



## Dynamics of Sexual Assault in Polyamorous Relationships

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### Learning Objectives

- Define polyamory, open relationships and other terminology specific to those communities and articulate how healthy polyamorous relationships function
- Identify at least 2 ways that sexual assault within poly relationships has different or additional impacts from sexual assault in monogamous relationships
- Using case studies, analyze how sexual assault of one person in a poly relationship impacts other partners
- Understand how to discuss relationships in a way that makes it safer for clients to disclose polyamory

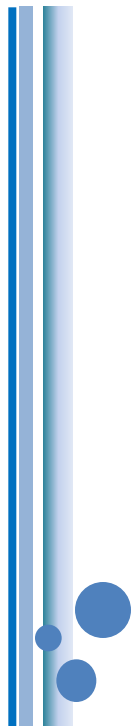




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## Polyamory



Poly = Many  
Amor = Love

Polyamory is the practice of, or desire for, intimate relationships where individuals may have more than one partner, with the knowledge and consent of all partners.

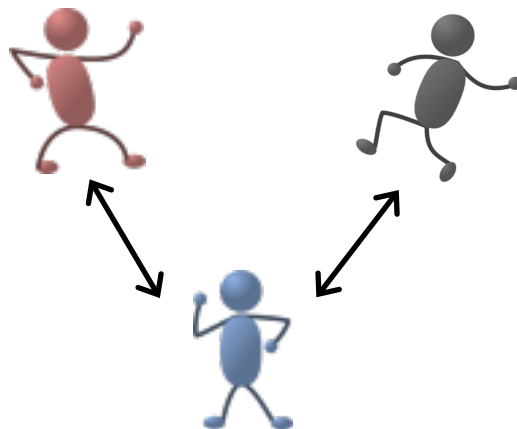
It has been described as "consensual, ethical, and responsible non-monogamy".

Greek and Latin were mixed #SorryNotSorry  
Image credit: Wikipedia user Rataosk

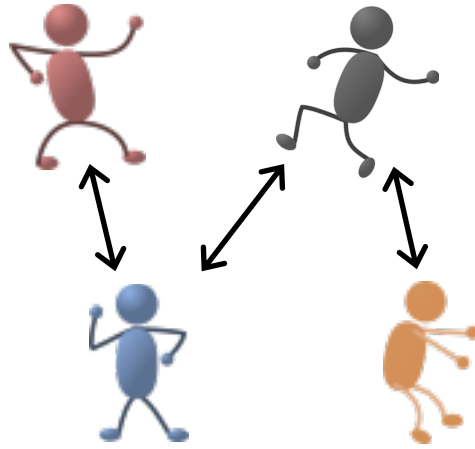
## Values of Polyamory

- Fidelity & Loyalty
- Trust & Honesty
- Dignity & Respect
- Communication & Negotiation
- Boundaries & Agreements
- Non-possessiveness & Compersion
- Autonomy

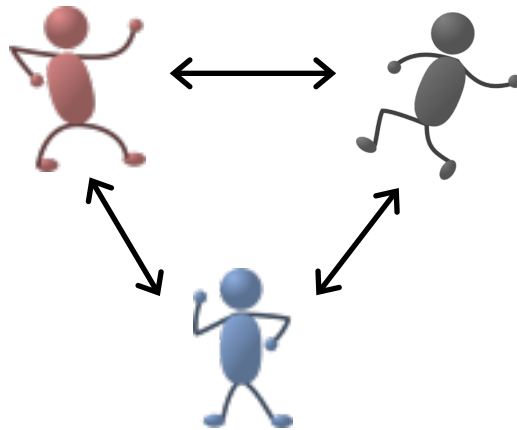
## Relation-shape V/Vee



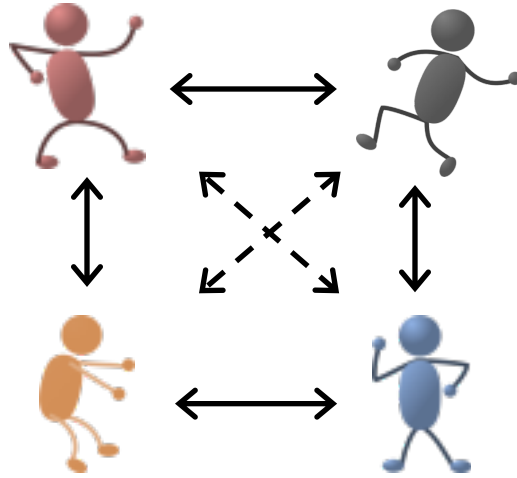
### Relation-shape N



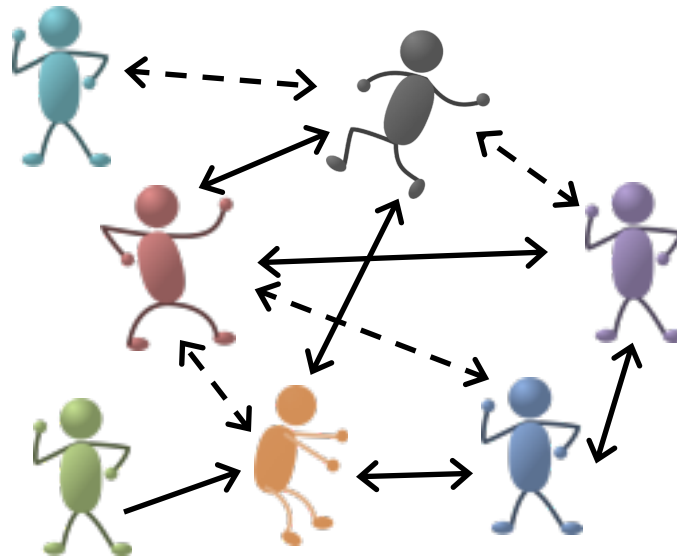
### Triad



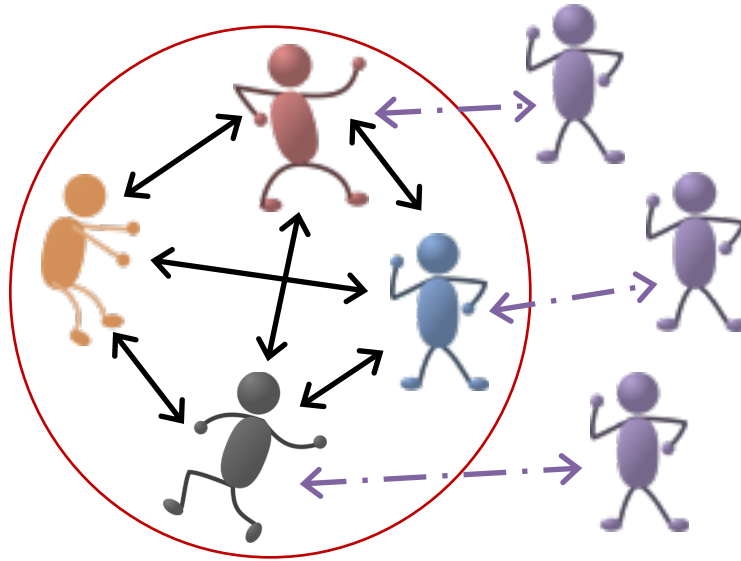
### Quad



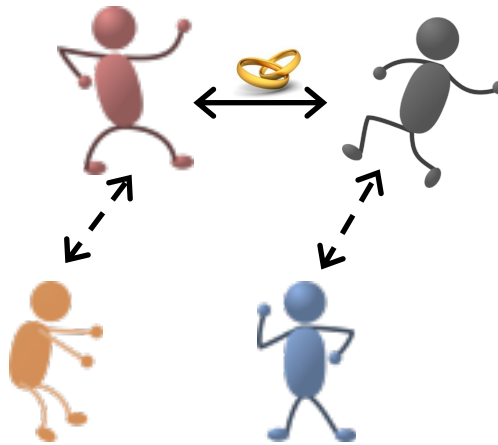
### Group Relationship/Tribe



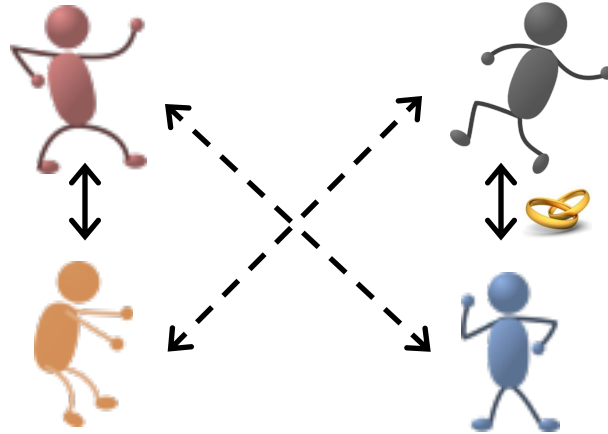
### Polyfidelity



### Open Marriage – Emotionally Exclusive



## Swinging



## Relationship Expectations

loveR                      Security  
Permanence              Best  
Enmeshed Lives              co-parenting      Friend  
Commitment              Financial Support  
Fidelity

## Benefits of Monogamy | Benefits of Polyamory

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sexual exclusivity</li> <li>○ Romantic exclusivity</li> <li>○ Decreased strain on time &amp; energy</li> <li>○ Socially expected &amp; accepted</li> <li>○ Easier to introduce to family (+1 at events)</li> <li>○ Supported by religious and legal marriage in most places</li> <li>○ Represented in media</li> <li>○ Available roadmap to navigate relationships or seek assistance</li> <li>○ Legal protection for parents</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Decreased STI risk</li> <li>○ Increased financial stability</li> <li>○ Shared chores and parenting</li> <li>○ Increased emotional support and structure for families</li> <li>○ More experience, skills, resources, and perspectives</li> <li>○ Decrease polarization of viewpoints</li> <li>○ Broader support of emotional, intellectual and sexual needs (one person cannot provide it all)</li> <li>○ No expectation to meet all of a partner's needs</li> <li>○ Preserves existing non-sexual relationship</li> <li>○ No expectation to ignore attraction or "pick" between people</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

## Keys to Success in Polyamory


- Able to identify and talk about feelings
- Accountable for one's own feelings
- Self-reflective, willing to work on oneself
- Healthy communicator
- Respects own & others' boundaries
- Time & energy management
- Engages supportive community
- Only going as fast as the slowest person
- Healthy attachment





## Common Questions About Poly




- Jealousy
  - Division of love
  - Cheating
  - Avoiding commitment
  - Fixing an existing relationship
  - Sexual health & safety
  - Interaction with metamour
- 



## Common Questions About Poly



- Coming out as poly
  - Parenting
  - Legal protections
  - Beginning & ending relationships
  - Change of structure or style
  - Change in status
  - A secondary with no primary
- 



## Dynamics of Abuse in Poly




DV/SA field:  
Jealousy = red flag for abuse

Polyamory:  
Jealousy = normal emotion  
Possessiveness = unhealthy behavior



## Dynamics of Abuse in Poly



- Lack of legal protections used to coerce and control
  - Breaking negotiated agreements “in the heat of the moment”
  - Not giving the secondary partner a voice
  - Requiring the secondary to be sexually involved with all partners
  - Gay men’s culture of non-monogamy used to pressure/coerce partners
- 



## Dynamics of Abuse in Poly



- Not communicating rules or boundaries
- Keeping track of mistakes
- Ever stricter rules
- “You’re not doing poly right”
- Shaming partners for jealousy
- Forbidding contact with/disclosing to with metamours
- Undermining other relationships



## Effects of Trauma



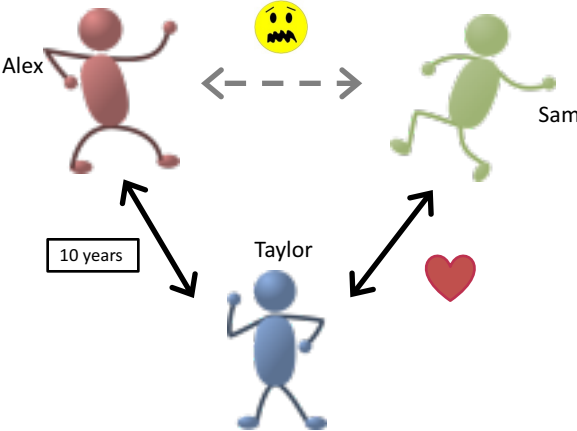
- Maintenance of boundaries
- Ability to communicate
- Ability to self-reflect
- Assertiveness about needs
- Emotional regulation
- Attachment concerns



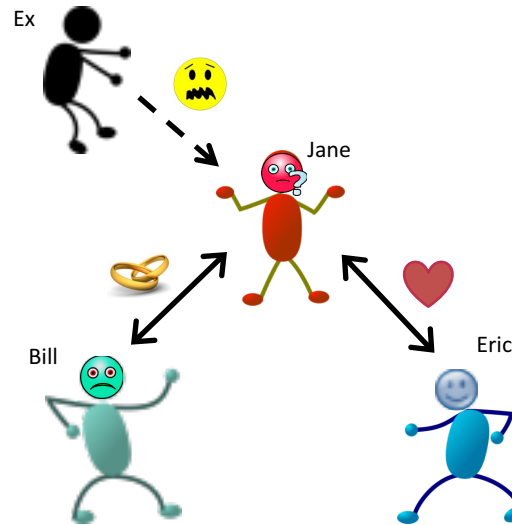
# Case Studies

Impact of Sexual Assault and Sexual Abuse  
in Poly Relationships

# Sexually Abusive Triad



## Sexual Assault in an Open Marriage




## Debrief

- What are some additional challenges when sexual abuse or assault is inflicted in poly relationships? How does it affect the experiences of survivors?
- What are some ways that other partners might react to abuse or assault? How are they impacted?
- What are some specific things you would change about your work with survivors to create space for people who might be poly? How can we best support survivors who are not monogamous?



## Challenges with Seeking Help



- Fear that the abuse will be attributed to polyamory as fundamentally unhealthy
  - Victim-blaming for getting into a poly relationship in the first place
  - Internalized monogamist attitudes
  - Difficulty prosecuting when relationship orientation is put on trial
  - Reporting will “out” survivor as poly
  - Loss of parenting access
- 



## Culturally Humble Services




- Invite disclosure by demonstrating awareness
  - Use expansive, non-judgmental language
  - Ask about all the different kinds of relationships a survivor has
  - Strengths-based approach
  - Inclusive printed materials
  - Awareness of legal implications
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Image credit: Flickr user Christine Thomas  
Photo by Angie Gaud, NYC www.milestoneimages.us/

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