two people that way at the same time. You just can't. (Jacob)

I remember that my [partner] later told me that, when I was so preoccupied and in love with this other guy, there was never any discussion about "Do you love me most?" or anything like that. We always talked about it as … new relationship energy. I mean, at that time, we didn't know if we were, or if we wanted to live polyamorously, but we knew that this was new relationship energy. And it was very useful to be able to talk about it in that way. We didn't have to fall into that trap where it was like, "Oh, now you can only think about him. Does this mean that you don't love me?" We never had that discussion.[1] (Henrietta)

Romantic love is very important in contemporary Western culture. The desire and search for love occupies our thoughts and permeates our lives from an early age. Some argue that, especially now in post-industrial times, love can be thought of as "our secular religion," tasked with providing meaning in people's lives (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995: 175). "As society becomes more prosperous people's lives are less restricted by class considerations or established authorities and their attention centres on a hectic search for emotional satisfaction" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 1995: 182). The idea of romantic love is closely associated with finding *the one*. Monogamy in romantic relationships is a deep-seated social

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[1] This thesis is based on literature and empirical data, not all of which was originally written or spoken in English. All translations of both literature and empirical data used in this study are mine. This has been a challenge, particularly in regards to the empirical data. Many words and concepts are not easily translatable. In such cases, I have been particularly concerned with staying true to meaning, rather than providing word for word translations.

norm, apparent in popular culture and the way families and other societal institutions are organized.

I started this introduction with two lengthy quotes from two study participants because these statements demonstrate, not only the value of romantic love, but also that there are different views regarding its nature. In the first quote, Jacob describes his initial reaction to his partner's romantic feelings for someone other than him. His reaction aptly represents a central aspect of the concept of romantic love upon which monogamy depends, namely that it is *not possible* to have romantic feelings for two or more people simultaneously. In this view, the realm of monogamous coupledom becomes the proper setting for intimate relationships, given the finite nature of romantic love. "The standard we live by," as Jacob called it, is such that if one's partner falls in love with someone else, the relationship has obviously run its course, because "she doesn't love me anymore. She can't."

The second quote presents a similar situation and shows how Henrietta and her partner handled it in a very different manner. In this case, the emotions for the third party were not seen as a threat to the relationship, but rather viewed as something to be dealt with by the couple. In this understanding of romantic love, its finite nature has disappeared.

The concept of polyamory, which is preliminarily defined here as "a form of relationship where it is possible, valid and worthwhile to maintain (usually long-term) intimate and sexual relationships with multiple partners simultaneously" (Haritaworn et al. 2006: 515) stands in contrast to the notion of romantic love as exclusive and finite. Those who identify as polyamorous or engage in polyamorous practice contest monogamy in their daily lives through the way they understand love and the way they form affective relationships. The contradiction between the concept of polyamory and monogamy makes this an appealing area of research. While there is undoubtedly also focus here on the monogamous couple as the legitimate setting for intimate relationships, Scandinavia is commonly perceived as having a liberal sexual culture. It is interesting to explore this phenomenon in this ostensibly liberal Scandinavian context, where there, thus far, has been limited research on the subject.

In this thesis, I consider polyamory to be a subculture in the sense that it is a collection of rituals, narratives and symbols that serves as a set of cultural resources for those affiliated with it (Sandberg & Pedersen 2010: 32). I refer to this subculture hereafter as the *culture of*

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polyamory. I am interested in identifying the most important narratives that surface when individuals who are affiliated with this subculture talk about their relationships. The research question is as follows:

What are the most important narratives that emerge in the accounts of those who are affiliated with the culture of polyamory? What elements characterize those narratives and what meanings do these individuals attach to these elements?[2] And finally, how do they use these narratives to create symbolic boundaries in an effort to present polyamory as a legitimate way of doing relationships?

In the remainder of this introduction, I will address the concept of polyamory, its origin and meaning, and its relationship to other plural relationship models. I then discuss a number of activities that are available to those in Norway who are affiliated with this subculture.

1.1　The Concept of Polyamory

The term, polyamory, is a hybrid word coming from the Greek *poly* and the Latin *amor*, which together mean *many loves* (Polyamory n.d.: URL). Who first coined the term and when this happened is not an uncontested matter. In many publications the expression is attributed to one of two sources, either 1) American author Robert Heinlein, who in his 1961 novel *Stanger in a Strange Land*, used the word to characterize a type of responsible non-monogamy, or 2) the founders of the neo-pagan Church or All Worlds[3] who, in 1990, desired a less cumbersome alternative to the expression *responsible non-monogamy* (Barker 2005: 75; Klesse 2011: 7; Emens 2004: 304). However, the use of word has also been traced back to two older texts; one published in 1953 and the other published even earlier, in 1921 (Alan 2010: URL). The word polyamory entered the Oxford English Dictionary in 2006 (Fidgen 2013: URL) and is defined there as "the practice of engaging in multiple sexual relationships with the consent of all the people involved" (Polyamory n.d.: URL).

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[2] In this thesis, I will largely make use of the word *elements* to describe those features that characterize the key narratives. In order to avoid linguistic monotony, I also refer to these as themes, dimensions or aspects. The words *discourse* and *narrative* are used in both the commonsensical way (i.e. talk and story, respectively), as well as to, respectively, refer to larger discourses in society and narratives that surface in the data.

[3] After his reading of Robert Heinlein's Stranger in a Strange Land, Oberon Zell founded this church in 1968 in California (April n.d.: URL).

Polyamory is one of several concepts used to describe plural relationships, the most common of which is *polygamy*. The word polygamy originates from the Greek *poly* and *gamos* (marriage) and denotes marriage between more than two partners regardless of the gender composition of the partners. However, the term is often used colloquially to refer a marriage between one man and several women. This type of relationship is more accurately represented by the concept of *polygyny*, while *polyandry* designates a marriage between one woman and several men. In English, the term *bigamy* denotes the criminal offence of marrying one person while still legally married to someone else. However, important to note that in the Scandinavian languages, this term does not have the same normative connotation. Bigamy, in Scandinavia, simply describes the condition of being married to (no more than) two people simultaneously.[4] Polyamory differs polygyny and polyandry in that all partners, regardless of gender, have the opportunity to have multiple partners. Additionally it differs from all of these concepts in its lack of formal focus on marriage as an element of such relationships, and thereby it is not specifically forbidden by law.

The differentiation of polyamory from other concepts seems to be a more straightforward matter than defining what polyamory actually is. The simplest of descriptions characterize it as "more than one love" (Wilkins 2004: 341), "ethical" or "responsible non-monogamy" (Bettinger 2005: 98; Mitchell et al. 2014: 329), or as one form of consensual non-monogamy (Barker & Langdridge 2010: 750).[5] Some academics have analyzed polyamory as a "family system" (Bettinger 2005: 97) or a "family form" (Sheff 2011: 487). Others position polyamory as a framework, or a way of doing relationships, when they describe it as a "complex relationship style" (Sheff 2005: 256) or a "form of association in which people openly maintain multiple romantic, sexual and/or effective relationships" (Sheff & Hammers 2011: 201). Likewise, many authors and polyamorists characterize polyamory as a practice or behavior, which emphasizes agency and choice (Aguilar 2013: 104; Aviram 2008: 263; Barker 2005: 84; Emens 2004: 320; Klesse 2014b). While others describe polyamory as something deeper and more essential by using the terms "relationship orientation" (Barker

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[4] All English definitions are sourced from Oxford Dictionaries http://www.oxforddictionaries.com. Scandinavian definitions of bigamy are sourced from Den Store Danske: http://www.denstoredanske.dk, Svenska Akademiens Ordbok: http://g3.spraakdata.gu.se/saob/, and Bokmålsordboka: http://www.nob-ordbok.uio.no.

[5] In most texts, consensual non-monogamy is not synonymous with polyamory. Although this is a point of contention, consensual non-monogamy is often viewed as an umbrella term and is operationalized in a way that includes consensual extradyadic relationships that are strictly *sexual* in nature as well as consensual extradyadic *emotional* relationships (see, for example, Conley et al. 2013).

2005: 75), "identity" or "sexual identity" (Ritchie & Barker 2007: URL; Sheff 2005: 254), or "sexual orientation" (Tweedy 2011: 1514). Similarly, other definitions posit polyamory independent of practice by calling it an "*assumption* that it is possible and worthwhile to maintain intimate, sexual and/or loving relationships with more than one person" (Haritaworn et al. 2006: 518, emphasis added) or the "desire for" or "experience of" having loving or romantic feelings for more than one person simultaneously (Burris 2014: 259; Manley et al. 2015: 1). Still others have elevated polyamory by characterizing it as "a theory of relationships" (Emens 2004: 320) or a "relationship philosophy" (Klesse 2007b: 97).

The contours of some points of contention emerge in these different views of what polyamory is. Some polyamorists essentialize polyamory by stating that it is something that is in their nature and cannot be changed, while others view it as a practice or behavior (Barker 2005: 83). Additionally, while most definitions of polyamory imply that the relationships involve emotions, there are others who would assert that casual sex and swinging are included under the polyamory umbrella. German sociologist Christian Klesse writes, "whereas some positions on polyamory take a more sex-radical stance, others are adamant that polyamory would rule out sex-focused approaches to non-monogamy" (Klesse 2007a: URL). This last point of contention will be elaborated further in Chapter 3.

The configurations of polyamorous relationships vary and are theoretically infinite in number (Emens 2004: 307). Many polyamorists choose to organize themselves around a primary (couple) relationship that allows for additional partners, who may be considered secondary or tertiary (Emens 2004: 307). Although many polyamorists, including some who participated in this study, disagree with the use of such hierarchical language to describe their relationships (Emens 2004: 307), this particular structure is common within polyamory (Aviram 2008: 269). A triad involves three people and is usually used to designate groups in which all partners are committed to one another (Taormino 2008: 77). However, the term triad is sometimes used to refer to three-person V-structure relationships in which two of the partners are not romantically involved (Veaux n.d.: URL). A group of four can be referred to as a quad while groups of more than four can be designated in a variety of ways, including, for example, poly family or poly circle (Taormino 2008: 99). Polyamorous relationships, regardless of structure, can be either open to additional partners or closed. Polyfidelitous relationships involve three or more persons who have agreed to be sexually exclusive within

the group, although more partners can be added upon the partners' mutual consent (Emens 2004: 308). Single people are also categorized as polyamorous through the term solo poly.[6]

There is increasing interest in the concept of polyamory in popular culture and the media. At the time of this writing, a Google search on the term produces approximately 650,000 results. There are a number of television programs and films featuring polyamorous relationships (e.g. Arlen n.d.; Friend 2006; Garcia 2012, 2013; O'Dwyer & Bliss 2007) in addition to a multitude of newspaper and magazine articles. Interest in the topic in the Scandinavian media is also evident as a simple Google search produces articles from major Scandinavian newspapers and magazines. During the course of my work on this study, I have been contacted by two Norwegian television programs and one journalist regarding this work, which anecdotally demonstrates the current relevance of the topic. Academics began to take interest in the concept during the early 2000's and since then the amount of literature has increased substantially (Barker & Langdridge 2010: 749; Haritaworn et al. 2006: 516).

1.2   Polyamory in Norway – Getting to Know the Field

In order to research the culture of polyamory, I had to gain access to individuals who are affiliated with this subculture and could offer insight about it. As will be elaborated in Chapter 5, the definition of subculture used in this thesis refers to the *cultural resources* made available through the culture of polyamory, and thus the term does not denote the *individuals* who are affiliated with it. Here, I use the term polyamorous *community* to describe these individuals. I use the term loosely, as it is not meant to imply that there is an organizational structure or that the people within that community are a uniform group with common goals.

After gaining access to the community, I was able to identify activities that specifically target a Norwegian audience. The overview I present here is not an exhaustive list of everything available to these individuals. A number of blogs, forums and other activities are not included here, either because there is scant recent activity in these or they are of a non-collaborative nature. Because of the porous borders between the Scandinavian countries and the absence of borders on the Internet, the polyamorous community defined here and participants in this

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[6] I have only scratched the surface of possible configurations as well as the terms that can be applied to these. For a more complete overview and explanation of polyamory models and terminology please see Veaux n.d.: URL or Taormino 2008.

study include individuals from both Norway and Sweden. However, my initial acquaintance and primary relationship with the field has been in Norway.

1.2.1 PolyNorge

The majority of poly-related activities in Norway are associated with PolyNorge.[7] PolyNorge can be described as a loose association of individuals interested in polyamory. The group has a volunteer administrator who takes care of practical issues as well as functioning as an initiator of certain activities and a contact person for the media and other interested parties. PolyNorge is not registered in the Norwegian registry of organizations[8] although the volunteer administrator has entertained the idea. Activity in the community appears to be centered on carving out spaces for communication with one another. As one interview partner expressed, "I felt kind of a need talk about this in Norwegian." Fulfilling this need for communication is currently done in several ways.

1.2.2 Online Social Media

Barker asserts, "much of the work of negotiating polyamorous identities and the rules of polyamorous relationships takes place on the Internet" (2005: 78). By searching for the term *polyamory* on Facebook, for example, the results show that, internationally, there are over 300 groups with that word in their title. The two largest of these groups boast approximately 20,000 and 15,000 members, respectively. In addition to this abundance of discussion forums on Facebook, there are a large number of other Internet forums on the topic. The Internet is also used by Norwegians to create space for discussion about polyamory.

PolyNorge.no was the first online discussion forum for polyamorists in Norway. The forum was established in 2007 and is describes itself as a meeting place for polyamorous and poly-curious people in Norway where they can seek mutual support and share experiences. At the time of this writing, the forum has over 280 members. The members are primarily located in Norway, with only a handful listing their place of residence in other countries.[9] Despite the number of members, the level of activity is relatively low (see Footnote 20).

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[7] The English translation of PolyNorge is PolyNorway.
[8] Brønnøysundregistrene.
[9] These statistics are printed here with the permission of the site administrator.

More recently, however, Facebook has become a forum for poly-discussion in Norway. The level of activity on Facebook is considerably higher than that of *PolyNorge.no*. There are three active Facebook groups that serve the same purpose as the PolyNorge forum: to provide a virtual meeting place where individuals who are interested in polyamory can discuss their relationships, polyamory in general and seek support from one another. I was granted access to two of these three groups. One of the groups has a Facebook privacy status of "closed." This group was created in 2010 and, at the time of this writing, has eighty-five members. The other group, with twenty-five members, was created in 2011 and has the privacy status of "secret."[10] In 2014, there were a total of seventy-one posts for both groups. There were thirty-seven posts that generated discussion, with a total of 367 comments on these posts.

1.2.3 Poly-Gatherings

One of my interview partners described the value of meeting other people who are interested in polyamory. He said, "together, we can talk together about, about things that, um, that aren't always so easy to talk to others about, because they don't really know how I am."

Maria Mørch studied polyamory in Norway in connection with her master's thesis in social anthropology in 2010-2011. She reports that during her research period there were poly-discussion meetings that took place with a certain level of regularity in different places around the country (Mørch 2011: 12). However, more recently the regularity of such meetings appears to have tapered off. One of the participants in this study reported that there were regular meetings for several years in her area:

> It started as more formal meetings, uh, where really none of us new each other very well at all. But now we are more like a group of friends, in a way. … But I think we came to a point where many of the big issues, we were finished talking about them. … So, it has gone more and more from being public meetings to being more and more a private thing.

However, during the course of this study a few meetings were arranged, some of which I was involved in organizing. Additionally, several gatherings have been organized in the community after I completed the data generation phase of this study. Because such meetings

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10 My memberships are included in these tallies. The membership tally for the secret group is not public information and is printed here with the permission of one of the group administrators.

are voluntary and depend on personal initiative they have no standard format. However, what they do have in common is to provide a space and time for these individuals to come together for discussion. Face-to-face meetings serve, in many ways, the same purpose as the Internet forums.

In familiarizing myself with these poly-activities, I became acquainted with the individuals who participated in the data generation phase of this study. Thirty-eight individuals have generously contributed to this study through either online or face-to-face contributions.

1.3 Outline of Thesis

In this introduction, I have discussed the concept of polyamory and contrasted it to other relationship models, in addition to providing an overview of the most prominent poly-activities in Norway. Because social norms influence ideas about the workings of intimate relationships, I have chosen to devote Chapter 2 to an elaboration of the contextual circumstances in which polyamorous individuals form and maintain relationships. This contextualization consists of a discussion of heteronormativity and mononormativity, as well as a presentation of some measures of the presumed liberal sexual culture in Scandinavia. Considerable research on polyamory has been conducted during the past ten years. In Chapter 3, I provide a brief overview of such research and follow this with a more in-depth discussion of research that is particularly relevant for this study. Data for this study has been generated through a variety of methods. In Chapter 4, I provide an overview of both methods and the data. The theoretical perspective is presented in Chapter 5, before I move on to the analysis in the subsequent four chapters. Chapter 10 is devoted to a summary of the findings and concluding remarks.

2 Social Norms for Intimate Relationships

Social norms regarding love and intimate relationships shape the context within which polyamorous individuals navigate when establishing relationships. According to American anthropologist Gayle Rubin, "most of the discourses on sex, be they religious, psychiatric, popular or political, delimit a very small portion of human sexual capacity as sanctifiable, safe, healthy, mature, legal, or politically correct" (2007: 160) She presents a version of sexual value hierarchy, dubbed "the charmed circle" (Rubin 2007: 160). Rubin contends that the sexuality that qualifies for placement within this charmed circle "should ideally be heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and non-commercial. It should be coupled, relational, within the same generation, and occur at home" (2007: 159). In Rubin's description, the heteronormative (between a man and a woman) and mononormative (between two people only) nature of the ideal sexual encounter emerges. The two related notions of heterornormativity and mononormativity guide determinations of sexual normalcy and deviance to which polyamorous and other individuals are subject.

In the first two sections of this chapter, I illustrate how these two notions have been established and continue to be maintained through various discourses. I start with a discussion of heteronormativity, in which I draw primarily, but not exclusively, on French philosopher Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* (1978). His description of the discursive production of sexual normality and abnormality in 18th and 19th century Western society gives a historical view of how the monogamous, heterosexual couple is socially constructed as the legitimate sphere for sexuality. I then address the concept of mononormativity. I draw on sociological and other literature to provide examples that highlight how the naturalization of the monogamous couple is maintained today. In an effort to address local contextual circumstances, the last portion of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of Scandinavian sexual culture specifically.

2.1 Heteronormativity

The heterosexual couple has long been the legitimate setting for sexual and romantic love (Andersen 2011: 4). Heteronormativity can be defined as "the interplay of discourses and material practices that privilege heterosexuality" (Berlant & Warner, cited in Klesse 2007b: 135) which engender the assumption that heterosexuality is natural and thereby does not require explanation (Mühleisen et al. 2009: 16). This concept involves not only the

assumption that romantic love should be heterosexual, but also the wider assumption that certain types of heterosexual lifestyles are superior to and more natural than others. Three elements have been identified in the dominant construction of sexuality expressed through popular culture. The message conveyed about sexual relationships is that they should be "(a) between a man and a woman, (b) monogamous, and (c) with the man active and the woman passive" (Barker 2005: 76). This means that it is not only homosexuals and bisexuals who transgress this norm, but also certain heterosexuals whose relationships (or lack thereof) are inconsistent with this model (Klesse 2007b: 135; Mühleisen et al. 2009: 16).

In *The History of Sexuality* (1978), Michel Foucault theorizes about the discursive construction of sexual difference. He takes issue with what he calls the "repressive hypothesis" that purports a shift from the sexual openness that existed at the beginning of the seventeenth century to a repressive silencing of all things sexual (Foucault 1978: 3, 10). He questions the empirical validity of this hypothesis by describing a "veritable discursive explosion" regarding sex from the eighteenth century onward (Foucault 1978: 17). He highlights how this transformation of sex into discourse was integral in defining sexual regularity and irregularity.

Foucault explains that, up until the end of the eighteenth century, sex was mainly governed by the canonical and civil law and that these determined the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable sexual activity. At this time the matrimonial union represented the focal point of the discourse on sexuality, whereby marital sexual relations and reproduction were "beset by rules and recommendations" (Foucault 1978: 37). At the same time, this governance did not distinguish between violation of the rules of the conjugal union and other forms of sexual deviation, as both "breaking the rules of marriage or seeking strange pleasures brought an equal measure of condemnation" (Foucault 1978: 38).

During the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, attention turned away from the married couple and was rather directed toward that which was deemed abnormal. "The legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality had a right to more discretion. It tended to function as a norm" (Foucault: 1978: 38). According to Foucault, those whose sexual conduct fell outside the setting of the legitimate couple were called upon to explain their sexuality, and this, increasingly in the nineteenth century, for the purpose of medical categorization. "No doubt they were condemned all the same; but they were listened to; and if regular

sexuality happened to be questioned once again, it was through a reflux movement, originating in these peripheral sexualities" (Foucault 1978: 39). The discursive focus on this "world of perversion" (Foucault 1978: 40) pathologized sexual difference and bolstered the position of the heterosexual couple as the standard against which other forms of sexuality would be measured.

At this same time, during the late 19th century, the governance of sex shifted its focal point from *sexual acts* to *sexuality* as an innate individual quality. Foucault writes, for example, that:

> The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscrete anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. … The homosexual was now a species (1978: 43).

Klesse tells us that during the Victorian era, the pathologizing discourse regarding homosexuals focused not only on same-sex attraction as abnormal, but also purported excessive appetites for sexual activity and promiscuity (2007b: 58). "In both medical and popular texts, homosexuality was described as a contagious state of degeneracy, whose central focus was on an *unrestricted* transgressive sexuality" (Klesse 2007b: 59, emphasis added). According to Klesse, this "discursive fusion of homosexuality and promiscuity" applied to both men and women, it was especially significant in the case of male homosexuality (2007b: 59).

The attention to the number of sexual partners and its association with deviance demonstrates how the notion of the monogamous couple is embedded in the concept of the heteronormativity. Gradually, homosexuals have managed to carve out a space for themselves in this heteronormative landscape. In 1984, when Rubin presented the charmed circle, she wrote that "some forms of homosexuality are moving in the direction of respectability" (2007: 161). One of the main components of this movement "in the direction of respectability" more recently has been asserted effort to achieve official recognition of same-sex couple relationships and a particular push for same-sex marriage, implicitly distancing homosexuality from promiscuity and multiple partners. By advocating for recognition of same-sex *couple* relationships, gay rights activism places emphasis on

compliance with and assimilation into the mononormative tradition for cohabitation (Andersen 2009: 138).

2.2   Mononormativity

Monogamy is a cultural value that dominates the view of how romantic relationships should be formed and maintained (Andersen 2010: 853-854). According to American sociologist Kassia Wosick-Correa "the 'rules' of monogamy provide a template for individuals to engage in sexual and/or emotional relationships with another" (2010: 44). By providing a template, the notion of monogamy guides individual action toward the establishment of pair-bonds.

The term *mononormativity* was coined by German sociologists Marianne Pieper and Robin Bauer in 2005 (Ritchie & Barker 2006: 598) to describe the "discursive naturalization of [the] dyadic model as the hegemonic form of intimate relationship that is inscribed again and again as a complex interplay of discourses, juridical norms, power relations and forms of subjectivity" (Pieper 2013: URL). Mononormativity in society contributes to what American sociologist Eric Anderson calls *monogamism*: "a culture in which individuals volitionally aspire to monogamy" (2010: 855). In this section I provide some examples of how the naturalization of the dyadic model is supported by contemporary discourses that stem from the scientific defense of monogamy and the Western romance tradition (Emens 2004: 287).

2.2.1 Scientific Discourse

Within science, monogamy is viewed as a mating strategy (Herlihy 1995: 573). This particular mating strategy presents a peculiar dilemma in regards to evolutionary theory. If reproduction is the primary motivation for human behavior, it stands to reason that monogamy constrains such reproduction. When it comes to humans, the reproductive strategy is characterized by few offspring and considerable parental investment in those few. According to this theory, the lengthy period of pregnancy and child rearing compels females to seek out mates with ample resources and who are willing to invest in the survival of their offspring. In return, males expect fidelity from the female, to ensure paternal certainty. The theory also contends that this arrangement is advantageous for females, because in exchange for their fidelity they receive paternal involvement and security for their young (DeLamater & Hyde 1998: 11; Emens 2002: 294-295; Herlihy 1995: 573).

However, this mating strategy does not require monogamy from males (Herlihy 1995: 573-574). Several theories have been developed to account for the evolution of monogamy in males. Some theories posit, for example, that male monogamy is a result of economic and political necessity. Higher status males required cooperation from lower status males to ensure their own (and thereby their offspring's) economic prosperity and survival, as well as the welfare of the group or the state. Polygyny was a destabilizing factor and "only a system of monogamy could ensure all male citizens a reasonable chance of attracting a wife" (Herlihy 1995: 581). Other theories of male monogamy suggest that the family relationship is the motivating element; it is the male's interest in ensuring his offspring's survival and his concern for female fidelity that keeps him close to the home (Emens 2004: 295). These theories have not gone uncontested and while there is scientific literature that offers evidence to the contrary, a discussion of these is beyond the scope of this thesis. These evolutionary theories are presented here as an example of the way in which scientific discourse presents monogamy as the natural form for human intimate relationships and the natural and most efficient framework for family and child rearing.

When it comes to contemporary scientific research, Angela Willey, American scholar of Woman and Gender Studies, argues, for example, that monogamy is naturalized in present-day genomic research. A portion of her doctoral research was concerned with the neuroscience laboratory at Emory University that reportedly discovered the "monogamy gene" in prairie voles in 2004 (Willey 2010: 44). The use of prairie voles, in particular, for this research is important because, as the principal investigator, Larry Young, states, "like people, they are monogamous" (Willey 2010: 44).

As demonstrated by Young's statement above, the research is based on the premise that humans are monogamous (Willey 2010: 51). In the research project, the monogamous prairie voles are designated as "normal." Monogamy is used as a model for social health and is linked to behaviors that are deemed to be desirable and social. Meanwhile, meadow voles, who do not form the same type of pair bonds, are deemed promiscuous. Non-monogamy, conceptualized as the inability to fall in love and sustain long-term social bonds, is pathologized and "serves as the model for something abnormal and 'wrong' in humans" (Willey 2010: 55-56). It is this genetic variation in the non-monogamous voles that the research aims to alter. By using gene therapy, in order to influence the voles toward less

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"asocial" behaviors, they expect to gain insight into the treatment of other "asocial" conditions such as autism (Willey 2010: 10, 53).

2.2.2 Western Ideas of Romance and Love

American sociologist Ann Swidler details the origin of the "romantic love mythology" in her book *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters* (2001: 112-114). She tells us that the view of love in Europe was fundamentally changed by the emergence of the concept of courtly love in medieval literature (Swidler 2001: 112). These texts, poetry in particular, emphasized the chivalrous acts and virtue as the result of a noble man's love for a noble woman. The individual's transformation to virtue and honor was attributed to the power of such love. At the same time, the poetry emphasized how such love could lead to disastrous consequences for the involved parties if it violated social norms. "Like the later stories of Lancelot and Guinevere or Romeo and Juliet, it portrays and ill-fated love that violates social obligations" (Swidler 2001: 112).

This vision of love was somewhat altered in the 18th century through the appearance of the novel as a form of literature developed for a wider audience of middle class citizens in England (Swidler 2001: 112). In such novels virtue remained important. However, the love story more often culminated in a triumph of love after a period of personal adversity, during which the parties uncover their true selves. After this journey of discovery the partners are rewarded with a "happily ever after" ending including true love and marriage. This view of love involves the association of love with integrity and the value of knowing oneself in order to know one's beloved. Such loving relationships are limited to couples and are made everlasting through the institution of marriage. "True love must be unique and exclusive ('one true love'), embodying the uniqueness of the individual self. The loved one is idealized in the sense that only true love could justify an exclusive choice" (Swidler 2001: 113).

This formula is readily recognizable in many genres of today's popular culture, especially romantic comedies on television and the big screen. Boy meets girl and they fall deeply in love. They subsequently face obstacles that put their love in jeopardy. However, these trials reveal the true character of the respective sweethearts and make them stronger in their

conviction that they have met *the one* who will make them happy for the rest of their (often, married) lives.[11]

This focus on exclusivity positions jealousy as a key feature in the discourse of love. Jealousy is viewed as either good or bad, depending on the type of relationship involved. "In friendship the lack of jealousy is a virtue, even a prerequisite to true friendship, but in erotic love the presence of jealousy is a virtue, even an emblem of true love" (Emens 2004: 288). The distinction between friends and lovers is defined by whether or not they can be shared without the feeling of jealousy. This distinction implies a difference in the degree of "ownership" of another person, whereby a jealous romantic partner is naturally justified in this emotion because of her presumed sole possession of her partner and his or her affection (Emens 2004: 288). In this way jealousy serves to reinforce the institution of monogamy (Davis 1936: 403; Robinson 1997: 148).

British sociologist Ani Ritchie and British psychologist Meg Barker point out that the language available within the contemporary discourse of romantic relationships does not allow for positive treatment of relationships between more than two people (2006: 589). The discourse allows for characterization of relationships outside of a primary-pair bond only in negative terms, such as infidelity, cheating, the other women, and so on (Ritchie & Barker 2006: 589). Likewise, the language available to describe persons with multiple simultaneous relationships is negatively loaded, particularly for women (Ritchie & Barker 2007: URL; Robinson 1997: 149). Consequently, the position of non-ethical non-monogamy is possible, while ethical non-monogamy is not.

2.3   Scandinavia – "Land of the Midnight Sin?"[12]

> Looking at the sex issue from the outside, travelers are often surprised at how liberal Scandinavia is. You may see a couple of pornographic movie theaters and sex shops, along with naked breasts in the media – or at the beach. … As a whole, Scandinavia views sexuality more liberally than any other region in the world, with relaxed attitudes

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[11] Swidler gives a similar version of this typical bourgeois love story (2001: 112-113). The version I present here is more characteristic of contemporary love stories we see, for example, in Hollywood productions.

[12] From Lewin (2008: 125). "Thus, some saw Scandinavia not only as the land of the midnight sun but also as the land of the midnight sin."

towards their own and others' sexuality. Premarital sex has been acceptable in Scandinavia for centuries (Mapes n.d.: URL).

This excerpt is from a travel advice website targeted at an American audience. As demonstrated by this text, Scandinavians are often portrayed as liberal and permissive when it comes to sexuality. This view is also apparent in social science research, whereby comparative studies regarding sexual attitudes have typically compared the United States to one or another Northern European country (Widmer et al. 1998: 350).

Because of Scandinavia's reputation as a sexually liberal region, I find it useful to address Scandinavian sexual culture specifically. In an effort to contextualize the more local landscape in which those affiliated with the culture of polyamory navigate, I present a compilation of data from a variety of studies that measure actual attitudes and behavior in regards to sexual activity, with a particular emphasis on Norway and Sweden. General attitudes toward sexuality influence behavior and choices in relationships. Beliefs, in the local context, about the rightness and wrongness of non-normative sexual behavior are also apt to influence the degree to which individuals feel the need to legitimize their actions.

The measures of sexual permissiveness presented here are attitudes and behaviors in regards to *premarital sex*, *adolescent sex (before age sixteen), parallel sexual relationships, and homosexuality.* These measures correspond to the operationalization of sexual permissiveness in a study published by American academics Eric Widmer, Judith Treas and Robert Newcomb (1998).[13] In addition, I provide data on the prevalence of *cohabitation* outside of marriage.

2.3.1 Premarital Sex, Cohabitation and Adolescent Sex

Although attitudes toward sexual behavior have relaxed considerably since the 1940's in many Western countries, attitudes toward certain sexual behaviors in Scandinavia seem to be more liberal than attitudes in other countries (Træen et al. 2003: 55; Widmer et al. 1998). Although it is difficult to verify here the travel writer's assertion that "premarital sex has been acceptable for centuries," contemporary attitudes regarding premarital sex can be characterized as tolerant.

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[13] The study from Widmer et al. (1998) is, to my knowledge, the most recent study of its kind. The study continues to be cited regularly in academic literature.

According to the study by Widmer et al., premarital sex is widely accepted in both Sweden and Norway, with respectively 89 and 77 percent of respondents stating that premarital sex is *not wrong at all* (1998: 351). While not as popular as marriage, cohabitation outside of marriage is an accepted model for family formation. The proportion of cohabiting couples who are not married in Sweden is 30 percent, while it is 26 percent in Norway (SCB 2014: URL; SSB 2012: URL).

In Sweden and Norway, the age of consent is fifteen and sixteen respectively (Brottsbalk 2013; Espinoza n.d.: URL). Researchers in Sweden have found that 38 percent of women and 34 percent of men had their first sexual experience before age sixteen (Helmius 2000: 154), while in Norway 46 percent of women and 33 percent of men had debuted sexually at age sixteen or earlier (Træen et al. 2003: 6).[14] However, 79 percent of those surveyed in Norway and 60 percent of those surveyed in Sweden were of the opinion that sex before age sixteen is *always* or *almost always wrong* (Widmer et al. 1998: 351).

2.3.2 Homosexuality

In his book *Odd Couples* (2011), Swedish gender studies scholar Jens Rydström provides a detailed depiction of the movement toward gay marriage in the Nordic countries.[15] All of these countries now offer legal recognition of same-sex relationships. Registered partnership laws were adopted in Norway in 1993 and in Sweden in 1995. Both countries have now abolished these partnership laws and replaced them in 2009 with gender-neutral marriage laws. Additionally, Norway and Sweden allow same-sex couples to apply for adoption and assisted fertilization for lesbian couples. While the Church of Sweden permits same-sex marriages to be performed in church, the Church of Norway allows only for a church blessing of same-sex unions (Rydström 2011).

When it comes to attitudes toward homosexuality, study results indicate that the majority of people in both countries report either positive or indifferent attitudes (Anderssen & Slåtten

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[14] These studies were conducted by the Swedish National Institute of Public Health (SNIPH) and the Norwegian Institute for Public Health (NIPH) respectively. The Swedish study, conducted in 1996, and the Norwegian study, conducted in 2002, are the most recent nationwide scientific studies of the whole population (all age groups). Results from these studies are sourced from Helmius 2000, Lewin 2000 and Træen et al. 2003.

[15] Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland.

2008: 48; Österman 2002: 18). The proportions reporting positive, indifferent and negative attitudes are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Attitudes Toward Homosexuality in Sweden and Norway

Attitude	Sweden	Norway	
	All	Men	Women
Positive	25%	30%	55%
Indifferent	37%	53%	40%
Negative	27%	17%	5%
Don't know	11%	n/a	n/a

Note. Adapted from Anderssen & Slåtten 2008 and Österman 2002.

As shown in Table 1, the most recent representative study for all age groups in Sweden showed that 62 percent report having either a positive or an indifferent attitude regarding homosexuals (Österman 2002: 18). A more recent Swedish study among fifteen to twenty-nine year olds showed that 95 percent of women and 86 percent of men reported that same-sex relationships were either somewhat or totally acceptable (Tikkanen et al. 2011: 58). For Norway, research indicates that 83 percent of men and 95 percent of women were either positive or indifferent (Anderssen & Slåtten 2008: 48). Results from a recent study also show that 79 percent of Swedes and 74 percent of Norwegians support same-sex marriage (Jakobsson et al. 2013: 1353).

2.3.3 Parallel Sexual Relationships

Studies show that extradyadic relationships are not uncommon in Norway and Sweden. As shown in Table 2, between 20 and 40 percent of respondents in these studies report having sexual intercourse with someone other than their primary (married or cohabiting) partner.

Table 2. Attitudes and Practices Regarding Parallel Sexual Relationships in Sweden and Norway

	Attitude		Practice			
	Sweden	Norway	Sweden		Norway	
			Men	Women	Men	Women
Parallel sexual relationships	94% *always or almost always wrong*	95% *always or almost always wrong*	38%	23%	29%	23%

Note. Adapted from Lewin 2000: 79, Træen et al. 2007: 55 and Widmer et al. 1998: 351.

While parallel sexual relationships do occur, the permissive Scandinavian attitude does not extend to these relationships. In fact, the attitude toward parallel relationships is one of condemnation. In the study that measured the attitudes reported in Table 2, parallel sexual

relationships were framed as "extramarital sex." Thus, these negative attitudes reflect how fidelity is valued in relationships in which it was a premise. Sexual and emotional exclusivity is, however, not a premise in polyamorous relationships. Unfortunately, there are no studies documenting attitudes toward consensual non-monogamous relationships in Norway or Sweden, neither have there been any quantitative studies to ascertain how many people identify as polyamorous or live polyamorously.[16] A number of studies have been conducted in North America that document attitudes toward consensual non-monogamy and polyamory. These will be discussed in Section 3.2.4.

2.3.4 Tolerant and Permissive Sexual Culture?

The results of these studies suggest that attitudes in Norway and Sweden are somewhat similar. While respondents in Sweden were more permissive than their Norwegian counterparts when it comes to premarital and adolescent sex, Norwegians and Swedes exhibit similar attitudes when it comes to homosexual relationships. However, both Swedes and Norwegians are critical of sexual activity among young teenagers, and highly critical of parallel sexual relationships. According to these studies, there is a disparity between attitude and practice when it comes to extradyadic sexual relationships. Despite widespread condemnation of this practice, it is shown to be not uncommon amongst those with regular partners.

Some argue that, despite the view of the Nordic countries as sexually liberal, the heteronormative view of sexuality prevails, whereby the proper place for sexual activity is defined as within the confines of home and family (Bang Svendsen 2012: 397). Norwegian academics Wencke Mühleisen, Åse Røthing and Stine Bang Svendsen assert that those seeking equal familial rights must conform as much as possible to the traditional nuclear family model (Mühleisen et al. 2009: 24). "Marriage, or the 'patriarchal nuclear family,' which, in the 1970s, was the subject of crass criticism from feminists and homosexual activists, is now the template for all cohabitation regardless of gender and sexuality" (Mühleisen et al. 2009: 21). In both Sweden and Norway, the state offers more protection and rights to those who choose marriage than to those who do not (Den norske Advokatforening

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[16] In order to ascertain whether or not such research exists I have done extensive literature searches in databases such as *Idunn*, *Norske of nordiske tidsskrifartikler (Norart)*, *JSTOR*, and *ProQuest* amongst others, making use of relevant search terms in English, Swedish, and Norwegian. The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU) has also confirmed that there are no such Swedish studies to their knowledge (M. Bergström, personal communication, 23 April, 2015).

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2014: URL; Juridikfokus.se 2009: URL) and sexual activities that are not confined to the private sphere are highly regulated by the state. Examples of such regulation are the criminalization of the purchase of sex, in both Sweden and Norway, as well as the strict regulation of pornography in Norway (Bang Svendsen 2012: 398).

In this chapter I have elaborated on the values and norms that influence how intimate relationships are formed and viewed in contemporary Western culture, as well as attitudes and behaviors toward sexuality in Norway and Sweden. In the next chapter I present an overview of previous research on the topic of polyamory.

3 Polyamory – A New and Contested Concept

In the early 2000s, British sociologist Ken Plummer approached a group of academics to guest-edit a special issue of the journal *Sexualities* dedicated to polyamory. Their original call for papers produced disappointing results, both in number and subject matter (Barker 2005: 76; Haritaworn et al. 2006: 516). However, since that time the number of journal articles and books on this matter has increased substantially, thanks to the work of both academics and polyamorous activists. In addition to self-help style books written by polyamorists, there is now a considerable body of international academic literature that covers a variety of aspects related to polyamory and consensual non-monogamy. In this chapter, I will first give a general overview of academic literature related to polyamory, followed by a more in-depth discussion of literature that is particularly relevant for this study.

3.1 General Overview of Academic Literature

Because polyamory is a relatively new concept, many academic texts on the subject contain a definition of the concept, a description of relevant relationship models, as well as discussion of the practicalities that are necessarily involved in multiple simultaneous relationships (e.g. Bettinger 2005; Emens 2004; Klesse 2006, 2011; Wilkins 2004). Some works have discussed the demographics of polyamory and highlight how this way of structuring relationships may only be available to those who come from a privileged background, specifically white, middle-class and educated individuals (Klesse 2014a; Noël 2006; Sheff & Hammers 2011).

Other works have had a specifically gendered focus, examining aspects of polyamory specifically in relation to either women or men (Sheff 2005; 2006). A number of researchers have examined polyamory in relation to other marginalized sexualities or subcultures (bisexuality, homosexuality, Goth, and communal subcultures) (Aguilar 2013; Bettinger 2005; Klesse 2005, 2007b; Rambukkana 2008; Ritchie & Barker 2007; Robinson 2013; Wilkins 2004). A number of studies have addressed whether polyamory is an essential quality of the individual or if it is, rather, a behavior that one can either choose to or abstain from doing (Barker 2005; Egelstig & Gustafsson 2010; Emens 2004; Klesse 2007b; Mørch 2011). Polyamorous families and parenting have also been addressed in academic literature (Pallotta-Chiarolli 2010; Riggs 2010; Sheff 2010, 2011). A number of quantitative studies have investigated satisfaction and well being in polyamorous and consensually non-

monogamous relationships (Conley et al. 2012; Mitchell et al. 2014; Morrison et al. 2013; Rubel & Bogaert 2014).

In Norway and Sweden, specifically, there has been relatively little research on the topic. Searches in relevant academic databases and general Internet searches produce a number of Master's theses, similar to this one, which address polyamory in general or more specifically in relation to law or psychotherapy (Egelstig & Gustafsson 2012; Lidslot 2013; Mørch 2011; Paulsson & Wennberg 2014).

3.2   Relevant Literature

Particularly relevant in this study is literature that addresses 1) the tenets of polyamory, 2) the relationship between polyamory and other forms of non-monogamy, 3) comparison of polyamory to monogamy, and 4) the perception of polyamory in society at large.

3.2.1 Tenets of Polyamory

In academic literature, polyamory is not only presented as a relationship structure, but also a theory of relationships. Certain key elements within this theory of relationships provide "an ethical vision of how those relationships should be conducted" (Emens 2004: 320). These elements include: the prioritization of love, honesty, work, self-reflection, communication, dedication and commitment, freedom, autonomy and gender equality (Emens 2004; Klesse 2011). Drawing on academic literature, I present here an overview of those principles that are particularly relevant in this study. This means that I do not address in any detail here the principles of freedom, autonomy and gender equality.[17] The academic texts that are the basis for this overview consist of analyses of central polyamory writings as well as interview and survey data.

Prioritization of Love

Research on polyamory often highlights the high value placed on love in this theory of relationships. An important aspect of this esteem for love is the rejection of the notion that romantic love is finite and can only be shared with one person at a time. The essence of polyamorous love is that people can, and often do, have romantic feelings for more than one

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[17] Further discussion of these issues can be found in Bettinger 2005; Emens 2004; Klesse 2007b, 2011; Ritchie & Barker 2007; Robinson 1997; Sheff 2005.

person simultaneously and that it is possible to have concurrent loving relationships. This view of love as "non-exclusive and potentially unlimited" is a rejection of the central premise of monogamy (Klesse 2011: 14). Love begets love, and thereby the expression of love is seen as beneficial both for oneself and for those in one's immediate surroundings. "When a community of people values the expression of love, polys would say, the benefits accrue to all its members" (Emens 2004: 329).

Based on interviews conducted in the United Kingdom, Klesse describes polyamory as both "a love song" (2006: 568) and "a love story" (2007b: 103). By using these terms, Klesse is referring to how interview partners emphasized the connection between polyamory and love. As will be discussed further in Section 3.2.2, the focus on love was often associated with an effort to repudiate the perception that polyamory involves relationships of a purely sexual nature (Klesse 2006: 568, 2007b: 103). Some researchers have found polyamorous love may also include non-sexual love, and that friendships are valued just as highly as romantic relationships (Barker 2005: 81-82; Klesse 2006: 569; Ritchie & Barker 2006: 592-593). However, when sexual relations are involved, Klesse found that the basis of these is love and affection for one's partner(s) (2011: 13). "Consequently, love appears as the defining feature of polyamorous desire" (Klesse 2011: 13).

In her essay "Monogamy's Law: Compulsory Monogamy and Polyamorous Existence," American law scholar Elizabeth Emens suggests that both love and sex are privileged to a greater degree in polyamorous relationships than in monogamous ones. This involves devoting time and energy to activities that will create and sustain intimacy at the expense of other pursuits. Communication, which is further addressed below, is highlighted as one important activity that enhances intimacy (Emens 2004: 329).

In this view of love as a renewable resource, jealousy is relegated to the sidelines. The naturalness of jealousy is challenged, and countered with the notion of *compersion*. Compersion is conceptualized as the direct opposite of jealousy. This addition to the emotional spectrum emphasizes that it is possible to feel joy and take pleasure in knowing that one's romantic partners(s) share their love with and receive love from others (Emens 2004: 330; Ritchie & Barker 2006: 595). Although some polyamorists reject the use of the term compersion to characterize this emotion, there is agreement that such an alternative to jealousy exists (Ritchie & Barker 2006: 595). Theses studies do not contend that jealousy has

been completely eradicated. However, those who do experience feelings of jealousy view them as something to be recognized, owned, examined, and dealt with in a manner which allows the prioritization of love for one's partner(s) and the love of one's partner(s) by others (Emens 2004: 329-330; Ritchie & Barker 2006: 594-595).

Honesty

Klesse describes honesty as the "*sine qua non* of polyamorous practice" (2011: 16). Establishing and maintaining intimate relationships with multiple partners necessitates honesty from all those who are involved. Emens tells us that "for many polys, honesty is so central to polyamory that they would object to the use of the term polyamory independent of honesty, protesting that honesty is a definitional element of polyamory" (2004: 322). In Wosick-Correa's survey of self-identified polyamorists, 96 percent of the participants reported having some form of agreement that establishes the rules, guidelines or boundaries between partners (2010: 47). Honesty was depicted as having both a constitutive role in the creation of agreements and was an integral component of the subsequent shared understanding that guided behavior in relationships (Klesse 2011: 16; Wosick-Correa 2010: 53).

Interwoven with the notion of honesty is the importance of consent in polyamorous relationships. According to Emens, "honesty forms the basis of consent" (2004: 324). In the absence of honesty, one cannot properly consent. Being truthful is not only important when it comes to openness about the existence of other partners, safer sex and practical concerns like allocation of time. For some it is seen as part and parcel of the goal of creating a high level of intimacy between partners (Klesse 2011: 16).

Work, Self-Reflection and Communication

In her review of three central polyamory self-help texts, Italian sociologist Serena Petrella (2007) finds that relationships are depicted as *work* in all of these writings. The authors of these texts emphasize "that polyamory is more complex and emotionally demanding than simple monogamy" (Petrella 2007: 156) and success, therefore, depends on a great deal of effort from the involved parties. Petrella draws comparisons between the focus on work in these texts and the Protestant work ethic, as well as a "Liberal meritocratic logic" (Petrella 2007: 156) These comparisons emphasize how polyamory is portrayed in the relevant texts as requiring commitment to a "life of labor" and an emphasis on "only to the committed and

hardworking go the spoils of victory" (Petrella 2007: 156). In her study of polyamorous men, Sheff draws on the terminology of sociologist Arlie Hochschild in emphasizing the high degree of *emotion work* required in polyamorous relationships (2006: 627).

Part of the work of polyamorous relationships involves self-reflection and an acute awareness of one's own emotions. Participants in Wosick-Correa's study, "necessitated self-awareness as a central component to effective communication" (2010: 53). Polyamorists do not have a monopoly on this line of thought, as self-awareness is valued in most kinds of relationships, however, Emens points out that "understanding oneself and listening to one's own feelings are vital to the process of working through the 'baggage' of living in a monogamous world" (2004: 321).

This awareness of one's emotions is seen as a pre-requisite for effective communication with one's partner(s). The emphasis on communication has been found in numerous studies (e.g. Barker 2005; Klesse 2006; Ritchie & Barker 2007; Sheff 2006; Wosick-Correa 2010). Wosick-Correa found that her study participants "repeatedly discussed how polyamory is essentially predicated upon continual communication with all partners involved" and "emphasized communication as *the* core component of a multiple-partner paradigm" (2010: 52, 53, emphasis in original). Both Sheff (2006) and Ritchie and Barker (2007) highlight how open communication is necessary to keep relationships running smoothly, both in the emotional and practical spheres. Because of the complexity of these relationships, a great deal of time is devoted to the communication and processing of feelings as well as to the challenges of scheduling and time allocation (Ritchie & Barker 2007: URL; Sheff 2006: 627-628).

Dedication and Commitment

Klesse found amongst his interview partners an emphasis on dedication and commitment to partners (2011: 15). They also emphasized that communication involved in making relationships work is related to the notion that the relationships are meant to last (Klesse 2011: 16). In Wosick-Correa's study, her interview partners used strategies of discussion and renegotiation of agreements when a partner had broken the rules, rather than resorting to termination of the relationship (2010: 55). This demonstrates both a commitment to the relationship as well as a recognition of changing individual needs in within relationships (Wosick-Correa 2010: 56).

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The image of polyamory that emerges in this literature is one of loving, committed relationships in which self-aware partners are dedicated to honest, open communication with one another to make the relationships work over the long-term. Love is conceptualized as an infinite resource and thereby it is imperative that both men and women are allowed the freedom to forge new bonds and relationships while they, at the same time, stay committed to and care for their other partners.

3.2.2 Differentiation From Infidelity and Other Forms of Non-Monogamy

Differentiation From Infidelity

In a study that explores the boundaries of fidelity in relationships, American social scientists Katherine Frank and John DeLamater found that those in consensually non-monogamous relationships were particularly sensitive to what is and is not allowed in relationships (Frank & DeLamater 2010: 13).[18] Although these participants defined a wider range of activities with other people as acceptable than monogamous participants, their notion of infidelity was specifically dependent on what had been previously agreed between partners (Frank & DeLamater 2010: 13). However, Wosick-Correa recognized amongst her polyamorous participants a pattern of rejection of the terms "infidelity" and "cheating," rather preferring to characterize violation of agreements as "breaking the rules" (Wosick-Correa 2010: 55). "Several of them wrote elaborate comments about how cheating is for monogamists and others who are not 'honest and open' about their multiple partners" (Wosick-Correa 2010: 55). Wosick-Correa thereby asserts that "'cheating' is not a relevant construct for such behavior" (2010: 44).

In their study of polyamory-related Internet resources, Ritchie and Barker found that these resources differentiate polyamory from infidelity in the same manner as popular polyamory self-help books (2006: 589). The Internet resources echo the message of the self-help texts, which "explicitly counter the likely assumption that polyamory equates to infidelity by constantly emphasizing openness, honesty and ethical practices" (Ritchie & Barker 2006: 589).

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[18] In this particular study, the types of relationships classified under the consensual non-monogamy umbrella in this study were open marriages, polyamory and swinging.

Ritchie's more recent analysis of polyamory as a "sexual story" in confessional media accounts of polyamorous relationships in the British press, presents similar tendencies (2010: 46). Ritchie explored how these individuals presented their relationships in the media and found they also drew this distinction between polyamory and infidelity (2010: 48). This distinction "seems to function firstly to counter perceived assumptions that [polyamory and infidelity] are the same, and secondly … to position polyamory as an *alternative* to infidelity" (Ritchie 2010: 48, emphasis in original). The individuals featured in these articles stressed the prevalence of infidelity in society and emphasized polyamory as an ethical and "more honest way of managing shifts in relationship needs" (Ritchie 2010: 48).

Differentiation From Other Forms of Non-Monogamy
Klesse (2006) and Ritchie (2010) have both examined how polyamory is discursively differentiated from other forms of non-monogamy in polyamorous individuals' accounts of their relationships. Klesse found that his interview partners emphasized polyamory as a form of "responsible non-monogamy," implying that other forms of non-monogamy lack this element of responsibility (2006: 571-572). Some of the individuals he interviewed made a distinction between polyamory and non-monogamy, stressing that polyamory is about loving relationships while non-monogamy is about sex (Klesse 2006: 572). Open relationships and swinging were defined as non-monogamy because they do not involve emotions or love for sexual partners, and polyamory was thus distanced from all three concepts (Klesse 2006: 573). Klesse also found that certain interview partners made a concerted effort to distance themselves from casual sex and promiscuity. Based on this he asserts that "the major difference between people who are into promiscuity, swinging and casual sex, and practitioners of polyamory is that the latter have fewer partners and an honest interest in building intimate long-term relationships." (2006: 574).

Ritchie also found that the polyamorous individuals, featured in the British press articles mentioned above, drew boundaries between polyamory and casual sex, defined here as swinging, open relationships and one night stands (2010: 48-49). The boundaries were drawn along the same lines as those in Klesse's study, emphasizing that rather than sex, the focus in polyamory is on love and "having meaningful relationships" (Ritchie 2010: 48).

Both Klesse and Ritchie recognize in these differentiation techniques a tendency to normatively construct a "proper" form of polyamory. Ritchie concludes, "this de-emphasizing of sex forms part of what has become the discursively dominant ideology of polyamory" (2010: 50); an ideology that reinforces the normative view that love is the basis of relationships. She adds, "In this context what emerges is a narrative of the 'good' polyamorous person" (Ritchie 2010: 50). A number of Klesse's interview partners did object to the normativity expressed through such narratives. These individuals expressed concern that "polyamory discourses bear the potential to reinforce the stigmatization of people who seek sex for the sake of sexual pleasure" (Klesse 2006: 576-577). This vision of proper polyamory comes through in much of the academic literature, as shown in Section 3.2.1.

3.2.3 Comparing Polyamory and Monogamy

In Barker's analysis of polyamory discourse generated through e-interviews, she describes how participants presented polyamory as both different from and similar to monogamy (2005: 80). In emphasizing difference, some participants posited polyamory as a threat to monogamy because "it represented an honest way of having more than one lover" (Barker 2005: 81). These individuals viewed polyamory as essentially different from monogamy and positioned it as "better" or "more realistic, given that many people are attracted to more than one person" (Barker 2005: 81). At the same time, participants often underscored similarities between polyamory and monogamy, in what Barker describes as an effort to normalize polyamory and "present polyamorous people as 'just like anyone else'" (Barker 2005: 82-83).

3.2.4 Perceptions of Consensual Non-Monogamy and Polyamory

As indicated in Section 2.3.3, there have been no studies, to my knowledge, that measure the attitudes toward consensually non-monogamous or polyamorous relationships in either Sweden or Norway. However, a group of researchers conducted a series of quantitative studies with North American samples to measure the level of stigma associated with consensually non-monogamous (CNM) relationships (Conley et al. 2013). These studies measured attitudes toward consensual non-monogamy as a whole, rather than a specific type such as swinging, polyamory or open relationships.

The results of these studies showed that, by and large, monogamous relationships were viewed more favorably than CNM relationships on most the measured relationship-relevant

traits. CNM relationships were only viewed more favorably than monogamy in regards to such qualities as allowing independence, preventing boredom and involving less jealousy (Conley et al. 2013: 13, 21). Monogamous relationships were viewed as more moral, natural and socially acceptable (Conley et al. 2013: 17-18). The researchers also found support for a halo effect, meaning that favorable views of monogamous people also extended to traits that were arbitrary, or relationship-irrelevant, such as recycling or career-success (Conley et al. 2013: 21-23). Interestingly, they also found evidence that supported system justification, whereby even those in CNM relationships viewed monogamous relationships more favorably (Conley et al. 2013: 13).

Until very recently, there had not been any research measuring attitudes toward polyamorous relationships specifically. However, two studies were published in 2014 that address attitudes toward polyamory compared to, 1) casual sex and infidelity, and 2) swinging and open relationships, respectively. Both studies draw on samples of North American university students and thus may have limited generalizability (Burris 2014: 260, Matsick et al. 346). A third study was published in 2015 that measures both public awareness of and attitudes toward polyamory, based on a predominately white sample of American adults (Hutzler et al. 2015).

In the first study, participants were asked to give their opinion about one of three scenarios in which the protagonist desired, but had not engaged in, a) a polyamorous relationship, b) an affair involving love for the extradyadic partner, after having fallen out of love with the current partner, or c) casual sex with an extradyadic partner, while still loving the current partner (Burris 2014: 261). The results show that overall attitudes toward all these scenarios were equally negative. The only exception to this was a somewhat less negative view of the protagonist in the third scenario (c) that surfaced when participants were instructed to take the perspective of the protagonist. (Burris 2014: 264-265). Meanwhile, the polyamorous protagonist was viewed as "more loving, warm and sensitive" than the others, but at the same time viewed as "more needy and confused and more likely 'fooling themselves'" (Burris 2014: 265).

The second of these recent studies measures and compares attitudes toward polyamory, swinging and open relationships (Matsick et al. 2014). The results indicate that of these three types of CNM relationships, swinging was perceived most negatively. Attitudes toward open

relationships were found to be somewhat more positive, while attitudes toward polyamory were significantly more positive. They conclude that, at least for the demographic represented by the sample, attitudes toward CNM relationships are more positive when the emphasis of the relationship is on love rather than sex (Matsick et al. 2014: 345-346).

These two studies are both designed to measure the comparative value of relationships based on love versus relationships that are strictly sexual. However, both the dependent and independent variables are operationalized differently in the respective studies, making them very difficult to compare. It is, however, interesting to note that the results are not consistent with one another. While the first study concludes "at least in the context of the scenario presented to this sample of participants, there was no evidence than an emphasis on love as a motive in polyamory generated greater social approval" (Burris 2014: 265), the second study found that more positive attitudes were associated with relationships that emphasize love rather than sex (Matsick et al. 346).

The final study consisted of two surveys that measure the awareness of polyamory and attitudes toward those in polyamorous relationships (Hutzler et al. 2015). These two connected studies showed that, sixty and fifty-one percent of the sample participants, respectively, had heard of polyamory and had a good understanding of the meaning of the concept (Hutzler et al. 2015: 6, 10). Both of the studies produced statistically significant results showing negative attitudes, in certain respects, toward individuals in polyamorous relationships. In relation to their monogamous counterparts, polyamorous individuals were viewed as "(a) higher in promiscuity, unsafe sexual practices and sex drive; (b) lower in trustworthiness and morality and (c) higher in communication skills and extroversion" (Hutzler et al. 2015: 6, 10). The results also showed that polyamorous individuals were viewed as "more physically attractive, less jealous, and less satisfied in their relationships" than their monogamous counterparts (Hutzler et al. 2015: 6, 10).

The studies presented in this section give an indication of the attitudes toward polyamory in a contemporary Western context. They document that polyamorous people are perceived positively on a number of traits, such as communication and being warm, loving and less jealous. However, they are seen as being more promiscuous, more likely to be confused and less satisfied in their relationships and, most importantly, less moral than their monogamous

counterparts. At the same time, at least one study indicates that polyamory is viewed more favorably than other forms of non-monogamy.

In this chapter, I have given an overview of the academic literature that relates to polyamory. I have also provided a more detailed discussion of those texts that I find particularly relevant in this study. I now move on to my own research, starting with a discussion of the methods used and data that forms the basis for my analysis.

4 Methods and Data

This chapter is devoted to a discussion of the methods employed in this study. I start by discussing the methodological approach and follow this with a brief description of my initial contact with the gatekeeper for this study. The details of data generation and relevant epistemological issues are then discussed. Thereafter, I provide an overview of the study participants and address issues related to the preparation of data for analysis. I close this chapter with a discussion of my role as researcher and ethical considerations.

4.1   Methodological Approach

It is important to identify those methods for the generation, handling, and analysis of data that are appropriate for the specific research topic at hand (Silverman 2001: 4). What is appropriate data for a project can thereby only be determined by careful consideration of the research topic and the conditions under which the project is conducted (Kalleberg et al. 2009: 69). Qualitative methods and data are preferable to quantitative methods when the purpose of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of a social phenomenon (Silverman 2001: 32; Thagaard 2010: 17).

Because I am interested in the cultural resources, specifically narratives, provided by the culture of polyamory and what those resources mean to the participants, a qualitative approach was thereby deemed appropriate. The British sociologist David Silverman writes that there are four major qualitative research methods: observation, analysis of texts and documents, interviews, and audio and video recording (2001: 11-12). As polyamorous relationships are non-normative and uncommon, I was at the outset uncertain as to whether or not I would be able to obtain enough data to do the study. Because of this, I adopted a fairly open and pragmatic attitude in regards to methods and data generation. I knew I needed either text or talk about such relationships, which meant that interviews, participant observation and conversation threads from online forums all had the potential to provide appropriate data. In the end, use of these three methods generated an abundance of data.

4.2   Gaining Access

Critical to this study was the ability to gain access to and establish a level of trust with individuals who are affiliated with this subculture. Norwegian sociologist Katrine Fangen stresses the importance of establishing contact with a gatekeeper during the initial phase of a

research project (2010: 67). During the course of preliminary Internet searches I discovered *PolyNorge.no*. I contacted one of the administrators and our initial correspondence was followed by a meeting in order to discuss the intentions of the study. The administrator of this Internet forum has acted as a gatekeeper for this study, facilitating access to his network in Scandinavia.

4.3   Data Generation and Epistemological Issues

After my initial contact with the gatekeeper I was able to gain access to a variety of resources. Data generation has been focused in three areas: 1) Internet resources, 2) participant observation, and 3) interviews. An overview of data along with the number of participants is provided in Table 3. After discussion of epistemological issues, I provide a more complete description of the data generated through the different methods.

Table 3. Overview of Data

	Data	Number of participants
Facebook groups	40 posts and 245 comments	17
Participant observation		
Poly-weekend	Field notes	7
Poly-discussion meeting 1	Field notes[19]	6
Poly-discussion meeting 2	Field notes	6
Poly-discussion meeting 3	Field notes	4
Interviews	Interview transcripts	8

Because the data for this study are generated through different types of methods it is important to evaluate what these different types of data represent and how they can be used in combination with one another. The interview researcher can be viewed as either a "miner" or a "traveller" (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 67). The researcher's notion of herself as a miner or a traveller has epistemological consequences. Is the knowledge just waiting there to be collected by the miner? Or is it rather produced in interaction between two people as their paths cross?

These questions are raised in the methodology literature in specific reference to interview research, however, they are in my opinion also applicable to the other methods used in this study. All the data in this study is either text produced by the participants or talk transformed to text through transcription. All the data for this study, with the exception of a few Facebook

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[19] Please see discussion below (section 4.3.2) regarding abbreviated field notes from this poly-discussion meeting.

posts, can be described as conversation. I view this knowledge as being constructed in interactions between participants themselves or in interaction between participants and myself. I use the term *interview partner*, rather than *interviewee* as an acknowledgement of the collaborative nature of the production of knowledge in the interview situation (Klesse, 2006: 579). Likewise, I make use of the term *participant* throughout, which emphasizes collaboration to a greater degree than the term *informant*. The texts produced through these collaborative efforts give access to and enable an analysis of the culture of polyamory, its meaning and how it is used by those affiliated with it.

The data that serve as the basis for analysis are thus a combination of naturally occurring data and data generated solely for the benefit of this study. Silverman advocates the use of naturally occurring data, which he "define[s] in terms of a contrast with … manufactured or researcher-provoked data" (2010: URL). In his view it is beneficial to study naturally occurring data because rather than giving an account of a participant's perception of a phenomenon to an outsider, naturally occurring data give insight into how participants actually produce the phenomenon (Silverman 2010: URL). Meanwhile, British sociologists Paul Atkinson and Amanda Coffey argue that people's accounts are also action and that what people do should not be viewed as more authentic than what they say (2003: 110). In this study, I adopt the position advocated by Atkinson and Coffey, whereby the naturally occurring data and the researcher-provoked data can be seen as "incorporating social actions of different kinds and yielding data of different forms" (Atkinson & Coffey 2003: 117). Thus, one type of data is not privileged over another.

4.3.1 Internet Resources

As mentioned in the introduction, much of the discussion about polyamory takes place on the Internet. Thus Internet resources seem an appropriate place to seek data for this study. I identified three relevant resources: 1) *PolyNorge.no*, 2) two Facebook groups, and 3) a series of online videos about polyamory. Access to both *PolyNorge.no* and the Facebook groups is restricted, while the polyamory videos are available online to all. I applied for and was granted access to *PolyNorge.no*, and was also admitted to the Facebook groups. My original intent was to make use of all of these as data for this study. However, due to the large amount of data suddenly at my disposal, and my intention to also collect data through other methods, I prioritized the conversation threads from Facebook over the two other Internet resources.

This decision was made on the basis of 1) the conversations on Facebook were more recent and the level of activity was higher than on *PolyNorge.no*,[20] and 2) the series of videos represent only one voice, while the Facebook conversations give access to many voices. I have therefore elected to use conversation threads from the Facebook groups as data, while I have allowed *PolyNorge.no* and the video materials to serve as background materials. These materials provided me with valuable knowledge and informed the development of the interview guide.

Facebook Groups

The membership base of the two Facebook groups primarily comprises, but is not restricted to, Norwegians. Nor is membership restricted to those who identify as polyamorous or are currently in polyamorous relationships. The "About" section of the closed group, for example, describes its target audience as those who are either currently in, or curious about, multiple concurrent relationships, regardless of how their relationship is categorized (polyamory, open relationship, responsible non-monogamy).

The administrator of *PolyNorge.no* granted me membership in both groups, after which I posted a brief introduction of the study and myself (Appendix A). The entire content of both groups was reviewed during the autumn of 2014. In this exercise I chose and inductive approach whereby I skimmed the posts and comments to get an idea of what topics the members felt important enough to warrant posting. I was able to identify three main themes that appeared to be of importance. One main theme in the material is mononormativity in society in general. There are posts that demonstrate this mononormativity in popular culture and societal structures, such as the laws that govern marriage, parental custody, and inheritance. Some of the posts also touch on the topic of stigmatization of plural relationships. The comments that accompany these posts give an indication of how the members relate to this mononormative context. Another central theme is the presentation of alternatives to mononormativity, giving examples of non-normative romantic love in, for example, popular culture. Some posts provide examples of role models for plural relationships as well as citing instances in which societal structures accommodate or make attempts to accommodate non-normative relationships. The third strong theme that emerged

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[20] An exploration of the site statistics in January 2015 confirms that approximately 84% of the users had not logged into the site within the past year. During 2014 there were only four posts that generated discussion of poly-related issues. These statistics are printed here with the permission of the site administrator.

in the material is the general discussion of polyamory and plural relationships. This material can be viewed as an attempt by the members to define what polyamory is, as well as what does and does not belong within the concept. These themes are presented here as distinct from one another; however, in the material the themes are intertwined, with one, two or all three occurring in the same post, comment or sentence.

After the initial skimming, I carefully reviewed each post and the associated comments in both groups. I identified a number of posts from each of the above themes. I did a critical review of the comments on each post and selected those comments that I deemed to have particular relevancy. Comments that were excluded were those that did not add any particular substance to the discussion at hand.[21] I solicited informed consent from the authors of the content via a personal message on Facebook (Appendix B). Seventeen of the twenty individuals I contacted consented to the use of their respective Facebook posts. As indicated in Table 3, the data material then consists of forty posts and 245 comments.

4.3.2 Fieldwork – Participant Observation

It is with some reservation that I use the terms *fieldwork* and *participant observation* to describe this method of data generation. When it comes to participant observation Fangen states, "there is no blueprint" (2010:12). However, participant observation usually consists of observing both what people do and say in situations that are initiated by participants themselves, rather than being designed by the researcher (Fangen 2010: 12). The fieldwork portion of the study does not match this description perfectly, as it consists of participation in one weekend event and attendance at three polyamory discussion meetings.

The format of both the weekend event and the discussion meetings is reminiscent of focus group interviews, whereby a group of people are engaged in a discussion in which the purpose is not necessarily to reach consensus, but rather to consider as many viewpoints as possible. Typically the researcher determines which topics will be discussed and serves as the moderator. This is also often an appropriate setting if the topics to be discussed are of a sensitive nature (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 162).

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[21] Examples of excluded comments are those that consisted of only emoticons or simple expressions of liking the discussion.

The events I attended were similar to focus group interviews in that a moderator led a group of people in discussion, the topics discussed were of a sensitive nature and the purpose was exchange of ideas rather than reaching any form of agreement or a definitive answer to a problem. However, I did not serve as the moderator of these discussions and all the participants had the opportunity to suggest topics for discussion. I made a conscious choice to not influence the discussion topics to any great degree, as I wanted the other participants to raise the issues that were of most concern to them. However, the time frame of the meetings combined with the moderator's influence meant that not all the suggested themes were discussed. I took hand-written notes at each of these events, which were later transcribed for use as data in this study.

Poly-Weekend

> William and I arrived in the town at 17:00 and called our contact person, Julia. … When she arrived, William rode with her in her car and I followed in my car. The cabin was about ten to fifteen minutes from town, in the woods. … Before dinner I took the opportunity to inform about my presence as a researcher, to those who were present. I told about my project, my interest in polyamory and my wish to be able to take notes about what is said during the course of the weekend. … All agreed that this was fine as long as anonymity was maintained.

> Julia had already prepared the dinner, which only needed to be heated up. We sat down to dinner and William raised the topic of polyamory by starting to tell about his own experiences. He began by telling that he was living in a foreign country with his girlfriend. At the same time he found himself in romantic relationships with four women in addition to his girlfriend (Excerpt, field notes).

In attendance at the poly-weekend were seven individuals, in addition to myself, who either stayed the whole weekend or dropped in as their schedules allowed. Some of the participants had, at the time, more than one partner, while others were in the process of exploration and information gathering.

As mentioned in the above excerpt from my field notes, I informed the participants about my role as a researcher upon arrival, as there was no opportunity to do so in advance. Because

people were coming and going throughout the weekend, I was faced with the challenge of introducing myself as a researcher as new people arrived, which is not unusual when using participant observation as a method (Fangen 2010: 65). There were no objections to my presence at the event or my request to take notes on the discussions. I explained in general terms the initial intentions with the study over dinner on Friday evening and answered sporadic questions during the rest of the weekend. Additional written information was also available for the participants (Appendix C).

There was time for informal discussions about polyamory and other topics during food preparation, meals, and other activities. More formal discussions took place on Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning. These discussions were moderated by one of the participants and had polyamory and relationships as their main focus. The discussion topics were chosen democratically. The moderator's preferred format for discussion allowed everyone to speak on each topic as long as they wished, but in some respects discouraged free dialogue and the answering of questions.

Poly-Discussion Meetings
The polyamory discussion meetings were organized as a joint effort between the gatekeeper and myself. The gatekeeper sent electronic invitations to his network. Before each meeting I informed potential participants of my attendance and my role as a researcher.

Each of the three meetings lasted approximately three hours. During the introductions, I presented myself as a researcher and explained the project in general terms. Additional written information was also made available to the participants (Appendix C). During the first meeting, one participant questioned the nature of the notes I intended to take and objected to the recording of actual statements. We agreed then that my notes would only be thematic in nature at that first meeting. At the subsequent meetings, none of the participants objected to my presence or to my jotting down both discussion topics and individual statements.

The participants at the meetings were a mix of individuals with varying degrees of affiliation with the culture of polyamory. While some had experience living polyamorously, the majority of participants were either simply seeking information about polyamory or persons who can be characterized as theoretical, rather than practicing, polyamorists.

4.3.3 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight individuals who were recruited via the Facebook groups, *PolyNorge.no* and through snowball sampling. In order to gain insight into this phenomenon, it was important to speak with people who have had either current or past experience with polyamorous relationships. Membership in these forums, however, is not restricted to such individuals. In my initial correspondence with potential interview partners, I attempted to tactfully inquire about their relationship status. All of the interview partners, with the exception of one, have either current or past experience with polyamorous relationships. The final interview partner is what I would call an *aspiring polyamorist*. Despite not having, as of yet, polyamorous experience, the individual in question has spent considerable time and energy laying the groundwork for this through negotiation and emotional work. I have chosen to include this interview as part of the data set because this person has valid experience with the challenges that polyamorous persons face when attempting to navigate several relationships simultaneously.

The venue for each interview was chosen by the respective participants. Most of the interviews were conducted in cafés or restaurants. In each case, I started with a briefing that included information about the project, a review of important points concerning informed consent and a reminder that the interview would be audio recorded. All interview partners signed the informed consent form before we started the interview (Appendix D).

Most of the interview partners seemed comfortable speaking about polyamory at the location chosen for the interview. Many of them even spoke loudly and were seemingly unaffected by the presence of others. However, two interview partners exhibited, what I interpreted as, signs of discomfort. In these cases I attempted to adjust the volume of my own voice and phrase the questions such that the topic at hand was not immediately apparent to others.

I used a semi-structured interview guide during all of the interviews (Appendix E). The interview guide was developed based on background knowledge obtained from sources previously mentioned in this chapter. I started each interview with a series of demographic questions. This enabled us to ease into the interview with simple questions and it provided background information for subsequent discussion. I followed the demographic questions

with more general questions about love and relationships, before eventually broaching the subject of my interview partner's own relationships.

Many interview partners did not hesitate to bring up the subject of polyamory already within the first few minutes of the interview. The majority of them spoke at length about different aspects of polyamory and their relationships, rendering many of my questions superfluous. I strayed from the interview guide in order to pursue topics relevant to the specific interview partners. I also strayed from it in order to ask follow-up and clarifying questions, as well to pursue more social conversation when it seemed appropriate. The only significant addition I made to the interview guide was after the first interview. I added a question that more specifically addresses the issue of whether the interview partner felt that people are polyamorous by nature, as opposed to being polyamorous by choice. This issue came up naturally in the first interview, but not in reaction to the question I had hoped would produce the response.

I ended the interviews by asking my interview partner why they were willing to be interviewed and if there was anything they wanted to add. Once the recording devices was switched off, I thanked each of the interview partners and more often than not we lingered and engaged in either small talk or talk about polyamory. All interview partners indicated that I could contact them again if I had further questions or need for clarification. The audio recordings of the interviews were later transcribed and prepared for analysis.

4.3.4 Coding and Preparation for Analysis

The generated data, as outlined in Table 3, was transcribed and made ready for analysis with the help of HyperTranscribe and HyperResearch software. The data was coded according to various themes, enabling the structured extraction of passages relevant to the research question.

4.3.5 Overview of Participants

Some researchers have pointed out that the image of polyamory that emerges, based on demographic data from polyamory studies, is one of privilege and exclusivity (Klesse 2014a; Sheff & Hammers 2011). Descriptive statistics in various studies indicate that participants are overwhelmingly white, well-educated, middle- to upper-middle-class individuals. American

social scientists Elisabeth Sheff and Corrie Hammers express that while this homogeneity certainly exists in the *mainstream* polyamory community, "it is quite unlikely that these samples are representative of the actual range of … poly people" (2011: 209).

The participants in this study fall more or less in line with those in previous studies. Thirty-eight different individuals have contributed to this study and the overwhelming majority of them are ethnic Scandinavians.[22] Table 4 shows that, amongst interview partners and poly-weekend attendees, two-thirds have education beyond secondary school. It is not possible to draw conclusions on the basis of ethnicity, age, gender or socio-economic status in this very small sample, nor is it the purpose of this thesis. The demographic data is provided here to give a more complete picture of those individuals who participated in the study.

Table 4. Overview of Attendees at Poly-Weekend and Interview Partners

	Gender	Approximate age	Education	Occupation type
Participants at poly-weekend				
Participant 1	M	35-40	Secondary school	Laborer
Participant 2	F	35-40	Vocational school	Service industry
Participant 3	M	25-30	Secondary school	Public sector
Participant 4	F	35-40	University	Public sector
Participant 5	M	35-40	University	Public sector
Participant 6	M	50-55	Secondary school	Self-employed
Participant 7	F	35-40	University	Professional
Interview partners				
Participant 1	F	50-55	University	Public sector
Participant 2	M	50-55	Secondary school	Self-employed
Participant 3	M	40-45	University	Self-employed
Participant 4	F	30-35	University	Public sector
Participant 5	M	30-35	Vocational school	Laborer
Participant 6	M	35-40	University	Professional
Participant 7	M	35-40	University	Professional
Participant 8	F	40-45	Secondary school	Unemployed

Because of my limited contact with both the Facebook participants and those who attended the poly-discussion meetings, I do not have data regarding their ages, occupations or levels of education. Thereby, only total participant numbers and gender composition is presented in Table 5.

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[22] The total participants, when tallying Tables 4 and 5 together, add up to more than thirty-eight. This is because the numbers represent the participants for *each method*. Certain individuals have participated in data generation through more than one method.

Table 5. Overview of Facebook and Poly-Discussion Meeting Participants

	Total	Female	Male
Facebook participants	17	4	13
Poly-discussion participants			
Meeting 1	6	1	5
Meeting 2	6	3	3
Meeting 3	4	1	3

4.4   Researcher's Role and Relationship to Participants

Because of the diverse methods used in the data generation phase of this study, my role and relationship to participants has varied in its nature and intensity. My impression is that, for the most part, participants perceived me simply as a student researcher who was curious about a phenomenon about which they had insights to share.

My relationship to Facebook participants was rather minimal. Some of them took the opportunity to engage me in discussion via personal messages, but by and large my contact with them was limited to personal messages regarding the issue of informed consent.

As this study deals with love and relationships, it was natural to expect that my own personal situation would be of interest to those with whom I came into contact. The subject of my own situation came up more often in participant observation situations than with interview partners or with those with whom I communicated electronically. This may be because the role of participant observer can be experienced as somewhat ambiguous compared to the role of an interview researcher (Thagaard 2010: 72-72). Indeed, participants at the poly-gatherings were curious about my own background and if I had any personal experience with polyamory. In these cases, I explained that, while my lifestyle is quite traditional, my fascination throughout my studies has landed primarily upon those who live differently than the majority. My role at the poly-gatherings varied from fully participating observer to (nearly) not-participating observer depending on the situation and the level of interaction amongst others. The candor exhibited by the participants in all these situations gives, at least, the impression that my presence did not hinder discussion amongst those present.

My relationship with interview partners varied from person to person. I experienced the interviews as pleasant and straightforward affairs, in which my interview partners viewed me as a researcher. Some of my interview partners were extremely sociable, while others were

more reserved. A number of interview partners expressed a positive attitude toward the study because they simply want more focus on polyamory and relationships in general. One interview partner told me that he viewed the interview as a form of "cheap therapy." My impression is that the participants were quite candid in their answers to my questions. The only skepticism that seemed to arise, interestingly, was at the beginning of some of the interviews. The series of demographic questions contained questions about the participants' family background and early life. While I asked the questions in order to obtain a fuller picture of my interview partners, these queries appear to have given some participants the impression that I was looking for problems in their family or childhood.

As polyamory is a non-normative way of establishing and maintaining relationships, it is reasonable to assume that the interview data reflect a desire on behalf of the participants to frame their relationships in a positive light. Additionally, because the participants are not a homogeneous group and possess dissimilar views, it is also reasonable to expect that at least some of the participants made an effort to promote their "brand" of polyamory. In either case, I view these issues in a positive light given the research question at hand. It is precisely the framing and legitimization of polyamory that is of interest in this thesis.

4.5   Ethical Considerations

This study has been registered with the Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees (NESH) and is subject to the general, and Internet specific, guidelines for ethical research. This ethical code has guided me in my dealings with participants and the data itself throughout the research period.

Researchers have the responsibility to obtain informed consent from study participants and maintain confidentiality when disseminating research results (Thagaard 2010: 24-28). Given that this study employs a variety of methods, informed consent was solicited and obtained in a variety of ways, as detailed above for each of the respective methods.

The use of Internet data presents particular challenges, particularly when the forums in question are closed Internet groups and are not readily available for the general public (Thagaard 2010: 144-145). As previously mentioned, I made my presence known in both the Facebook groups through an initial introductory post (Appendix A). I posted an identical

introduction in the PolyNorge forum. The introductory posts encouraged individuals to voice objections to my presence within a certain date. When I approached the Facebook members to ask permission to use their comments or posts, many responded positively immediately. I allowed myself to send one friendly reminder to those members who did not respond within a certain time period. I received no negative feedback and there were only a couple of members who did not respond to my request at all.

For all methods used, I have been concerned with giving participants enough time to consider the implications of participation and raise any possible objections. As mentioned previously, when possible I informed in advance that I would attend meetings and I also sent the informed consent forms to interview partners before the interview.

During my conversations with participants, I was particularly aware that the subject of polyamory is, for some, very personal. Polyamory touches on the emotional as well as the sexual realm. I tried to be especially aware of participants' comfort levels at all times, as it is difficult to predict what may or may not cause another person discomfort. As illustrated by the interview guide (Appendix E), this study focuses on the social aspects of polyamory, not sexual details. Thus any accounts of a more sexual nature were given of participants' own volition.

In order to maintain anonymity, the names of all participants have been changed, and only approximate ages and occupations appear in this thesis. Some of the participants were not at all concerned about anonymity and made it known to others that they participated in this study. The biggest challenge in regards to anonymity has been concealing participant identities from one another. This is a particular challenge for the data generated from Facebook. NESH guidelines indicate that direct quotes can be used from Internet data with caution to ensure anonymity (NESH 2014: 7). I have chosen to use direct quotes from the Facebook groups and I believe that the level of anonymity is sufficient for several reasons. First, these groups are not open to the general public. Second, any direct quotes have been translated from their original language to English, making it difficult to search for particular words or phrases. Third, the Facebook search function is rather finicky, which hinders efficient searches within groups. And finally, I have also been careful to assign different names to the same person in many cases, making it more difficult for members inside the forum to trace particular statements to particular participants. Any overlap of participants

between methods has also been camouflaged in the analysis. In some cases, I have intentionally been inconsistent in the assigning of names to particular statements.

It is my hope that the participants in this study will be able to recognize themselves in the presentation of the results. I have endeavored to present the data in a fashion that does not abandon context and the participants' intent (Thagaard 2010: 111-112). The theoretical perspective, which will be outlined in the following chapter, was determined after tendencies in the data emerged in an attempt to avert the problem of forcing data to correspond with any pre-existing theoretical categories (Thagaard 2010: 111).

5 Theoretical Perspective

This study falls within the realm of the sociology of culture. There are several ways in which culture has been defined and these definitions have implications for how culture can be analyzed. Drawing on the writings of Ann Swidler and American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, I start this chapter by briefly discussing the understanding of culture that provides the theoretical backdrop for this study. In connection with this, I briefly discuss the understanding of subculture advanced by Norwegian sociologists Sveinung Sandberg and Willy Pedersen and then address narratives as cultural resources. I then move on to a discussion of symbolic boundaries, drawing primarily, but not exclusively, on writings of Canadian sociologist Michéle Lamont and British social psychologists Henri Taifel and John C. Turner.

5.1   Understanding of Culture

Culture has been defined in a variety of ways and I find it necessary to specify the understanding of culture that serves as the backdrop in this study. In his text, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive theory of Culture" (1973), Geertz provides an amusing description of the more than ten different ways culture was characterized in a popular anthropological text published in 1944 (1973: 4-5). In an attempt to provide a more specific and theoretically powerful concept of culture, Geertz advances a semiotic approach, and thereby defines culture as "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Geertz 1973: 89).

Geertz asserts that the task of the cultural analyst is the construction of "thick description" through which the analyst can tease out the meaning of a given piece of culture and examine how the meaning gleaned from this thick description can give insight about the wider culture at hand (Geertz 1973: 6; Swidler 2001: 20, 238). Cultural inquiry, then, consists of "sorting out the structures of signification … and determining their social ground and import" (Geertz 1973: 9)

Swidler agrees with Geertz's view of culture, insofar as it is a "set of symbolic vehicles though which such sharing and learning takes place" (Swidler 2001: 12). However, she is

critical of the this view because of it's implications for the analysis of culture. She argues that Geertz's understanding of culture implies that cultures are unified and used by individuals in a straightforward manner. Swidler writes, "If cultures are more discordant than this, with competing perspectives and clashing sensibilities, [Geertz] can say little about how these modes of understanding intersect, interact, or compete" (2001: 22).

Swidler advocates a different understanding of culture that allows the examination of how individuals deal with different, sometimes competing, cultural influences in their lives.

> We must think of culture less as a great stream in which we are all immersed, and more as a bag of tricks or an oddly assorted tool kit … containing implements of varying shapes that fit the hand more or less well, are not always easy to use, and only sometimes do the job (Swidler 2001: 24).

It is this view of culture, as a repertoire of resources, that serves as the backdrop for the analysis in this study (Swidler 2001: 24-25). It does not make sense to speak about culture as a unified system of meanings that can be easily employed by the participants in this study. They stand in the midst of competing cultural influences. The premise of polyamory stands in contrast to the conventional view that romantic and sexual love should be confined to the realm of monogamous coupledom. Both the culture of polyamory and mainstream culture provide a variety of resources that participants use in creative ways to cobble together a meaningful way of life. The degree of affiliation with the culture of polyamory varies from individual to individual. Some may incorporate more of the culture's resources in their lives and their discourse, while others may distance themselves from it and pull toward the mainstream.

5.1.1 Subculture

As an extension of this view of "culture as a tool kit" I posit that the repertoire of meanings provided by the culture of polyamory can be viewed as a subculture. Drawing on Swidler, Sandberg and Pedersen conceptualize subculture as,

> a collection of rituals, narratives and symbols [that] revolve around particular notions about the world and are often associated with general cultural trends in society.

People and groups internalize and embody certain parts of the subculture to greater and lesser degrees. They also use it in creative presentations of themselves (Sandberg & Pedersen 2010: 32).

This understanding of the concept of subculture differs from that which has traditionally been used in sociological literature. Subcultures have typically been thought of as "groups of people that are in some way represented as non-normative and/or marginal through their particular interest and practices, through what they are, what they do and where they do it" (Gelder, cited in Sandberg & Pedersen 2011: 36-37). This conceptualization of subcultures has been criticized for an overemphasis on continuity within the subculture, similarity between members and the degree to which individuals identify with the subculture. With this in mind, Sandberg and Pedersen altered the focus of the definition from *groups of people* to the *cultural resources* those individuals use and relate to in varying degrees (Sandberg & Pedersen 2010: 31).

I view the culture of polyamory as a subculture because its central premise prescribes a lifestyle that is clearly different from that which is widely accepted in the surrounding society (Schiefloe 2003: 160). However, rather than identifying the main features that characterize the individuals who participate in the subculture, I focus on in the main features of the subculture itself. In particular, I am interested in the overriding narratives that emerge when participants tell about their romantic relationships and how the participants use those narratives.

5.1.2 Narratives as Cultural Resources

A narrative can be defined as "an account of a sequence of events in the order which they occurred to make a point" (Labov & Waletsky, cited in Polletta et al. 2011: 111). The point that these narratives make is usually normative in nature; emphasizing a "desirable or undesirable future" (Polletta et al. 2011: 111). Narratives have been of psychological interest as a possible entry into understanding how individuals create their identity and create meaning in their lives (Gubrium & Holstein 2009: 7-8). At the same time a "narrative is a collective, shared cultural resource" (Atkinson & Coffey 2003: 118). Thereby, narratives do not only give insight into individuals, but also the individual's social environment. Plummer describes this eloquently:

Whatever a story is, it is not simply the lived life. It speaks all around the life: it provides routes into a life, lays down maps for lives to follow, suggests links between a life and a culture. It may indeed be one of the most important tools we have for understanding lives and the wider cultures they are a part of (1995: 168).

In this thesis I am interested in narratives as cultural resources. I am not interested in the temporal organization of the narratives or in identifying their plots. Rather, I focus on what resources (narratives) the culture of polyamory has added to the participants' "tool kits" and how they utilize these to make a normative point, namely the legitimization of their relationship structure.

5.2   Symbolic Boundaries

The repertoire of rituals, narratives and symbols that make up a subculture often emphasize the differences between those affiliated with it and those who are not. This feeling of difference from the mainstream can also produce a sense of affinity amongst those who share similar non-normative interests, traits or engage in non-normative practices. Symbolic boundaries help create and maintain these feelings of difference and similarity (Lamont & Molnár 2002: 168). Symbolic boundaries are defined as "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space. They are tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality" (Lamont & Molnár 2002: 168).

Individuals draw on their cultural repertoire in order to create evaluative distinctions between themselves and others (Furseth 2014: 8; Lamont 1992: 11). "Boundary work is an intrinsic part of constituting the self" (Lamont 1992: 11), such that when individuals draw boundaries to define who they are not, they implicitly define who they are. If symbolic boundaries are widely accepted, they can solidify into social boundaries that, in turn, can form the basis for social exclusion (Lamont & Molnár 2002: 168-169). This means that only when there is broad agreement in the assessment of which traits are more worthy and desirable, such distinctions can concretely affect the lives of those who do not possess those traits.

Drawing on French sociologist Emile Durkheim and German sociologist George Simmel, Lamont writes, "symbolic boundaries presuppose both the inclusion (of the desirable) and exclusion (of the repulsive, the impure)" (1992: 9). According to Lamont, this delineation also implies a third category of elements that fall into neither of the first two. Based on this, she outlines a model of concentric circles, whereby the inner circle represents those elements that are *appreciated and included*, while the second, larger circle contains those elements about which individuals feel *indifferent*, and are thus *tolerable*. Outside of the second circle we find those elements she characterizes as *intolerable and excluded* (Lamont 1992: 9-10).[23]

This concentric circle model (Figure 1) has influenced and structured the analysis in this study. This model is useful in the categorization of the themes that emerged in the participants' accounts, and enables identification of most important narratives in the subculture as well as how those narratives are used to draw to symbolic boundaries.
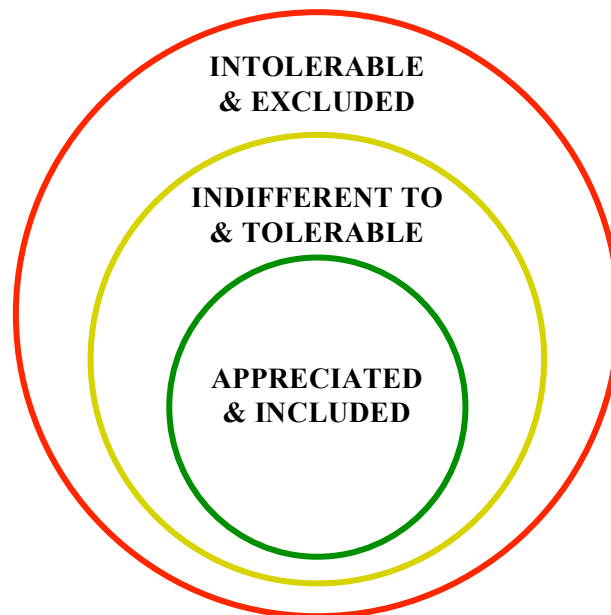
Figure 1. Concentric Circle Model
Adapted from Lamont 1992: 9-10

5.2.1 The Value of Moral Boundaries

Moral values play a significant role in this study. In her book *Money, Morals and Manners* (1992), Lamont explains that "moral boundaries are drawn on the basis of moral character;

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[23] Lamont model has been influenced by a somewhat (dis)similar model in Eviatar Zerubavel's book *The Fine Line: Boundaries and Distinctions in Everyday Life*. See Zerubavel (1993) Chapters 2 and 3 and Lamont Chapter 1, Endnote 30 (Lamont 1992: 236).

they are centered around such qualities as honesty, work ethic, personal integrity and consideration for others" (1992: 4). She also addresses the importance of moral boundaries, in addition to socioeconomic and cultural boundaries, in the struggle for improving or maintaining status. In this study, Lamont draws on French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's ideas about how status and class position are reproduced and maintained through symbolic distinctions (Furseth 2014: 8; Lamont 1992: 181). Bourdieu's theory posits that individuals attempt to position their own tastes and lifestyle as superior to others. Such distinctions, according to Bourdieu, are primarily based on socioeconomic and cultural resources. The goal of this endeavor is to shape the definition of what is legitimate and desirable in society, in such a way that their own lifestyle becomes (or remains) highly valued and coveted by others (Lamont 1992: 180-181).

Lamont, however, criticizes Bourdieu because of his subordination of moral values to more "legitimate" resources such as economic, cultural or social capital (Lamont 1992: 184). The presumption is that people only avail themselves to morality in the absence of other resources and "that people stress moral values *only* with the goal of improving their social positions" (Lamont 1992: 277, 184, emphasis in original). In contrast, Lamont's finds that "respecting one's moral obligations … is often valued as a goal in itself" (Lamont 1992: 184). She also asserts that in those cases when distinctions are based on morality, high moral status is viewed as an autonomous resource that is not subordinated to or only called upon in the absence of other resources (Lamont 1992: 184).

5.2.2 Status Through Comparison

Symbolic boundaries "are an essential medium through which people acquire status and monopolize resources" (Lamont & Molnár 2002: 168). Status is an important concept in this study. Non-normative behavior is often associated with stigma and an undesirable social status position for those who engage in it. In the case of polyamory, Barker has argued that it "is generally invisible in our society, but that when it is present it is constructed as evil or, at best, strange" (2005: 80). As such non-normative behavior can be seen as deviance in the sense that it transgresses an established norm, and when it is discovered it triggers negative sanctions (Skog 2012: 17). The research presented in Section 3.2.4 also confirms that polyamory is viewed more negatively than monogamy.

Those who are faced with such sanctions, as a result of affiliation with a certain group or subculture, may engage in a number of strategies in order to improve their status position. Taifel and Turner outline three such strategies in their text "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior" (1986). I will investigate if and how these strategies are used by participants in this study in their talk about polyamory.

Taifel and Turner conceptualize status as "the *outcome* of intergroup comparison. It reflects a group's relative position on some evaluative dimensions of comparison" (1986: 19, emphasis in original). They explain that social categorization provides individuals with "a system of self-reference" (Taifel & Turner 1986: 16). Categorization is, thus, a tool that provides people with a way of evaluating their own position and status in society. Thus, affiliation with such social categories influence one's view of oneself in relation to others, and is thereby involved with self-image and identity (Taifel & Turner 1986: 16). Identification with low status categories or groups contributes very little to the production of a positive social identity (Taifel & Turner 1986: 19). Taifel and Turner outline several strategies individuals and groups may use to ameliorate an unsatisfactory status position and enhance social identity (1986: 19-20). These strategies are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Comparison Strategies

Strategy	Explanation
1) Individual mobility	Distancing from own in-group with the goal of upward social mobility
2) Social creativity	a) Changing comparative dimension
	b) Changing view of comparative dimension from negative to positive
	c) Changing the comparison group
3) Social competition	Engaging in direct competition with the dominant out-group

Note. Adapted from Taifel & Turner 1986: 19-21.

The first strategy, *individual mobility*, is an individual strategy that involves distancing from, or leaving if possible, the group or category that is negatively affecting identity and social status. If a person successfully disassociates him- or herself from the group and achieves upward social mobility the status of the group remains unchanged (Taifel & Turner 1986: 19). In the case of this study, individual mobility would necessarily involve a disassociation by the individual from the culture of polyamory and an embrace of a monogamous lifestyle.

The second strategy is a group strategy called *social creativity*. As shown in Table 6, social creativity consists of three different strategies, none of which necessarily produce a change in

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the objective social position of the group. In the first strategy (2a), members of a subordinate status group may shift the focus of the comparison to a different evaluative dimension that casts them in a more favorable light (Taifel & Turner 1986: 20). For instance, a salient comparative dimension in the case of polyamory could be the number of romantic partners. This strategy would then involve and attempt on behalf of those associated with the subculture to shift the salient dimension from the number of partners to something else.

In the second social creativity strategy (2b), a subordinate status group may reappropriate a negative comparative dimension, such that it thenceforth becomes a positive, rather than negative, attribute (Taifel & Turner 1986: 20). This could mean that individuals associated with the culture of polyamory embrace a negative salient dimension, using again the example of number of romantic partners, and reverse its value by highlighting the positive aspects of this dimension.

Lastly, a subordinate status group may simply change the group to which they compare themselves (2c). A preference for comparisons with groups of perceived lower status and an avoidance of comparison with high status groups can contribute to a feeling of heightened group status (Taifel & Turner 1986: 20). Using this strategy would mean that those affiliated with the culture of polyamory shift the relevant out-group from monogamous individuals to one or more other groups in an effort to generate a more favorable comparative outcome.

The final strategy outlined by Taifel and Turner is that of *social competition*, whereby a subordinate status group may use the salient dimension to directly challenge higher status groups through in an effort to reverse their relative positions (1986: 20). This would involve an attempt by those affiliated with the subculture to position polyamory as superior to monogamy on the basis of, for example, number of romantic partners. I find these strategies to be a useful analytical tool. Examination of the use of such strategies by the participants in this study gives extra insight into the process of how comparative dimensions and relevant comparison groups are determined.

I have presented here several perspectives that together constitute the theoretical framework in this study. In the remainder of this thesis, I use this theoretical framework to identify important narratives in the cultural repertoires of those affiliated with the culture of polyamory and analyze how those narratives are put to use as resources in an effort to

legitimize polyamory as a way of doing relationships. I start the analysis with a presentation of the completed concentric circle model. I follow that short presentation with three analysis chapters in which I discuss, respectively, the three important narratives identified in the material.

6 Using the Culture of Polyamory

The culture of polyamory provides a set of resources, primarily narratives, that those affiliated with it make use of in varying degrees. By examining how participants talked about their own and others' relationships, I found that participants' narratives embodied their view of the ideal way to think about and maintain, not only polyamorous, but also other types of intimate relationships. This is compatible with, for example, Emens' claim that "polyamory is not only a practice. For some, it is a theory of relationships" (2004: 320).

This view of the ideal way of doing relationships was characterized by certain elements. The narratives also implicitly, and often explicitly, defined aspects that were viewed as problematic in relationships. It is these elements that are presented in the concentric circle model (Figure 2). Before I discuss the model, it is important to point out that the aspects presented there represent only a fraction of the themes that emerged in the data. Because of space limitations and my desire to cover a few aspects thoroughly, I have prioritized those themes that appeared most significant, based on prevalence in the data. Once the prevalent themes were identified, I further prioritized those narratives that appeared to be cultural resources that participants drew on in the creation of symbolic boundaries between themselves and *other* groups. This means that, unfortunately, I will not address issues such as freedom, gender equality, marriage equality, or polyamory as a sexual or relational orientation versus polyamory as a choice.

I present here only a brief overview of the model, as all its dimensions will be addressed in more detail in the subsequent analysis chapters. Within the category of *appreciated and included* are those aspects that participants emphasized were important in polyamory, and that characterize good and valuable relationships. These include: 1) poly-love, 2) honesty with partners, and 3) relationship competence. Relationship competence is a category I have conceptualized to include commitment, hard work, introspection, jealousy management and communication. These three elements correspond with the three main narratives identified in the material.

The elements in the category of *intolerable and excluded* are those that participants deemed undesirable and, thus, rejected. These include 1) dominant ideas about romantic love, and sex

without love, 2) dishonesty with partners, and 3) low relationship competence. I view the three elements in this category to be the inverse of the themes in the first category.

There was only one element that fit neatly within the category *indifferent to and tolerable*. The participants expressed clear opinions about the characteristics of good and bad relationships, such that, in this respect, there appeared to be very little about which they were indifferent. I have placed monogamous relationships with high relationship competence in this category. These relationships are by definition different from polyamory, as they endorse the view that romantic love is finite, however, they were not categorically rejected by the participants.

APPRECIATED & INCLUDED
1. Poly-love
2. Honesty with partners
3. Relationship competence

INDIFFERENT TO & TOLERABLE
Monogamy with high relationship competence

Dishonesty with "outsiders"

INTOLERABLE & EXCLUDED
1. a) Dominant ideas about romantic love
   b) Sex without love
2. Dishonesty with partners
3. Low relationship competence
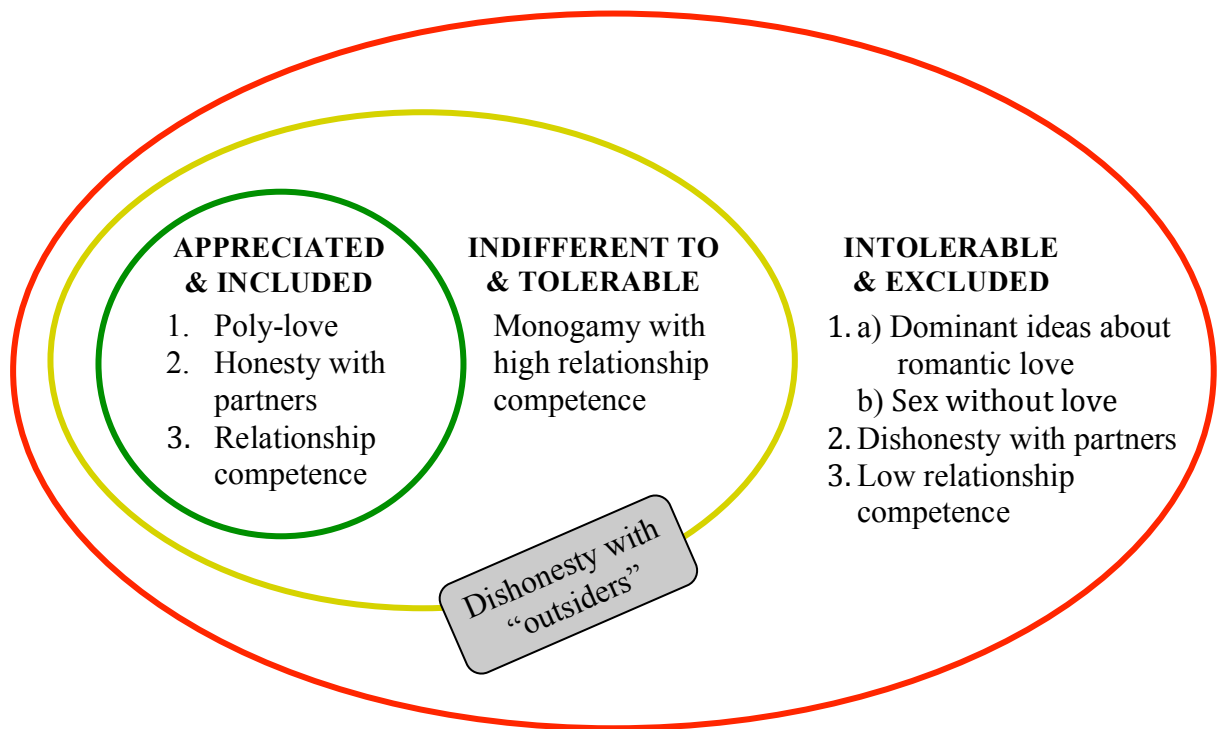
Figure 2. Concentric Circle Model – Basis for Analysis

Finally, there is one element, related to the theme of honesty, about which there was some disagreement amongst the participants. I have expanded the model to accommodate this element, which is presented in the gray box. It is placed in the model to indicate where disagreement lay amongst the participants. None of the participants described dishonesty with "outsiders" as desirable, but instead many saw it as convenient or necessary, at least for the moment. For others, dishonesty about their relationships with family, friends and others was not considered a viable option at all. Therefore this element is placed on the boundary

between *indifferent to and tolerable* and *intolerable and excluded*. The shapes in the model have been adjusted in size as a matter of convenience and thus their proportions are not meant to convey any particular significance.

Because the dimensions in the different categories are often closely or inversely related, I address the elements in the model thematically rather than addressing each category separately. Thus, Chapter 7 is devoted to a discussion of the narrative of love. The narrative of honesty is addressed in Chapter 8, and the narrative of relationship competence follows in Chapter 9. In each chapter, I provide both description and analysis of the respective narratives. Following the research question, I discuss the elements that characterize each narrative and the meanings the participants ascribe to those elements. I then address the symbolic boundaries that emerge through the participants' use of these narratives, thereby drawing in those elements that are *intolerable and excluded*.

Because the dimension placed in the category *indifferent to and tolerable* (monogamy with high relationship competence) is an element to which the participants were indifferent, there is no clear boundary work associated with this particular aspect. I do, however, discuss it briefly at the end of Chapter 9, before I present a compilation of the analysis and concluding remarks in Chapter 10.

7 The Narrative of Polyamorous Love

"It is good for people to love each other" (Nora).

It is not an overstatement to say that the participants were unified in their emphasis of love as the basis for polyamorous relationships. When I asked my interview partners to tell me what the term polyamory meant to them, I received such answers as, "For me, it means specifically the ability to love more than one person" or:

> It means loving more. It means that you can have several sets of loving feelings, or loving relationships with others, um, that don't involve just trying something sexual with several people. But it involves the whole person.

That love figured largely in the accounts of the participants in this study falls in line with the aforementioned research in which, for example, Klesse also found that "love appears to be the defining feature of polyamorous desire" (2011: 13). This focus on love forms the basis of one of the most important narratives in the culture of polyamory, the *narrative of polyamorous love*. Love is, thus positioned as *appreciated and included* in the concentric circle model.

On the surface, the desire for love and meaningful relationships does not differ from mainstream culture. That relationships are formed on the basis of love, and that love is highly valued and sought after, is certainly not unique to this particular subculture. However, what is interesting here are the meanings the participants ascribed to love and how they used this narrative to explain their relationships and at the same time legitimize them through the construction of symbolic boundaries.

The narrative of polyamorous love rests on three secondary narratives that differentiate polyamorous love from conventional views of romantic love. In this first analysis chapter, I elaborate on the image of love that emerges through these three narratives. I then move on to a discussion of how this view of love points toward symbolic boundaries in the two last sections of the chapter.

7.1 Polyamorous Love Is Not Finite

"Love is not reduced when it is shared – it grows." (Annabel)

First and foremost, polyamorous love represents a romantic love that is not finite in nature. The idea of romantic love as infinite is embedded in the concept and clearly distinguishes it from the dominant discourse on romantic love. This notion is represented by one of the central symbols in the culture of polyamory: a heart intertwined with an infinity symbol (Figure 3). This symbol is widely used in the international culture of polyamory and, at the time of this writing, a version of it is featured in the cover photograph for one of the Facebook groups drawn upon in this study.
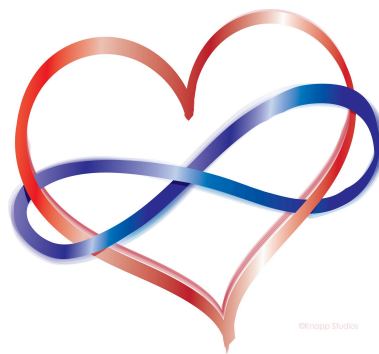
Figure 3. Infinity Heart
(Courtesy of Knapp Studios)

Participants drew on the *narrative of infinite love* when they talked about their relationships. Ella describes her experience with love:

> In my own case, I know that it's not a problem at all if the one or ones I am closest to express feelings for others. … I also know that the happier I am in a relationship, the more love I have for all those around me. So, for me at least, love is a renewable resource that doesn't get used up when I share it with others.

Several participants included comparisons of polyamorous love to platonic love. As Nora says, "It's okay to love your four, all four of your children. … Yes, that's completely acceptable. But loving two men is not acceptable, yet. But I hope it will be." Simon also drew on this narrative.

You can have the love for your partner and you can have the love for your child. It doesn't necessarily mean it detracts anything from your partner. So, I mean, love isn't finite. And if people would dare to think that, I mean, [and] look beyond what is the norm now. Yes, probably a lot more people would go, "Hmm, that is more me."

Here both Nora and Simon assert that sharing romantic love is no different from sharing any other kind of love. Both address wider society; Nora hopes that, at some point, sharing romantic love with more than one person will be accepted by others in the same way that sharing platonic love is, while Simon indicates that polyamory might be a better fit for many monogamous individuals if they dared to consider it. By alluding to a lack of difference between sharing romantic love and sharing platonic love they resist one of the main tenets of the dominant discourse, namely that romantic and platonic love are essentially different.

Although polyamorous love is potentially infinite, many participants spoke of how it is at the same time limited by other factors. Klesse asserts, "Many polyamorous people acknowledge that there are limits to polyamory. Yet they tend to identify these limits on the level of practicalities … and not on the level of an emotional capacity for loving" (2011: 15). One of my interview partners, who had two partners at the time, related how she was open for more partners in theory, but not in practice, citing time constraints due to work, family and other practical responsibilities. Another participant referred to her desire to devote time to nurturing current relationships as the reason for limiting partners, while yet another talked about how adding one more partner would increase the complexity of the situation exponentially.

The participants' view of romantic love as unlimited is consistent with Klesse's description of polyamorous love as "overabundant" and "potentially limitless," based on his review of two central polyamory texts (2011: 14). The emphasis on romantic love as potentially infinite differentiates it from the conventional view. However, as I have shown, some participants drew on mainstream discourses about platonic love in order to emphasize similarity. One interview partner explicitly stated, "Being loved by two is no different than being loved by one." This manner of comparison is viewed as a way to help others understand how it is possible to be romantically involved with more than one person. I argue that it also functions as a legitimization technique. Loving more than one person platonically is not a negatively

valued trait in mainstream culture. I view this particular strategy of comparison as a form of social creativity (2b in Table 6) whereby polyamorous love is posited as no different than any other kind of love. The value of the previously negatively viewed attribute (number of romantic partners) is shifted to a positive by highlighting that love of any kind is not finite. By engaging in this social creativity, the participants imbue the salient dimension with positive meaning, in what can be seen as an effort to ameliorate a perceived subordinate status position in relation to monogamous individuals.

7.2   The Primacy of Love

"Stranger things have happened than people turning their lives upside down for the sake of love." (Anne)

All participants placed a very high value on love. This *narrative of the primacy of love* emphasizes that, while one nurtures and maintains any already established relationship(s), feelings of love that may arise for others can be viewed as legitimate and afforded respect. For example, when Karen first became familiar with the concept of polyamory she thought it was some kind of "elite thing" and that those who managed it were especially intelligent or experts in communication. However, she says she eventually realized that "they are in love and they are just trying to take it from there." Regarding her own situation she said, "I certainly could have lived a completely different life, but the fact is that I fell in love with someone [other than my partner] and I had to deal with that." She viewed these feelings as a challenge that she could not just ignore or "run away from."

Among the participants, emotions appeared to command a high degree of respect and demand authentic attention. This stands in opposition to what some participants suggested was the monogamous strategy of suppressing feelings for anyone other than one's spouse or steady partner. One interview partner described how people in polyamorous relationships can be viewed by society at large as "psychologically immature" because they avoid having to choose one partner over another. She rejected this notion:

> We have almost the opposite opinion. Those who insist that [relationships] always
> have to be monogamous are a little immature. … You create some unnecessary

problems if you, by any and all means, try to avoid living in a different way, or even talking about things in a different way. Because it's always like, if you fall in love with two people, you are supposed to fight one of those sets of feelings, so that the other person is left standing there, like a shining like a beacon. Yes, then you are like very mature if you manage to do that.

Denial or suppression of feelings was not considered a viable option by many participants, including Ella. She commented, "suppression [of feelings] is really not the way to go if you want to have an all right relationship to those around you, regardless of how many partners you want." Attempts to ignore one's feelings were viewed by some participants as particularly painful and unhealthy for both oneself and for loved ones. As one woman stated, "it certainly doesn't work to pretend that feelings or circumstances are not happening."

Following one's heart and forming additional relationships, however, is not risk free. Many participants reported that their prioritization of the pursuit of additional relationships was accompanied by a degree of emotional distress. When Sarah related the story of how her polyamorous life began, she talked about how she was perfectly happy in her monogamous relationship until she realized she had fallen in love with a friend. This realization was very alarming, as she viewed it as a potential threat to her relationship with her partner. She said, "I was certain that when I told [my partner] he would say, 'You have to leave.' And I was certain that [my love interest] would say 'I'm not interested.'" In this case and other cases, it appears that the emotions were considered so compelling that they had to be addressed in some way. Another woman told about a particular idea that she heard about in some polyamorous circles. This idea framed polyamory as a way of hedging your bets, such that if one relationship ended, one always had another to fall back on. She rejected this notion and characterized loving more than one person at a time as "jumping of several mountains at the same time."

As mentioned in the introduction, love is highly valued in contemporary Western culture. However, I posit that love and feelings enjoy an even more elevated status in the culture of polyamory than in mainstream culture. In her review of polyamory literature, Emens identified the prioritization of love and sex as one of the principles of polyamorous relationships (2004: 328). A high prioritization of love, even when it was accompanied by personal distress and other risks, was quite evident in this sample. The narrative of love's

primacy emphasizes the importance of pursuing love as opposed to suppressing emotions. The participants' discourse about the importance of emotions can be seen as a social competition strategy. This narrative challenges the dominant position monogamy by focusing on how it allows for the pursuit of several loving relationships, rather than the harmful denial of emotions. This social competition is based on the salient dimension of number of partners and positions polyamory, in relation to monogamy, as an equally legitimate, or perhaps better, relationship structure.

7.3   Richer Emotional Life

"An incredibly wonderful feeling." (Daniel)

Participants also spoke about the rewards of having the opportunity to form new romantic bonds. Certain participants characterized love in a way that indicates that polyamory gives access to a larger array of loving feelings than monogamy. The *narrative of a richer emotional life* consists of participants' talk about and emphasis on this wider range of feelings. Nora indicated that her polyamorous relationship allows her the ability to enjoy the feeling of yearning and looking forward to meeting her non-cohabiting partner. When I asked her if she felt that her different partners fulfilled different needs, she stated matter-of-factly that she did not have any needs that were not being met by her cohabitating partner. However, she eventually said,

> [I have] a need to, uh, to long for someone. Maybe that's the most important need. … To long for someone and look forward to seeing them. And build up expectations and know that in three days and four hours [we will see each other]. You can't get that with someone you live with.

For Nora and others, the possibility of getting to know someone new and the intoxicating experience falling in love was especially attractive. This feeling is often characterized in poly-literature and discussion as *new relationship energy* (NRE) and was referred to as such by Daniel. Here he describes his partner's return home after she met someone new:

That NRE feeling, when it comes it's an incredibly wonderful feeling. I have to say, it was great fun when she came home and [told me she] was in love. It was fantastic to see that glow again, and actually feel it myself as well. … It was just brilliant.

Polyamory gives the participants the freedom to embrace the experience of falling in love with someone new, something that is not available to those in monogamous relationships. In Daniel's case he also valued being able to share in the joy of his partner's experience of falling in love again. Annabel also drew on this narrative in discussion, "If you love your partner - isn't it good to allow your partner to be loved by others as well?" In similar fashion to the participants in Ritchie and Barker's study (2006), some of the participants in this study also spoke about the ability to take joy in another person's love for one's partner(s).

Participants also emphasized taking joy in their partners' relationships with one another. Because of the limited nature of the data from the Facebook groups, I am not familiar with the relationship structures of all of those participants. However, of the participants I met in person, none were, at that time, in relationships in which all partners had sexual relationships with one another. Participants who served as a link between partners appreciated that their loved ones knew one another and had a positive relationships with each other. One participant related how, only a short time after her second relationship was established, her partners bought a joint birthday gift for her. Several talked about how their partners communicate on their own to work out problems or organize practical details. Of his relationship with his partner's partner, Thomas said,

I think it varies. I think it's very organic. Uh, but I mean, we're definitely not friends. That doesn't cover it because we're much more closely binded [*sic*] than that. Um, there is, uh, there is a term called metamour. … We don't use it, but it describes us. … I think in some sense, apart from sex, we are in a relationship. We need to be. And we will grow closer. … We're a family. Yeah. … Because I love him. Absolutely. And I need to because otherwise this wouldn't work.

In this description, Thomas emphasizes the closeness he feels to his partner's partner. The participants' discourse about feelings forms a narrative that emphasizes the ability, of both sexually and non-sexually involved partners, to experience a range of emotions that are not typically available to those in monogamous relationships. I view this as a strategy of social

competition, based, again, on the salient dimension of number of partners. The emphasis on a richer emotional life through polyamorous associations challenges monogamy by positioning polyamory as an equal or, perhaps more desirable, way of doing relationships.

7.4 Rejection of Dominant Ideas about Romantic Love

The contours of certain symbolic boundaries emerge in the narratives of love presented in the previous three sections. I have already pointed out the relevant strategies of comparison for each of the narratives and I will now address how these narratives are used in participants' boundary work. As illustrated in the concentric circle model, dominant ideas about romantic love are place in the *intolerable and excluded* category. The narrative of polyamorous love points to a rejection of these notions.

The challenge to the prevailing ideas about love's finite nature is evident in the accounts presented in Section 7.1. The notion that romantic love is finite is the cornerstone of the mononormative ideas about romantic relationships. Nora, among many others, emphasized how monogamy and the notion of love's finite nature is embedded in the mainstream culture:

> I think that we learn this notion that if you are in a relationship and you fall in love with someone else, that means that your relationship is falling apart. …This is a truth that has been determined by society - that the minute you fall in love with someone else, it's because your love for your partner is dead.

Participants distanced themselves from this idea and other "relationship clichés" as one participant called them. Many emphasized how monogamy is the default or "first choice" for most people and that polyamory "hasn't even been raised as an alternative." These statements are in line with Barker's study, in which her participants also emphasized the invisibility of polyamory in society (2005: 81).

Jonas characterized monogamous relationships, particularly marriage, as "package deals" in the sense that once you buy in you have secured love, companionship and a range of other benefits through your spouse. Another participant was concerned with how buying in to this package deal discourages critical thinking about love and relationships. She asserted, "there

are many who live in monogamous relationships in a way that is like being on autopilot. They don't really ask themselves what they want."

That monogamy simply does not work was also a recurring theme amongst the participants. Several expressed how they have witnessed the failure of monogamy amongst their acquaintances and that "statistically, monogamy does not work." When evaluating the relationships of his monogamous friends, Jonas said,

> Well, I hear what they say and I see what they do, and I see that those two things do not always coincide. … I would call some of the things I see and hear dysfunctional, if you want to have a good life.

Although participants spoke in this critical fashion, they did not characterize monogamy as an inherently bad relationship structure. It was rather the ideas promulgated through the culture of monogamy that were found objectionable. They disapproved of uncritical acceptance of the "romantic love mythology" which, as described in Chapter 2, is supposed to, but often does not, provide a happily ever after ending that secures one's identity in society as husband, wife or partner.

The prevailing notion of monogamous romantic love, participants claimed, lacks adequate tools for dealing with emotions. Anne says, "There is a poor culture when it comes to talking about attraction to, and feelings for, several people simultaneously, as these feelings are considered to be very threatening for the relationship." Because this "poor culture" does not provide appropriate tools or language for constructively dealing with such feelings that arise outside of the primary pair bond, individuals are often left with the agonizing choice between rejection or suppression of the feelings, infidelity or breaking up with their partner. These strategies are deemed inadequate because, amongst other things, they are incongruous with the prioritization of love and emotions. The culture of polyamory, they assert, provides an alternative, more constructive way of dealing with emotions as well as facilitating a richer emotional life. The opinions of the participants in this study are, also in this respect, consistent the participants in Barker's study, who framed polyamory as a "better way of relating than monogamy" (2005: 81).

The narratives in the previous three sections all point toward a rejection of prevailing ideas about romantic love. The relevant out-group on this comparative dimension is composed of those who naïvely endorse a traditional monogamous lifestyle. Symbolic boundaries emerge between polyamorists and those who uncritically bind themselves to the social convention of monogamy. I propose that these boundaries can be characterized as *emotional boundaries*. The participants' focus on love, which is valued in mainstream culture, however, the narratives frame love in a way that differentiates them from those in monogamous relationships. The narratives emphasize the character, or essence, of romantic love and the importance placed on emotions, and contrast this with conventional views of romantic love.

By drawing on these cultural resources, I argue that the participants use a combination of social creativity (2b in Table 6) and social competition strategies, as discussed in the previous three sections. These strategies are activated in an effort to posit polyamory as an equally, or more, legitimate way of thinking about relationships. Through the prioritization of love and emotions, participants challenge the dominant view of monogamy as the natural setting for romantic relationships. These comparisons can be seen as an attempt to elevate the status of those affiliated with the subculture by virtue of raising the status of polyamory to that of equal to, or perhaps better than, monogamy.

This narrative of polyamorous love serves not only as the basis for boundary work in regards to monogamy, but participants utilized this cultural resource to differentiate themselves from those who engage in relationships that are of a purely sexual nature, as I will address in the next section.

7.5   Polyamory Is Not About Sex

The prevailing understanding of love in contemporary Western culture posits that it is not possible to experience romantic feelings for several people simultaneously. Consequently, those in conventional relationships often perceive polyamorous relationships as being only about sex, effectively placing polyamorous individuals in the same category as those who engage in casual sex, swinging or open relationships. The participants used the narrative of polyamorous love to reject this notion. Thus, sex without love is placed in the *intolerable and excluded* category of the concentric circle model. This boundary work is consistent with the

aforementioned studies by Klesse (2006; 2007b) and Ritchie (2010) in which participants also rejected the view that polyamory is synonymous with casual sexual encounters.

This mainstream perception was illustrated in one interview partner's account of reactions after the polyamorous nature of his relationship became known. He explained that some of his friends suddenly viewed his girlfriend as sexually available. "Because she's a woman with two boyfriends, which makes her a slut. And which makes her open to preying on. … The men were definitely like "Oh, really? So, where do I sign up?" Other participants echoed this experience of being perceived by some as indiscriminate sexual omnivores.

Nora explained that polyamory does not revolve around sexual gratification. "I think that there are unfortunately some people who view this as a convenient excuse to have sex with more than one person. And that's a shame, because it has nothing to do with sex. It has to do with emotions." She also remarked, "I am not a swinger. I cannot fully enjoy sex with someone I don't have any feelings for."

Jonas spoke about how he views open relationships as clearly different than polyamorous relationships. He emphasized that open relationships often involve isolated short-term sexual experiences, with the consent of one's partner. That partner may wish to be kept ignorant of the details and prefer that " it's kept out of the house." Karen also underscored the difference between open relationships and polyamory:

> Many of those who are in open relationships totally block out anything that has to do with romantic feelings. That's just too scary. So it's kind of like a porn fantasy. "Oh, I can have sex with others. This is great!" Things like that. They have some exciting experiences and then they go home and are a couple, together.

By drawing on the narrative of polyamorous love, participants use this cultural resource to differentiate themselves from those who engage in promiscuity, swinging or open relationships. In this boundary work, I assert that the participants utilize a strategy of social creativity (2a in Table 6). The mainstream discourse on love and relationships generally ascribes a higher moral value on relationships involving love than those that are of a purely sexual nature. Promiscuity, for example, is commonly associated with a number of negative traits, such as "immaturity, character-deficiency, shallowness, … relational incapacity, [and]

lack of responsibility" (Klesse 2006: 573). This narrative incorporates this theme from mainstream discourse and the participants use it as a resource to create a moral boundary between themselves and those who pursue purely sexual connections. The participants' use of this narrative can be seen as an attempt to cast polyamory in a more positive light.

By shifting the comparative dimension from sex with more than one partner to love for more than one partner, the narrative also shifts the comparison group from monogamous couples to those who engage in purely sexual relationships. I argue that this can be viewed as an additional strategy of social creativity (2c in Table 6), in which the participants compare themselves to what they view as lower status out-groups. While participants endeavor to educate outsiders as to the nature of their relationships, they at the same time, implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, distance themselves from individuals who engage in casual sex. Likewise they distance themselves from swinging and open relationships, because in these, love is reserved for the couple, and is not something to which additional partners are privy. The narrative of love distances polyamory from casual sexual connections and positions it closer to conventional relationships.

7.5.1 Boundary Between Current and Former Self

Interestingly, swinging appears to be a gateway into polyamory for some people. More than just a few, but by no means all, of the participants in this study report experience with swinging. These individuals have already, or are seeking, to establish polyamorous relationships because they desire an emotional connection. For example, one woman related how she felt sexually fulfilled but emotionally empty after visits to a swingers' club. Another participant described polyamory as a progression from swinging. Others related how they felt it was difficult to keep feelings out of swinging relationships. As Jonathan explained,

> At the time we were mostly involved in swinging. We were, well, we were mostly interested in finding a unicorn.[24] … Yes, it was mostly that, but we were also just seeking other people. And eventually we did find some others and tried some

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[24] A *unicorn* denotes a bisexual woman who enters an established heterosexual couple relationship and is, preferably exclusively, sexually and emotionally involved with both partners. The term unicorn is used bycause this type of woman is thought to be rare and nearly impossible to find. In this case, it appears that Jonathan applied the concept to a purely sexual relationship.

different things. But by and by I realized that I desired something more than just [sex].

The desire for "something more" than purely sexual relationships can be seen as the basis for a moral boundary between these individuals' current and former selves. Here, the participants are still making use of social creativity strategies (2a and 2c in Table 6) by focusing on the comparative dimension of love, and by differentiating themselves from those who engage in casual sex, although in this case the group includes the participants' own erstwhile selves. It appears that the original intention was to share (only) sexuality with additional partners, but they found that they developed loving feelings for these sexual partners. These feelings were viewed as valuable and credible and propelled them to seek out polyamory as an alternative, in the hope that it could provide the tools to manage multiple relationships that are *both* emotional and sexual. This narrative draws upon the distinction between love and sex, according higher moral value to loving relationships.

At the same time, this boundary between poly-people and those who pursue purely sexual experiences with multiple partners appears, for some, to be somewhat fluid. Certain participants reported engaging in sexual encounters of a more casual nature, with their partners' full knowledge and consent. However, it is interesting that these experiences were defined out of the realm of polyamory. One participant emphasized several times that her "friends with benefits" relationship was not a polyamorous relationship, despite the fact that it was a long-term connection.

This de-emphasis of sex in favor of a focus on love is again compatible with the studies of Klesse (2006) and Ritchie (2010), in which they both found that participants made use of differentiating techniques that revolved around this dimension. The participants' use of the narrative of polyamorous love, in this study, supports their findings. The focus on love as the basis for polyamory gives the impression that this is a standard by which other relationships are judged; a standard that implicitly projects a normative image of the proper polyamorous person and perhaps further reinforces the high moral status of loving relationships in relation to purely sexual relationships.

In this chapter, I have elaborated on the narrative of polyamorous love as a cultural resource. The participants in this study stressed that *polyamory is about love*. They elaborated on the

nature of polyamorous love through three secondary narratives that emphasize that 1) romantic love is not finite, 2) love and emotions are of great importance, and 3) polyamory gives access to a richer emotional life. I have argued that the participants in this study use the narrative of polyamorous love to distance themselves from dominant ideas about romantic love and from individuals who uncritically accept those prevailing notions. In addition, I assert that the narrative of polyamorous love serves as the basis for the delineation of a boundary between polyamorous individuals and those who engage in relationships that are of a purely sexual nature.

8 Honesty Is Essential

"For me, poly is about love and honesty." (Stefan)

As the above quote suggests, the narrative of polyamorous love was accompanied by the *narrative of honesty*. Honesty was positioned as an essential element in polyamorous relationships and appears to be as important as love in the culture of polyamory. For example, when I asked my interview partners which values form the basis for polyamorous relationships all but one indicated that honesty was of key importance. The remaining interview partner emphasized honesty in response to other questions. However, the level of honesty varied, depending on the situation. As Emens notes, "radical honesty need not mean radical disclosure" (2004: 323).

This chapter is devoted to the discussion of honesty. As illustrated in the concentric circle model, honesty is *appreciated and included*, while dishonesty with partners is *intolerable and excluded*. Meanwhile, the participants were ambivalent in regards disclosure of relationship status to friends, family and other acquaintances, thus dishonesty with "outsiders" is placed in the concentric circle model on the boundary between the categories of *indifferent to and tolerable* and *intolerable and excluded*. Here I present how the participants spoke about honesty in an effort to tease out what meanings they ascribe to it. Thereafter, I discuss how the participants use this narrative as a cultural resource to draw symbolic boundaries between themselves and others.

8.1   Honesty Between Partners

"I have always been honest. I need to be honest with those I care about." (Daniel)

The narrative of honesty included honesty with one's partners and all others who are involved in or affected by the relationship. Jonas illustrates this when he spoke about not wanting to lie or tell half-truths to the partners of his partners. He said, "When I present my values, that's in itself the most important one - that I should not have to lie to anyone." Other participants echoed Jonas' emphasis on honesty as a key value. Consistent with Emens' (2004: 322) findings, honesty appears to be an essential condition for the participants in this

study; without it, polyamorous love is not possible. This means that if honesty is lacking in the relationship, then it is difficult to even characterize the relationship as polyamorous.

Prevailing ideas about love focus on sexual and emotional exclusivity. In this context, both sexual and emotional infidelity, often accompanied by dishonesty, are viewed as particularly hurtful to the injured party. As illustrated previously, polyamory rejects sexual and emotional exclusivity. Participants indicated that the expression of emotions for someone other than one's partner is not problematic in itself, however, dishonesty about such feelings is viewed as unacceptable. Ella, who stated above that it is not a problem for her that her partner(s) have feelings for others, expressed that for her "it's much more painful to not be told things because they expect that I will react negatively, or to feel like I'm not being seen or heard. Or excluded from important decisions." Here Ella expresses that, for her, honesty means not only the absence of lying, but also the absence of strategies of omission or avoidance. It is important for her partner(s) include her in discussions and decisions.

In the participant's accounts, the narrative of honesty was often connected to the notions of openness and trust. Participants repeatedly used the phrase "open and honest" when they spoke about communication, for example. Several participants indicated that the only agreement they have with their partners was to be honest with each other. It appeared, however, that honesty with partners did not mean that all partners desired to have full access to all details of other partners' relationships to one another. It rather meant being honest to the extent that was agreed upon in the relationship. Nicolai stressed the importance of candor, or openness, in polyamorous relationships. "Without openness, it can't work. But then, of course, you can choose the level of openness."

For some, honesty between partners brought with it the advantage of being able to discuss relationships and seek the opinion or advice of one partner about the relationship with another partner. One participant described honesty and communication between partners was a challenge for her at first. She said:

> You have to accept and enjoy being talked to and being talked about. This was difficult for me at first, but rewarding once we got the hang of it. This is a different dynamic than in monogamous or open relationships, because there are more than just two people looking after each other.

A couple of participants emphasized that the level of accountability in polyamorous relationships is higher than it is in monogamous relationships, because one is accountable to several people and, thereby, lies or misrepresentations of the truth can be more easily exposed. Nora rejected the idea that,

> being polyamorous means that you can do exactly what you want at any time. But really, in many ways, a polyamorous relationship is much more strict because you're not just relating to one person, you're relating to several. … And I am honest in my dealings with my partner's secondary partner. I owe her the same honesty.

It is interesting however, that most participants did not emphasize this aspect of accountability. Accountability implies that one can be called to answer for one's indiscretions. Many did not emphasize this aspect at all, perhaps indicating that honesty is so embedded in the way they conduct their daily lives that indiscretions are not even considered relevant.

Previous research on polyamory underscores the connection between honesty and polyamory (Emens 2004; Klesse 2011; Wosick-Correa 2010). The narrative of honesty utilized by the participants in this study supports the results of those studies. Honesty is, however, also a conventionally valued trait in relationships and more generally in society at large (Lamont 1992: 24). Dishonesty is not a trait that is commonly associated with good relationships. The focus on honesty in the culture of polyamory is in line with mainstream culture in this respect.

8.2   Honesty With Outsiders

The narrative of honesty, however, does not unequivocally include disclosure to those not directly involved. Again, it is necessary to note that, because of the limited nature of the Facebook data, I do not have a complete overview of all the participants' attitudes toward disclosure. However, of those in the sample who did discuss disclosure of their relationship structure, approximately half were completely "out," while the others had disclosed to a select group of people only.

Some participants seemed to view disclosure and openness as an ideological necessity. Kevin was one of those who emphasized this,

> Openness is very important. But more important than showing ourselves as a group, or with the occasional article in the media … is being open in everyday live, with friends, family and colleagues. … The goal is not to convince people to the point where they see the world in your way or that they hold the view that poly is just as legitimate as mono. It is primarily about being able to live out your love and be OK with yourself.

Here Kevin asserted that being open to others is important primarily because it enables one to live the life one wants to live openly and helps with self-acceptance. However, he also, at the same time, referred to openness as "the most powerful tool for wider acceptance and understanding" indicating that it is part of a larger ambition to gain acceptance in society. Another participant expressed that there is an element of social responsibility in living the life one wants for oneself and at the same time being open about it. He said, "If I don't live the life that is best for me, in some way I indirectly hinder other people from making good decisions for themselves. Because we influence each other all the time."

Other participants were more pragmatic in their reasons for favoring an open lifestyle. Some of those who had disclosed their relationships to certain people and not others expressed that it was difficult to know or remember exactly who had been told what. Lack of disclosure also left room for rumors to arise. A great deal of concern was centered on the impractical aspects of having to lie or tell half-truths about one's daily life.

8.2.1 Open With All

"It doesn't mean anything. Well, except for an extra chair at dinner parties." (Vivian)

While there always seemed to be a great-uncle or other peripheral acquaintances that were not aware of their relationship structure, those who were "out" were not intentionally concealing their relationship status from anyone in particular. Some of the participants felt that if the relationships were of importance and were meant to last, there was no way to avoid being open, because people would, in the course of time, find out one way or another. Simon

commented that people are going to eventually ask the question, "Who is this third person you are growing old with?"

Reactions upon disclosure varied, but most, including some of those who were only open with a selected few, reported that acquaintances responded with acceptance although they found it difficult to understand. All of those who were completely open about their polyamorous relationships claimed that they had not been subject to negative sanctions of any consequence as a result of their disclosure. Only one participant indicated that an acquaintance had limited their contact with him after he disclosed his polyamorous lifestyle, and this did not appear to cause him any distress. Alexander told about how his friends accept his relationships as completely normal.

> Say, for example, that I send a text message [to a friend] to let him know I'm coming over. "How many wives are you bringing?" That's what I get in return. They want to know how much coffee they should make.

Despite Alexander's emphatic insistence on widespread acceptance, it appeared that not all were as approving as he presented them. He mentioned that he hoped to marry one of his partners, but that it would have to wait until "everything is in order and her family has accepted it." He also asserted that the children of his other partner had accepted their relationship "110 percent," however, they did not talk about it very much:

> Audrey: You say that they have accepted it, but have they, in a way, accepted it reluctantly, since they don't want to talk about it?
> Alexander: No, I think that they simply don't find it interesting. It must be that. It's not something you talk about, because it's not really something, [pause] it is taboo for some people.

Even though Alexander contended that everyone accepts his relationships, it appeared that the families of his partners may have been somewhat hesitant in their approval.

Several participants were also open with public authorities and various businesses (insurance companies, banks, etc.) about their polyamorous status. In these contexts, after the initial surprise subsided, the barriers they met toward acceptance appeared to be of a more structural

than attitudinal nature. "The system, in large letters, … is made for two people" one participant said in reference to the computer systems of companies and other agencies.

This study is not designed in a way that can appropriately measure whether or not polyamorous relationships are really as accepted as the participants assert. These accounts suggest that these individuals have experienced few, if any, negative sanctions as a result of their relationship structure. For other individuals, disclosure was associated with more uncertainty and anxiety, as I address in the next section.

8.2.2 Open With a Selected Group

"I'm not hurting anyone. I'm not doing anything illegal. It's nobody's business who I love." *(Rebecca)*

Because honesty is so important in the culture of polyamory, even partial non-disclosure gives rise not only to practical problems but also ideological inconsistencies for those who engage in this strategy. Of the participants, who had thus far limited their disclosure, most reported having opened up to friends. Very few had disclosed their relationship status to their families and none were open about it at the workplace. All of these individuals, however, expressed a desire to be open and most indicated that they were working toward that goal. For example, Tobias spoke about how not being honest with others was problematic "because my ideals include openness, honesty and communication. And I feel that even though you have a right to keep things to yourself, at some point keeping things to yourself and lying start to look like the same thing."

As illustrated by the introductory quote, a number of participants stressed that their relationships were essentially a private matter and none of anyone else's business. At the same time, some resented that they even felt the need to conceal their relationships; in their opinion it was society that was to blame for this and expressed a desire for a more flexible society that accepted different ways of forming relationships. One participant, who was open with both family and friends, also spoke quite openly about different ways of doing relationships at her workplace. However, the nature of her occupation, in her opinion, prevented her from being entirely open with her colleagues.

While disclosure was associated with the obvious benefit of not having to lie or tell half-truths, the act of disclosure was presented as a burden. Because of polyamory's non-normative status, introducing a new partner to friends, loved ones and acquaintances is something entirely different than introducing a new, monogamous partner. Disclosure involves a great deal of explaining and dealing with other people's opinions and concerns. Some of those who had informed friends or family about their new, additional partner related that these people were genuinely concerned about the condition of the relationship with the original partner and, in one case, the welfare of the individual's children. Because of these reasons, the threshold for disclosure is quite high, and accordingly many participants expressed the need to conceal relationships until they were sure that it was worth it to undergo the process of disclosure. Maria illustrated this point when she said, "For me, the relationship must be somewhat established before I want to be open about it, simply because it is terribly difficult to explain to someone 'I am married, and this is the guy I'm dating.'" Daniel echoed this opinion,

> I want to live openly at some point, but [the relationship] has to be something that worth living openly for. If a relationship is serious enough that you feel that you don't want to hide it anymore, um, that's the criteria. … I feel that it has to be the right relationship. I don't want to open up for, or, I don't want to front something that doesn't look good. I mean, not before it's ready, not before it's nailed down.

In these statements, one can sense that the participants felt some degree of pressure to succeed in their relationships. It appears that participants expect that the presentation of a new relationship, in addition to an existing one, will be subject to scrutiny and criticism. Because this relationship structure differs from the norm, it is not a stretch of the imagination to think that others will be waiting for it to fail, and that this failure would be attributed to the polyamorous structure of the relationship, rather than any possible shortcomings or incompatibility of the partners. It is perhaps this expectation that leads to the opinion that it is best to only present relationships that can be defended as good, serious and long-term. In the absence of this, many of the participants engaged in a balancing act that required them to evaluate who needs to know, remember who they have informed, and creatively explain their lives in ways that did not indicate that they had more than one partner. This left them subject to both rumors and misunderstandings.

Thus far in this chapter, I have discussed the narrative of honesty and what it means to the participants. I will now move on to a discussion of how participants used this narrative to differentiate themselves from one group in particular – those who engage in infidelity.

8.3   Polyamory Is Not Infidelity

"Because I knew the concept [of polyamory] … I didn't think that I was in danger of being unfaithful to my partner." (Tobias)

The narrative of honesty can be seen as a resource in the cultural repertoire of those who are affiliated with the culture of polyamory. The narrative of honesty figured in the construction of a significant moral boundary between the participants and those who engage in infidelity.

Consistent with previous research (Barker 2005; Ritchie 2010), participants in this study expressed that those who are not familiar with polyamory often perceive this type of relationship as synonymous with infidelity. This perception was illustrated tragicomically by a story told by one of the participants. This particular participant told the story of how he, his girlfriend, and her relatively new partner were having a drink together when they noticed an old friend walk into the bar. When the participant left the table to use the restroom, his girlfriend and her partner kissed during his absence, as he had asked them to do.

> So I left, and I come back and sit down. And I can see out of the corner of my eye, his eyes. Just, "ohhh!" That was a bit mean. I realized that. And I had to actually, I talked to him at night, uh, long conversation on the phone. He was actually quite disturbed by this.

Many participants reported struggling with the mononormative frame of reference illustrated by this story. Participants reported that other people's inclination to equate having more than one partner with infidelity creates difficulties for them not only when it comes to being open about their current relationship structure, but also when dealing with their feelings toward potential additional partners. Some expressed that it is difficult to approach potential partners because of the association with infidelity. Susanne explained that when confronted with such

feelings, "many people who are not polyamorous themselves react with fear. Unfortunately, many believe there is a hidden desire to go behind your partner's back."

Participants drew on the narrative of honesty in an effort to differentiate themselves from those who cheat on their partners. Nora underscored this when she told me, "I mean, you can't hide things in a polyamorous relationship. Then you are unfaithful. And that's something else." Sarah expressed that because all partners consent to the arrangement, it should not be viewed as something "dirty, underhanded or unethical."

Jonas told about an experience in which he was compelled to end a relationship with a partner because of her dishonesty with her husband:

> We continued a loving and sexual relationship for quite some time, until at one point I and my girlfriend, and she and her husband were sitting around the table. Three of us knew and he didn't know. Then I felt that the situation was no longer satisfactory.

In this situation, this particular partner was not being honest with her husband about her relationship with Jonas, and was thereby engaging in infidelity. As mentioned previously, Jonas was particularly concerned that he should not have to lie to anyone in his relationships, but he was also concerned that his partners also should not lie to their partners. His partner's dishonesty necessitated the end of their relationship.

Karen also voiced her intense disapproval of cultural elements that cast infidelity in a positive light. She expressed disgust, on behalf of herself and others, toward songs on the radio that "glorify infidelity." She continued,

> And it's not only songs on the radio, it's also an attitude and actual things that happen. You have this website called *Victoria Milan*, for example, that facilitates infidelity. Of course, there are many monogamous people who think that website is awful, but we hate. I mean, we really hate, hate, hate that website! It's the worst website we know of. Because it's like they take everything that is meaningful to us and just stomp all over it. And how can you take polyamory seriously when you have heard about a website like *Victoria Milan*? We think it's just horrible.

Victoria Milan calls itself "Norway's #1 dating site for married and cohabiting people," and promotes itself as a facilitator of either "innocent erotic chat" or "secret sex dating" (Victoria Milan n.d.: URL) They provide anonymous profiles for users as well as infidelity tips and advice, an automatic logoff function and a "panic button" to help their members keep their affairs concealed from partners. The type of connections facilitated through this dating site conflict with the polyamorous ideal of honesty. Karen also seemed to indicate that when other people "go behind another person's back to get what [they] want," it devalues the experience of having more than one partner. She said,

> That goes against everything we stand for. … Maybe it's because we feel that we had to work on ourselves and, maybe, pay the price of openness so we could live that life, while others are willing to just do it in that very cheap way that doesn't cost [anything].

Participants in this study expressed that it is honesty, not the number of partners, that draws the line between the faithful and unfaithful. However, infidelity can also occur in polyamorous relationships. In similar fashion to Nora's statement above, Karen also explained that, "If you withhold things, or don't say things as they are, then they can get ugly quite fast. Um, and then it suddenly starts to look like cheating instead." The participants in this study readily referred to dishonest behavior as infidelity or affairs, inconsistent with the results of Wosick-Correa's study in which she found that her participants rather characterized such behavior as "breaking the rules" (2010: 55). Rather, the results from this sample are more consistent with findings that indicate that infidelity is dependent on what had been previously agreed between partners (Frank & DeLamater 2010: 13).

The narrative of honesty can be seen as a resource provided by the culture of polyamory, which is activated in the participants' boundary work. This narrative draws on a culturally valued trait, honesty, and is used by the participants in an effort to distance themselves from those who are unfaithful to their partners. While some of the participants' accounts give the impression that infidelity can be seen as nearly synonymous with monogamy, the out-group here is defined strictly as those who engage in secret extradyadic emotional or sexual relationships. As shown in Table 2, the attitude toward parallel sexual relationships in the Swedish and Norwegian samples was one of condemnation. Fidelity in relationships is a highly valued trait.

I argue that this differentiation is based on two strategies of social creativity (2a and 2c in Table 6). The participants have shifted the comparative dimension, in this case, from number of partners to honesty with partners (2a). Additionally, by comparing themselves to those who engage in infidelity, the participants have shifted the relevant out-group from the dominant group (monogamous people) to a group deemed to have a lower social ranking (2c). The use of this narrative distances polyamory from infidelity and positions it closer to conventional relationships.

8.3.1 Boundary Between Current and Former Self

"[My partner] asked, 'Have you been with her?' That was when I said no, which is completely incomprehensible to me now. It was as if my reptilian brain just said 'No!'" (Nicolai)

Thus far, the differentiation of polyamory from infidelity has been described as an external boundary between those associated with the culture of polyamory and others who engage in multiple relationships in secrecy. However, for some, this appears also to be relevant as a boundary between their current and former way of life. Regarding his discovery of the concept of polyamory, Jonas said,

> It was a feeling of coming home. OK, that's how I am living. … I saw that how I was living at that time did not include that open and honest "say how it is" part. So I thought, OK, I have to do something about that.

A few other participants described how they had previously struggled with monogamy and engaged in infidelity. One of them, Alexander, also expressed how the act of being honest with all partners shifted his behavior from the realm of the immoral to the moral. "I have also been a notorious cheater. But now I have two [partners], without being unfaithful. That's something." This focus on the shift from dishonest to honest behavior was evident when he described his friends' reactions:

Alexander: "We support you." That's what it is. None of them have turned their backs on me. They turned their backs on me more when I was monogamous.

Audrey: Oh?

Alexander: Hmm, mmm. Because then I was running around everywhere.

Audrey: So, they felt you were doing something dishonest then?

Alexander: Yes, that I was dishonest and didn't say that I was with somebody else. It's, it's more like, now I am honest and I have said it. I have more than one. Yes. I want to have more than one.

For some, the transition to polyamory meant moving from a lifestyle that included dishonesty to, what they expressed as, a more authentic way of doing relationships. I view these participants' use of the narrative of honesty as an effort draw a moral boundary between their current and former selves. While they recognize that they were previously dishonest and previously members of the relevant out-group, they distance themselves from their erstwhile selves through the same two strategies of social creativity (2a and 2c in Table 6). The concept of polyamory, with its emphasis on honesty, has provided the tools for sustaining multiple relationships in a way that no longer places them as members of this out-group.

In this chapter, I have discussed the narrative of honesty as a resource in the cultural repertoire of those individuals who are affiliated with the culture of polyamory. I have addressed what the narrative means to the participants in this study and their views on honesty between partners as well as honesty with friends, family and acquaintances. I argue that the participants use this narrative to create a symbolic boundary between themselves and those who are unfaithful to their partners, in an effort to frame polyamory as a legitimate way of doing relationships.

9 Polyamory Requires Relationship Competence

"If you seek out polyamory to avoid boredom, I don't think it's going to last very long. Even though it is rewarding, keeping several relationships going, and in good shape, demands a lot of you." (Greta)

Participants' narratives often emphasized traits that are culturally valued and generally associated with good relationships. They not only focused on love and honesty, but also used words like commitment, work, self-knowledge, learning, growth, communication and responsibility. Words like these have positive connotations and are often thought of as necessary ingredients in conventional loving relationships. In light of this, the participants' use of these terms does not represent a significant departure from prevailing narratives about relationships. In this analysis, I have chosen to group these themes together and refer to them as the *narrative of relationship competence*. I gather these themes under this heading because they are interrelated and, taken together, provide what one could call a blueprint for the work of building relationships. Relationship competence is positioned as *appreciated and included* in the concentric circle model, while the inverse, low relationship competence, is positioned in the *intolerable and excluded* category.

In this chapter, I will discuss this narrative of relationship competence with a particular focus on the concomitant themes of commitment, hard work, introspection, jealousy management and communication. Participants' accounts gave the impression that competence in these areas is indispensible for successful polyamorous relationships. I follow the discussion of these themes by addressing the symbolic boundaries that that emerge through the use of the narrative of relationship competence.

9.1 Commitment

"Polyamorous relationships are often long-term, because they are based on feelings." (Nora)

The goal of establishing and maintaining committed loving relationships was quite apparent when the participants spoke about their relationships. This is consistent with, for example, the study mentioned earlier in which Klesse finds that "polyamory is based on a strong

appreciation of long-term relationships" (2011: 15). Of those participants I spoke with in person, all of them, with the exception of one, were at that time in long-term polyamorous relationships.[25] While several Facebook participants indicated their relationship status, I refrain from commenting on these individuals' relationships because of the limitations of that data.

In their accounts, many stressed the connection between love and commitment. In Karen's view, love and commitment appear to be synonymous with one another:

> It's difficult to call it love if you don't want anything more than one night. … I think most people think that if it is love, you want it to last, you want it to deepen and you don't really just want to drop by and then leave again. Because then it isn't love. That's something else.

Participants underscored that their relationships are not "built on short-term lust" but are rather built upon and maintained by the same elements that sustain any long-term relationship. Committed relationships were portrayed as particularly valuable throughout the material. Sarah articulated this view:

> Audrey: So, for you, a relationship, to be [considered] a relationship it must entail love over time?
> Sarah: Yes, I think so. Because I think, um, relationships grow and they're very different at times. As in three months is very different from one year, from three years, from twenty years. And I think there's a great value in having a long-term relationship.

Several participants spoke about growing old with their partners and one emphasized that this is a much safer way to grow old because, when the time comes, he will have more than one partner to depend on for help and support. At the same time, some participants also stressed that, as with any attempt at establishing a loving relationship, there will always be trials and errors and not all relationships are "viable in the long-term."

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[25] The aspiring polyamorist included in the sample had not yet achieved this goal, but expressed a firm desire to establish a long-term relationship with another partner.

By and large, participants appeared to be seeking the stability of long-term relationships. This theme of commitment can be viewed as drawing on the prevailing view that loving relationships are meant to last. The participants' narratives give the impression that commitment is a necessary, albeit insufficient, condition in the maintenance of successful polyamorous relationships.

9.2   Hard Work

"I don't think anyone would say that living a polyamorous life is easy." (Susanne)

Consistent with previous research (Petrella 2007; Sheff 2006), the participants in this study also emphasized that polyamorous relationships are complex and require *work*. Some of this work entailed the practical and temporal implications of having more than one relationship. For example, Caroline's life appeared to be especially complex when she told about how she juggles her relationships with her husband and two other partners, only one of whom lives nearby, in addition giving time to her job, children, extended family and other social activities.

Caroline and others seemed to master these logistical and time allocation challenges. What appears to be more costly, however, is handling emotional issues, as this was a more prevalent theme in the narrative of hard work. As Simon indicated, "It takes a lot of time and effort to make a relationship work properly, in just an ordinary relationship. And then you have to do it two times, or two and a half times." In the rest of this section, I will discuss three aspects of this emotional work that repeatedly appeared in the participants' narratives, namely, introspection, jealousy management and communication.

9.2.1 Introspection

"Maybe you say, 'No, honey, I'm not in love with anyone else, you are the only one for me,' when you are trying to convince yourself." (Lydia)

Introspection, or self-examination, was a persistent theme in the narratives of participants. Introspection included honesty with oneself. In the above quote, Lydia referred to her

impression that some people are not honest with themselves about their own feelings, similar to what I have already discussed in Section 7.2. Trying to "convince yourself" of something was viewed as hindrance to self-knowledge and acceptance. Karen elaborates on this thought:

> If people could be a little better at, in a way, just being where they are … then I think they would be much, much happier with the lives they live, regardless of what they choose to do. I mean, daring to be honest about what is actually happening. It seems like to me that most of people's problems come about because they lie to themselves or to others.

Congruent with previous research (Emens 2004; Wosick-Correa 2010), participants emphasized an ongoing interrogation of one's feelings as a condition for living an authentic life. Such self-reflection was, accordingly, also framed as a desirable trait in others, particularly partners. As I mentioned in Section 7.4, some participants viewed monogamous relationships, and marriage in particular, as "package deals." Similarly, many participants underscored that there is no "paved road" in polyamory and thus "you are very much forced to think through what you really want." One participant was in the process of formalizing his own thinking in a written "user manual," as is recommended by a number of polyamory Internet resources. This user manual was meant to serve as a set of guidelines for himself and his partners. In it, he was in the process of defining what was important, for himself, but also outlining "this the way I function" and "this what I expect" for his partners.

9.2.2 Jealousy Management

"That's something we just have to work on, talk about and be open about." (Heidi)

One of the purposes of this introspection appears to be the management of feelings of jealousy. Jealousy came up frequently in discussion. Some participants reported not feeling any jealousy, while others reported struggling with it. In a similar fashion to Heidi's thoughts above, participants universally expressed that jealousy was something that could be managed through self-reflection and communication with partners. This is consistent with previous research (Emens 2004; Ritchie & Barker 2006). Several participants stressed that feelings of jealousy must be scrutinized to find their root. When Thomas talked about dealing with his

jealousy, when it was at its worst, he reported that the experience "took a lot of time, a lot of work." He related how he approached it, through use of a worksheet he found on the Internet:

> [It] is a matrix of … common emotions in jealousy. So, basically, I spent a lot of time writing and, and dealing with what jealousy [is] and stopped using the word jealousy, because that's just something you hide behind. What is it that you actually feel? So being able to, uh, to put words at what I feel and identify - this, this and this is what I feel. And within those categories - this is why, this is why, [and] this is why. That was really good.

Alexander stressed that his partners were, of course, entitled to be jealous, but not of each other. To be jealous "in the right way," according to him, entailed only being jealous if he did something that was considered out of line, such as flirting with non-partners. "Jealousy exists, but it's limited. Or [exists] in the right way, I should say. … You aren't jealous of your family. Because it becomes a large family. Big happy family."

While participants spoke about managing jealousy and, as mentioned in Section 7.3, a few also emphasized the joy of knowing that one's partner was loved by others, there was very little use of the word compersion. This may be because participants do not fully embrace the terminology of polyamory, or because jealousy management was a more relevant issue for them.[26] Rather than emphasizing compersion, those participants who shared their partners with others underscored the importance of dealing with jealous feelings in a constructive manner when they arose. Nora exemplifies this view. While her partner does not feel jealousy at all, she reported that she does experience jealousy on occasion. To deal with this she says that they "do what most other people do. We talk about it, openly and honestly."

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[26] Language differences may also be a factor that contributes to the lack of usage. The word compersion has been, for example, converted to Norwegian in the word *kompersjon*, but has also been translated as *medglede* (literally, "joy with"), but none of these words were utilized to any great extent by individuals in this study. I also considered whether jealousy was emphasized because participants thought that was of greater interest for me as a researcher. However, when I reviewed the Facebook data (not researcher-provoked data), I found that this word was seldom present there.

9.2.3 Communication

"Communication, communication, communication." (Emma)

The above mantra was universally apparent in the data generated for this study. Participants repeatedly underscored the significance of communication. This is consistent with the numerous studies mentioned in Section 3.2.1, which also found communication between partners to be an essential component of making polyamorous relationships work. One participant emphasized, "there is a lot of *talk* in polyamory, because you fall short with hinting and intimations." Due to both the practical and emotional complexity of polyamorous relationships, communication was underscored as a vital element in the work of maintaining them.

Many participants spoke about the obligatory nature of this communication – you *have to* talk. Daniel related his view that many people in monogamous relationships are living their lives side by side, like "two parallel lines" that very seldom cross, which he said had become a characteristic of his previously monogamous lifestyle. Of his own experience he stated:

> That's one of the most interesting things, because it is a forced communication. You just have to, you don't have a choice. You have to talk to one another. … I think that's what has been the most valuable for me and my partner during the past three years.

In this quote and elsewhere, Daniel emphasized how he and his partner "found each other again" through the communication necessitated in the process of seeking additional partners.

In describing the subject matter of these important conversations, participants referred to practical issues as well as "needs and desires," "rules and boundaries," "feelings," "values," and generally making explicit all those things in a relationship that are often implicit or taken for granted. Camilla mentioned that, "in polyland, issues and things must be brought up and examined in a different way" because there is no well-worn path, as there is in monogamy, Another participant emphasized how communication is particularly important in the early stages of a relationship, particularly if the person one is dating has no previous experience

with polyamory. While he and several others were concerned about being open and forthright with new partners, they were also sensitive to the timing of information sharing, not wanting to overwhelm their new or potential partners with "polybureaucracy" too early.

9.3   Relationship Competence Boundaries

The themes described in Section 9.2 draw on conventionally valued traits such as commitment, work, self-examination and communication, although the focus on management of jealousy in intimate relationships differs from the mainstream view that "jealousy is a virtue, even an emblem of true love" (Emens 2004: 288). Taken together these elements form what one could call a *polyamorous work ethic*, similar to that discussed by Petrella (2007: 156). Participants actively used words like, "very difficult," "complicated," and "demanding" to describe their relationships. These themes position polyamory as something that is at the same time both valuable and challenging. As mentioned previously, moral boundaries are drawn on the basis of a variety of qualities, including work ethic (Lamont 1992: 4). I posit that the narrative of relationship competence, resting on the dimensions of commitment and hard work, points toward a number of moral boundaries.

9.3.1 Differentiation Based on Commitment

"Polyamorous relationships can be healthy, stable and good relationships." (Oscar)

By emphasizing commitment, participants drew on normative ideas about what good relationships are – namely long-term, stable and loving – to describe their own situation. The emphasis on commitment implicitly distances the participants from short-term relationships, often associated with purely sexual connections. As mentioned previously, Klesse found that his participants differentiated themselves from people who are "into promiscuity, swinging and casual sex," stating that the primary difference between those two groups was the former's interest in having only a few, long-term partners (2006: 574).

Similar to the participants in Klesse's study, a number of participants distanced themselves from relationships that, in their opinion, were of a more casual, less-committed nature. Paul described his view of open relationships:

To me, open relationships definitely mean a primary partner who you, for example, live with, have financial obligations with, et cetera, et cetera. I mean it's a "normal" relationship, while you [at the same time] chase the "high" with other short and, more or less, meaningful relationships.

Oscar also underscored the value of commitment when he said, "real polyamory is committing yourself to more than one person." Some of the participants objected to how plural relationships are often portrayed in the media as a primary couple, who have short-term, loose connections on the side. Simon, for example, emphasized, "Because when people read about this, it's very seldom about, you know, people who've been in a long term relationship like this, that works. Because people think it's kind of … like swingers."

I view this emphasis on commitment as a legitimization technique. In similar fashion to the boundary work described in Chapters 7 and 8, the participants drew on conventional notions of what characterizes good relationships. I argue that, in this case, the participants engage in a strategy of social creativity (2a in Table 6) in which they shift the comparative dimension from number of partners to commitment to partners. This, again, allows for a shift of the comparison group (2c in Table 6) from those in the dominant position (monogamous people) to a group with a perceived lower status. The out-group, in this case, is composed of individuals who engage in casual sex, swinging and open relationships. Portrayal of polyamorous relationships as long-term and stable, casts a positive light, and a higher moral value, on these relationships. Polyamory is thus positioned closer to conventional relationships, and, accordingly, the distance is widened between those affiliated with the culture of polyamory and those who engage in relationships of a more casual, sexual nature.

9.3.2 Differentiation Based on Hard Work

The narrative of relationship competence also includes the dimension of hard work. This dimension figures in boundary work toward more than one out-group. I will first discuss how the narrative of hard work, with a focus on communication, serves as a resource in the creation of symbolic boundaries between polyamorists and individuals who engage in swinging and open relationships. I will then address how this resource, with an emphasis on both introspection and communication, is activated by the participants in efforts to differentiate themselves from a certain group of monogamous individuals.

Boundary Work in Relation to Swinging and Open Relationships

"There is this polyamory joke. We say, 'Swingers? They have sex, while we just talk!'"
(Henrietta)

In this introductory quote, Henrietta relates a polyamory joke that demonstrates the value of communication in polyamorous relationships in relation to swinging. She added, "That's not entirely true, but it's kind of like that. It is very difficult to live polyamorously without talking about things." As illustrated here, the theme of communication also emerged when the participants spoke about swinging and open relationships. Tobias, for example, compared polyamory to open relationships on this dimension:

> Because some people in open relationships, they are living in a way that resembles polyamory, or maybe even say it is polyamory. But they can be kind of weak, in a way, when it comes to handling those feelings and problems that arise. … That's my impression. I have met people who say they are in open relationships, and when they hear about polyamory, they say, "What is this?" Then you realize that they bypass a lot of those things that we, who call ourselves polyamorous, force ourselves to go through. … That you engage in those tough debates, because there's a lot of focus on talking about things.

Jonas also spoke about the difference between polyamory and open relationships in terms of communication. The agreement between partners in open relationships is often, as described by him, "OK, that's fine. … But I don't want to know about it." In this context, communication is not even relevant because the primary partner is kept unaware of new partners. He related how polyamory is an integrated part of daily life for him and that all of his partners have the opportunity to speak freely with him and one another.

I argue that the emphasis on communication in these accounts serves to distance polyamorous individuals from those who engage in swinging or open relationships. The participants, again, drew on culturally valued trait in order to highlight the difference between themselves and a group of individuals with a perceived lower status position than their own. In this case, as in their previous comparisons to these groups, the participants use two strategies of social

creativity (2a and 2c in Table 6). The comparative dimension is shifted from more than one partner to communication with partners and the out-group is shifted from monogamous people to swingers and individuals in open relationships. I assert that the narrative of relationship competence serves, in this case, to create a moral boundary between polyamorists and this out-group, thus positions polyamory closer to conventional relationships.

Boundary Work in Relation to Monogamy

"It is this attitude toward clear communication that also seems to be frightening for some, but far from all, monoamorous people." (Anne)

Through the narrative of relationship competence, participants engaged in boundary work to distance themselves from individuals in monogamous relationships. As mentioned previously, Petrella found, in her study of polyamory self-help texts, that those texts emphasized "that polyamory is more complex and emotionally demanding than simple monogamy" (2007: 156). The accounts of a number of the participants in this study fall in line with Petrella's findings.

As the quote from Anne above suggests, it is very important to note that this boundary work was not directed toward *all* monogamous, or monoamorous people, as she called them. While recognizing that certain monogamous individuals engage in introspection, and that some couples do indeed communicate well, it appears that, in their view, the nature of monogamous relationships is such that the same level of introspection and communication is neither required nor encouraged. Rather, the relevant comparison group here is composed of what I will call here *complacent monogamists*. The comparative dimension in this boundary work is relationship competence, specifically introspection and communication.

As mentioned in Section 7.4, one interview partner expressed that many people in monogamous relationships are living as if they are on "autopilot." This interview partner elaborated on the effects of this way of doing monogamy:

> I think that there are some people who live monogamously who indirectly affect my
> life. I mean, not because it's wrong for them, or even me, that they live

monogamously. But because if they do it in such a way that they don't question themselves, or question their partner … or others around them, it ends up being this kind of atmosphere that they spread around. Like, "As long as we do what Mom and Dad did, then everything is fine." Instead of asking themselves, "What do I want?"

In this account, the participant expressed that people who do not examine their own wants and needs, and do not live in the way that suits them best, indirectly contribute to the promotion of the normative standards and normative behavior in society, which in turn affects the lives of others. For this participant, introspection appears to be an important element in living an authentic life and promoting an atmosphere that enables others to do the same.

Other participants also expressed, in similar fashion, disapproval of such lack of introspection. For example, Jacob expressed how he felt that people who viewed polyamory as unethical had not really reflected upon why they held this view. This lack of introspection led to them not being able properly answer when he challenged them to explain *why* polyamory is unethical. He said, "No one can answer that question, unless they're religious. Then it's so easy to say 'It's written in this book.' Well, OK, fine. … That's a cop-out." According to Jacob, those who are not religious only managed to answer his call for explanation with, "I don't know, but this feels wrong!" He related how polyamory has encouraged him to think about the moral dimensions of romantic relationships and what those meant for him in his life.

Similarly, another participant expressed that the "paved road" of monogamy allows one to not "have to take a conscious position on much of anything in one's relationship." Polyamory was viewed as a way of doing relationships that requires a higher level of introspection and thus promotes individual authenticity. In these accounts, complacent monogamists who do not examine their own opinions and relationships are portrayed not only as having low relationship competence on this specific dimension, but also, in the one case, as indirectly hindering others in living authentically.

When it comes to the theme of communication, several participants mentioned that some of those in monogamous relationship do not communicate with one another at the same level as is required in polyamorous relationships. Jonas indicated that, "you have to make very clear

agreements, because there are several people in the relationship. You can't take things for granted. … Many monogamous people don't express clearly what they want. In a way, it is just something that is." Others echoed this view and presented the kind of communication required within polyamorous relationships as a significant advantage over monogamy. Among those who expressed this view was Paul, who said, "I think the only quality, or curse, choose which ever fits best, polyamory has that makes you better at doing relationships is that you have to communicate and be honest about what you're feeling." In this respect, the participants' own view of themselves is congruent with the study, mentioned in Section 3.2.4, that documented a perception of polyamorous individuals as having better communication skills than monogamous individuals (Hutzler et al. 2015).

When these participants talked about introspection and communication, they both explicitly and implicitly drew moral boundaries between themselves and complacent monogamists who do not take these elements as seriously. I view these comparisons as part of a strategy of social creativity (2a in Table 6) in which participants change the comparative dimension from the number of partners to competence within the fields of introspection and communication. While individuals in conventional relationships may presume that the main difference between themselves and those in polyamorous relationships is the number of partners, this narrative shifts the comparative dimension to competence in relationships. The narrative creatively draws on positively valued traits in order to cast polyamory as a way of doing relationships that is equal to, and in perhaps better, than monogamy.

9.4   Monogamy "Done Right"

As mentioned in Chapter 6, there is one aspect, monogamy with high relationship competence, which I have placed in the category *indifferent to and tolerable*. Many participants underscored the value of polyamory as a theory of relationships, and used it to create boundaries between themselves and uncritical or complacent monogamists. However, it is important to note that the participants' endorsement of polyamory as a relationship structure did not translate into a universal disapproval of monogamy. Several expressed how they were quite satisfied with their previous monogamous lifestyles, while others had a more indifferent relationship to monogamy.

Congruent with previous research (Barker 2005), there were several participants in this study who took an essentialist view of polyamory. They considered themselves *naturally polyamorous*, meaning that they viewed their ability to feel romantic love for several people simultaneously as similar or equivalent to a sexual orientation. These individuals stressed that monogamy works for some people because they are *naturally monogamous*.

Other participants expressed that, while they have seen a lot of dysfunctional and flawed monogamous relationships, monogamy can be "good, if it works." When I asked Nicolai if he thought monogamy can work for some people, he expressed his views with a musical metaphor, "Absolutely. Just like some function well in a duet and some work better in a band, while still others are solo artists." Regardless of whether or not the participants endorsed the essentialist view of polyamory, they shared the common view that monogamy *can* work for some people.

The narrative and boundary work I have elaborated in this chapter suggest that successful monogamous relationships, just like successful polyamorous relationships, require relationship competence. Tobias articulated this view when he said,

> My partner and I, we said to one another that even if we were to choose to live monogamously, our relationship would still have kind of a polyamorous character. Because we were into that philosophy, or that way of looking at things. … So, I think that, in a way, polyamory has something to offer not only to people who want to live polyamorously.

In this chapter, I have discussed the narrative of relationship competence, the elements characterize the narrative and their meanings as expressed by the participants. I have argued that this cultural resource is used to differentiate polyamorous individuals from a distinct group of monogamous individuals perceived to have low relationship competence. At the same time, the narrative is also used to draw a boundary between polyamory and casual sex, swinging and open relationships. I also addressed the final element in the concentric circle model, showing that monogamy was not categorically rejected by the participants.

10   Conclusion

This thesis has explored the culture of polyamory as it emerged in the discourse of Scandinavian individuals associated with this subculture. At the outset of this thesis, I described the social norms that influence ideas about the workings of intimate relationships in contemporary Western culture. I also elaborated on the Scandinavian sexual culture, which is commonly viewed as liberal as compared to certain other Western contexts. While Scandinavians have permissive attitudes toward sexuality on some measures, studies have shown that they condemn parallel sexual relationships when these were operationalized as extramarital sex. While North American studies have documented negative attitudes towards those in polyamorous and consensually non-monogamous relationships, there are unfortunately no such studies that document Scandinavian attitudes.

After an elaboration of previous research on polyamory, methods and data, as well as the theoretical framework for analysis, I presented the three main narratives I identified in the material. These are: 1) the narrative of love, 2) the narrative of honesty, and 3) the narrative of relationship competence. These narratives were used by the participants in varying degrees and different ways to differentiate themselves from those who engage in other types of intimate relationships. The participants drew on these narratives when they expressed their views about what constitutes good polyamorous relationships. They also extended these views to intimate relationships in general. Polyamory was presented as challenging, enriching and valuable. As one participant related, "I think we've all learned just incredibly much and grown so much as people, relationship-wise, that it's worth it no matter what."

10.1 Summary of Symbolic Boundaries

A summary of the main findings in this thesis is presented in Table 7. This summary shows that participants in this study drew on the narratives in an effort to differentiate themselves from three groups: 1) people in monogamous relationships, 2) people who engage in infidelity, and 3) people who engage in relationships that are of a strictly sexual nature. While the three main narratives drew largely on elements that are highly valued and commonly found in prevailing discourses regarding conventional romantic relationships, the narratives were framed in a way that allowed participants to distance themselves from these three groups.

This legitimization involved both distancing and normalizing techniques. In some cases this effort involved positing polyamory as an equally legitimate (normalizing), or better way of doing relationships (distancing), as compared to monogamy. In other cases, it involved distancing from groups that were seen to have a lower social ranking and thus positioning polyamory closer to conventional relationships (normalizing).

Table 7. Summary of Symbolic Boundaries

Boundary characteristic	Out-group(s)	Boundary type	Strategy
Love	Uncritical monogamists	Emotional	Social creativity (2b) Social competition
	Individuals who engage in: • Swinging • Open relationships • Casual sex	Moral	Social creativity (2a & 2c)
Honesty	Individuals who engage in infidelity	Moral	Social creativity (2a & 2c)
Relationship competence			
1) Commitment	Individuals who engage in: • Swinging • Open relationships • Casual sex	Moral	Social creativity (2c)
2) Hard work			
a) Communication	Swingers and individuals in open relationships	Moral	Social creativity (2a & 2c)
	Complacent monogamists	Moral	Social creativity (2a)
b) Introspection	Complacent monogamists	Moral	Social creativity (2a)

The symbolic boundaries participants constructed between themselves and the dominant group (monogamists) were largely directed toward specific sub-groups of monogamous individuals who were seen to be either lacking in critical thinking about relationships or complacent in their relationships, or both. They used the narrative of polyamorous love and the narrative of relationship competence to differentiate themselves from the dominant group. I proposed that the boundaries drawn through the narrative of love could be fruitfully thought of as emotional boundaries, because they emphasize a different view of romantic love and the prioritization of emotions. I have also proposed that the participants used narrative of relationship competence, with a specific focus on introspection and communication, to draw moral boundaries between themselves and the dominant group.

I have also argued that the narrative of honesty was activated in the creation of a moral boundary between participants and individuals who engage in infidelity. The participants

emphasized honesty in an effort to reject the perception that polyamory is synonymous with infidelity. This emphasis on honesty also served to distance them from this out-group of a perceived lower social ranking. For some participants, who themselves had not always been forthright in previous relationships, this narrative also served to distance themselves from their previous way of living.

When it comes to those who engage in casual sex, swinging or open relationships, I have argued that the participants drew moral boundaries between themselves and these groups, using the narratives of polyamorous love and relationship competence in these efforts. The emphasis on love, commitment and communication served to repudiate the notion that polyamorous relationships only involve short-term, sexual connections. At the same time, the narratives were the basis of comparisons they made between themselves and these subordinate status out-groups. Participants who had previously been involved with swinging as well as those participants, who occasionally engaged in sexual encounters of a more casual nature, also emphasized the difference between these activities and polyamory. A higher moral value was accorded polyamorous relationships because of the focus on love, commitment and communication.

The results that I have presented in this study are largely in line with previous research. While many of the participants in this study asserted that they view their relationships as normal and that they are not subject to negative sanctions, I have shown that they did engage in extensive boundary work and legitimization efforts. When the participants spoke about their relationships they strongly emphasized polyamory as an ethical way of doing relationships. The evaluative distinctions participants made between themselves and others drew largely on morality

Moral values, such as honesty, hard work in relationships and responsibility to love and care for others, were important in the participants' boundary work. I assert the participants' emphasis on moral values is congruent with Lamont's findings in that, 1) the moral values were used as an autonomous resource in differentiation efforts, independent of economic, culture or social capital, but also that 2) moral values, particularly honesty, were viewed as intrinsically valuable (Lamont 1992: 184).

10.2 Concluding Remarks

As with all master's theses, this one also has its strengths and weaknesses. When I began this study, I did not have a clear notion of what aspect of polyamory I wanted to investigate. This could be seen as a weakness, however, in this case I view it as a strength. In my exploration of the Facebook data and the creation of the interview guide, I did not specifically set out to identify how participants legitimize their relationships. These tendencies emerged in spite of this.

As mentioned above, the results of this study are quite consistent with that which has previously been documented in other research conducted in other countries. In this way, it adds to existing research by illustrating that these Scandinavian individuals also engage in legitimization of their relationships and show a tendency to define and endorse a normative framework for polyamorous relationships. However, the study is based on text and talk produced by a limited number of individuals, which accordingly limits its generalizability. The results presented here represent the views of those individuals who were willing to speak with me or allowed the use of their online writings. The willingness on behalf of these individuals to participate in the study may be a reflection of their own interest in legitimizing and promoting polyamory as an ethical way of doing relationships.

I find it very interesting that the participants emphasized these ethical standards to the degree that they did in the legitimization of their relationships. I am curious about the awareness of and attitudes toward polyamorous relationships in Scandinavian society at large. Quantitative and qualitative research into such attitudes could give an indication of whether this extensive legitimization work on behalf of the participants is justified. This thesis also touched upon the view that polyamory is a progression from swinging and the notion that it is a possible alternative to infidelity. It would also be interesting to explore how individuals who engage in infidelity, swinging, casual sex and open relationships view polyamory.

I will end this thesis with one final quote from a study participant:

> There is no "internal" justice in polyamory, as it is not a separate society or anything like that. The only thing that most poly-people will react to is if you behave

immorally, lie, hide things or in any way do something wrong. Other than that, just set yourself free!

Although this participant's choice of words presents this ethical understanding of polyamory in a rather extreme fashion, the tendencies in the data that I have presented here also suggest the existence of normative standards in the culture of polyamory. These normative standards are embedded in the narratives drawn upon by those affiliated with this subculture in efforts to legitimize their non-normative intimate relationships.

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All sources used in this thesis have been declared.

Appendix A – Introduction to Facebook Groups

Audrey Stark
September 10, 2014

Hei! Jeg er sosiologistudent ved Universitetet i Oslo og jobber nå med en masteroppgave om polyamorøse forhold.

Jeg er medlem av denne gruppen for å lære om polyamori og komme i kontakt med polyamorøse. Jeg synes at denne formen for felleskap/familie skaper spennende muligheter. Jeg er mest interessert i hvordan forholdene organiseres og aksept for polyamori i det bredere samfunnet. Det er mulig at jeg vil ønske å bruke innlegg eller samtaletråder til analyse i masteroppgaven. I så fall vil jeg ta kontakt med personene som har skrevet innleggene (i en privat melding) for å spørre om tillatelse. Dette er selvfølgelig frivillig og brukernavn/navn vil anonymiseres i oppgaven.

Jeg er også interessert i å komme i kontakt med personer som er villig til å stille til intervju. Dersom du er interessert i å stille til intervju eller vil ha mer informasjon om prosjektet kan du ta kontakt med meg via en privat melding.

Eventuelle motsetninger til min tilstedeværelse i gruppen kan sendes til meg og administratoren av gruppen innen 30. september 2014.

Appendix B – Informed Consent Form – Facebook

Forespørsel om deltagelse i forskningsprosjekt – innlegg på Facebookgruppe

Jeg heter Audrey Stark og er masterstudent i sosiologi ved Universitetet i Oslo. Fra august 2014 til juni 2015 skal jeg samle inn data og skrive masteroppgave. Jeg har valgt polyamorøse forhold som tema og har Professor Anne Krogstad (ved Institutt for sosiologi og samfunnsgeografi, UiO) som faglig veileder. Det monogame parforholdet har et institusjonalisert og privilegert status i vestlige samfunn. Jeg ønsker å se på hvordan polyamorøse organiserer sine polyamorøse forhold så vel som sine forhold til andre i samfunnet. Datainnsamlingen vil basere seg i hovedsak på intervjuundersøkelser, samtaletråder og innlegg fra relevante internettfora og observasjon på relevante samlinger/møter.

I forbindelse med prosjektet ønsker jeg å bruke samtaletråder eller innlegg fra Facebookgruppen PolyNorge til analyseformål. Din(e) samtale(r) / innlegg _____ (*spesifisering av samtale/innlegg gjennom tittel og dato*) er av særlig interesse i så hensyn. I tilfelle samtaletråder, vil eventuelle andre samtaledeltagere vil også måtte gi sitt samtykke for at samtaletråden kan brukes i sin helhet.

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst før juni 2015 trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Det er opp til deg om Facebookinnlegget ditt skal brukes i oppgaven eller ikke. Innsamlet rådata vil ikke være tilgjengelig for andre enn meg og min veileder og vil anonymiseres senest ved prosjektslutt (juni 2015). Jeg ønsker å ha mulighet til å publisere samtaletråden/innlegget i oppgaven, men vil fjerne navn, brukernavn og bosted. Jeg vil oppgi kjønn, omtrentlig alder og omtrentlig yrke hvis det er relevant. Studien er meldt til personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS.

Dersom du har spørsmål til studien eller annet kan jeg kontaktes via Facebook, på email, audreyms@student.sv.uio.no eller på mobil, ███████.

Med vennlig hilsen,
Audrey Stark

Samtykke til deltagelsen i studien
Dersom du tillater bruk av ditt innlegg/samtaletråd (som spesifisert over) vennligst kopierer følgende setning inn i en melding (via Facebook) eller email til meg. Vennligst undertegn elektronisk med ditt navn.

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, er over 18 år gammel og tillater bruk av min(e) samtale(r)/innlegg til analyse i forskningsprosjektet om polyamorøse forhold:

_____ (Signert av prosjektdeltager, dato)

Appendix C – Information Sheet

Information for Participants at Poly-Gatherings

Informasjonsskriv om masteroppgave om polyamorøse forhold - observasjon

Jeg heter Audrey Stark og er masterstudent i sosiologi ved Universitetet i Oslo. Fra august 2014 til juni 2015 samler jeg inn data og skriver masteroppgave. Temaet er polyamorøse forhold og jeg har professor Anne Krogstad (ved Institutt for sosiologi og samfunnsgeografi, UiO) som faglig veileder.

Det monogame parforholdet har en institusjonalisert og privilegert status i vestlige samfunn. Jeg ønsker å se på hvordan polyamorøse organiserer sine polyamorøse forhold så vel som sine forhold til andre i samfunnet. Datainnsamling vil basere seg i hovedsak på intervjuundersøkelser, samtaletråder og innlegg fra relevante internettfora og observasjon på relevante samlinger/møter som denne.

Alle deltageres navn og bosted anonymiseres i notater i forbindelse med observasjonen og i selve oppgaven. Kjønn, omtrentlig alder og omtrentlig yrke vil kunne komme frem i oppgaven dersom det er relevant. Det vil ikke bli benyttet båndopptaker under observasjonen. Innsamlet rådata vil ikke være tilgjengelig for andre enn meg og min veileder. Studien er meldt til Personombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS.

Dersom du har spørsmål til studien eller annet, kan jeg kontaktes på email, audreyms@student.sv.uio.no eller på mobil, ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮.

Med vennlig hilsen,
Audrey Stark

Appendix D – Informed Consent Form - Interview

Forespørsel om deltagelse i forskningsprosjekt – intervju

Jeg heter Audrey Stark og er masterstudent i sosiologi ved Universitetet i Oslo. Fra august 2014 til juni 2015 skal jeg samle inn data og skrive masteroppgave. Jeg har valgt polyamorøse forhold som tema og har Professor Anne Krogstad (ved Institutt for sosiologi og samfunnsgeografi, UiO) som faglig veileder. Det monogame parforholdet har et institusjonalisert og privilegert status i vestlige samfunn. Jeg ønsker å se på hvordan polyamorøse organiserer sine polyamorøse forhold så vel som sine forhold til andre i samfunnet. Datainnsamlingen vil basere seg i hovedsak på intervjuundersøkelser, samtaletråder og innlegg fra relevante internettfora og observasjon på relevante samlinger/møter.

I forbindelse med prosjektet ønsker jeg å intervjue folk som har erfaring med polyamorøse forhold og har bosted i Norge. Å delta i intervju innebærer å dele erfaringer og tanker om dine polyamorøse forhold og dine forhold til andre kjente. Jeg ønsker 1-2 intervjuer med hver deltager og intervjuet vil vare fra 1-2 timer, avhengig av hvor mye tid du har til rådighet. Du, som deltager, kan selv bestemme om du ikke ønsker å svare på enkelte spørsmål under intervjuet.

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst før juni 2015 trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Det er opp til deg om den informasjonen du deler i intervjuet skal brukes i oppgaven eller ikke. Det vil benyttes båndopptaker under intervjuene for å sikre kvaliteten på sitater og datainnsamling generelt. Intervjuopptakene vil slettes ved prosjektets slutt (senest slutten av juni 2015). Innsamlet rådata vil ikke være tilgjengelig for andre enn meg og min veileder. Alle deltageres navn og bosted vil anonymiseres i oppgaven. Kjønn, omtrentlig alder og yrke vil kunne komme frem i oppgaven dersom det er relevant. Studien er meldt til personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS.

Dersom du har spørsmål til studien eller annet kan jeg kontaktes på email, audreyms@student.sv.uio.no eller på mobil, ██████████.

Med vennlig hilsen,
Audrey Stark

Samtykke til deltagelsen i studien

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, er over 18 år gammel og er villig til å delta i intervju:

_____

(Signert av prosjektdeltager, dato)

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Samtykke til kobling av intervjusvar til innlegg på Facebookgruppe PolyNorge eller PolyNorge.no

Hvis du har gitt ditt samtykke til bruk av dine innlegg på Facebook eller PolyNorge.no vennligst kryss av:

Jeg tillater at den informasjonen jeg deler på intervju kan kobles til mine innlegg på Facebookgruppen PolyNorge og/eller PolyNorge.no i masteroppgaven:

☐ JA   ☐ NEI

Appendix E – Interview Guide

Demografiske spørsmål
- Alder
- Utdannelsesnivå/ yrke
- Barn
- Hvor vokste du opp?
- Hvilke familieforhold hadde du under oppveksten? (søsken, foreldre gift/skilt?, osv.)

Ideer om kjærlighet, romantiske forhold, ekteskap
- Når du var yngre, hvilke tanker hadde du om kjærlighet og romantiske forhold?
- Hva tenkte du om ekteskap?
- Hvor, tror du, de ideene/tankene kom fra?

Polyamorøse forhold

- Hvordan tenker du rundt kjærlighet, romantiske forhold og ekteskap nå?
  - Dersom endring, hvordan skjedde det?
- Jeg er interessert i ordet polyamori –
  - Hva betyr polyamori for deg?
    - Verdier?
  - Er det din definisjon, eller mer allment?
- Når hørte du først om polyamori?
  - Hva tenkte du da?
  - Har du søkt om informasjon om polyamori?
    - Hvis ja, hva da?
    - Hvilke bøker, internett sider, osv. har vært viktige for deg?
- Hva er fordelene med polyamorøse forhold? (implisitt, ulempene?)
- Definerer du deg som polyamorøs?
  - Vil du si at det er en legning?
  - Hvis ja, når skjønte du at du var polyamorøs?
    - Var du i et monogamt forhold på det tidspunktet?
    - Har du hatt flere forhold samtidig?
    - Kan du beskrive hvordan du innledet ditt første polyamorøse forhold?
- Kan du fortelle meg hvilke forhold du har per i dag og hvor lenge du har vært sammen med dine kjære?
  - Kan du fortelle meg hva som gjør dine partnere like eller ulike?
  - Hvilke av dine behov er det som fylles av de forskjellige?
  - Føler du deg forpliktet overfor dine partnere?
    - Like forpliktet overfor alle?
  - Er det noe du må ofre for å få forholdene til å fungere, for å være sammen med dem du ønsker å være sammen med?

- o Er du og dine kjære åpne for flere partnere eller har dere avtalt at det ikke er aktuelt?
- Kan du fortelle meg om ett (eller flere) forhold som har tatt slutt? (og implisitt, hvorfor?)
- Hvordan vurderer du forholdene til dine monogame venner og bekjente?
  - o Tror du at monogami fungerer eller kan fungere for noen?

Avtaler

- Det er en del fokus på kommunikasjon og avtaler med partnere. Har du laget slike avtaler?
  - o Muntlig/skriftlig?
  - o Kan du beskrive hovedpunktene i din(e) avtaler?
  - o Hva er formålet med avtalen(e)?
    - ▪ Fungerer avtalen(e) etter hensikt?
  - o Hender det at avtalen(e) må justeres?
- Hvordan deler dere tiden?

Forhold til andre bekjente (åpenhet om polyamori med andre)

- Opplever du at andre bekjente forstår hva det betyr å være polyamorøs?
- Hvordan opplever du at andre forholder seg til deg som polyamorøs?
  - o Er dine venner/familie klar over at du har flere romantiske partnere?
    - ▪ Nei?
      - Hvordan tror du at de vil reagere dersom det ble kjent?
      - Hvordan håndterer du disse forholdene, for å unngå å fortelle at du har flere romantiske partnere?
    - ▪ Ja?
      - Hvordan fortalte du? Hvordan reagerte de?
      - Hvordan forholder dine venner/familie seg til dine partnere?
  - o Er du åpen med andre bekjente (arbeidsgiver/kollegaer, naboer) om dine romantiske forhold?
    - ▪ Nei?
      - Hvordan tror du at de vil reagere dersom det ble kjent?
      - Hvordan håndterer du disse forholdene, for å unngå å fortelle at du har flere romantiske partnere?
    - ▪ Ja?
      - Hvordan fortalte du? Hvordan reagerte de?
      - Hvordan forholder dine venner/familie seg til dine partnere?
  - o Dersom vedkommende har barn er det interessant å spørre om det forholdet, og hvordan barna forholder seg til vedkommendes partnere.
    - ▪ Voksne barn vs. små barn

Bredere samfunn

- Dersom du kunne lage en ønskeliste over endringer i samfunnet, hva ville du inkludere på en slik ønskeliste?
  - Oppfølgingsspørsmål …
  - Føler du deg tiltrukket noen form for aktivisme i forhold til slike endringer?

Avslutning

- Har du noe mer du ønsker å tilføye? Noe som du synes er viktig som du ikke har fått sagt?