# Managing Monogamism: Polyamory Aware Therapy Practices



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# Presenter Positionality

- Dr. Markie Twist was born and raised in Houston, Alaska and is currently based out of the Las Vegas, Nevada area. Dr. Twist is an award-winning sexuality educator, sexologist, relationship therapist, author and international speaker. Dr. Twist is the Program Coordinator of the Graduate Certificate in Sex Therapy Program, and Professor in the Human Development and Family Studies Department and Marriage and Family Therapy Program at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. Dr. Twist is also a licensed marriage and family therapist and mental health counselor, as well as a clinical fellow and approved supervisor of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, and certified sexuality educator and supervisor through the American Association for Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists. Dr. Twist is co-author of the books, *The Internet Family: Technology in Couple and Family Relationships* and *Focused Genograms: Intergenerational Assessment of Individuals, Couples, and Families* (2nd ed.). Dr. Twist also serves as the Editor-in-Chief of *Sexual and Relationship Therapy: International Perspectives on Theory, Research and Practice* and is co-editor of the book *Eco-Informed Practice: Family Therapy in Age of Ecological Peril*. In addition, Dr. Twist serves as an adjunct faculty member in the School of Public Health at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, as well as a session instructor at the University of Guelph. To learn more about Dr. Twist visit: drmarkie.com.

# Abstract

As more people of polyamorous or consensually non-monogamous experiences, identities, and relational systems are out about their minoritised relational orientations, reports of institutional and personal discrimination have increased. Most clinicians are unfamiliar with the relational needs of consensually non-monogamous folx, polyam-identifying people, and people in multi-partnered relational systems, which means there are significant gaps in clinical practice and health care for people of these minoritised relational orientations and backgrounds. Monogamism is the dominant belief that monogamy is the only legitimate relational orientation (Blumer et al., 2014; Twist et al., 2018). Having a better understanding of monogamism is one step in becoming more polyamory-aware in clinical practice. Thus, in this presentation, Dr. Markie Twist, not only provides an intensive overview of monogamism and how to manage it in clinical practice, but also an overview of relational orientation itself, including various forms of polyamory and diverse relational configurations. The presentation is closed with an overview of suggested microskills, techniques, and models for bolstering one's polyamory-aware clinical skills for improving practice in working with polyamorous client systems.

# Overview

- Readings:

- Blumer, M. L. C., Haym, C., Zimmerman, K., & Prouty, A, (2014). What's one got to do with it?: Considering monogamous privilege. *Family Therapy Magazine*, 28-33.

- Twist, M. L. C., Prouty, A. M., Haym, C., & VandenBosch, M. L. (2018). Monogamism measure. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 33*(4), 376-381.

- Twist, M. L. C., Cloud, R., & Hechter, S. A. (2021). Invisible humans: Identity development and visibility management in the context of gender, sexual, erotic, and relational diversity. In M. J. Murphy, & R. Harvey (Eds.). *Handbook of LGBT-affirmative couple and family therapy* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

- Twist, M. L.C. (2021). Introduction to special issue on the parenting relationship. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy, 36*(2/3), 129-141.

# Objectives

- Participants will be able to describe the prevalence, history, and types of people and relational configurations identifying as relational orientation minorities.

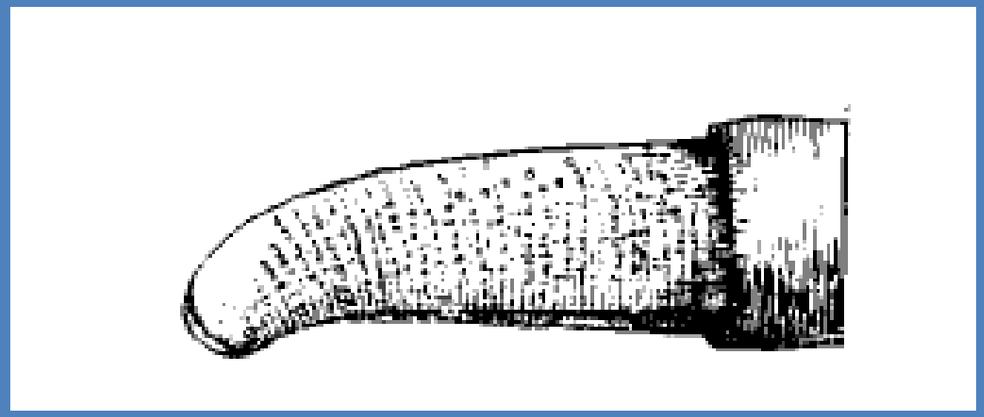
- Participants will be able to describe monogamism and mechanisms and tools for managing monogamism in clinical practice.

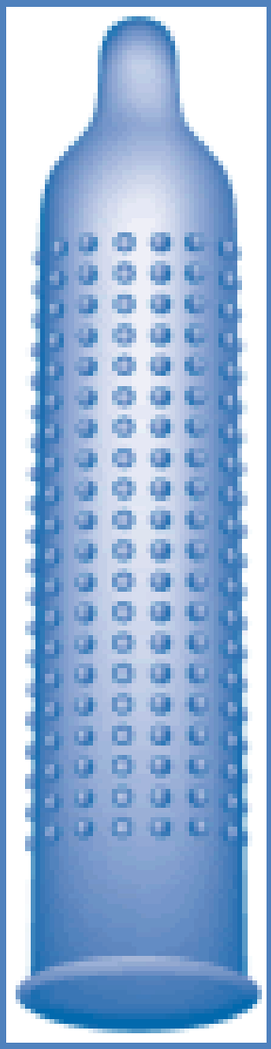
- Participants will be able to identify polyamory-aware microskills, techniques, and models for working with relational orientation minority client systems.

- Describe the prevalence, history, and types of people and relational configurations identifying as relational orientation minorities.

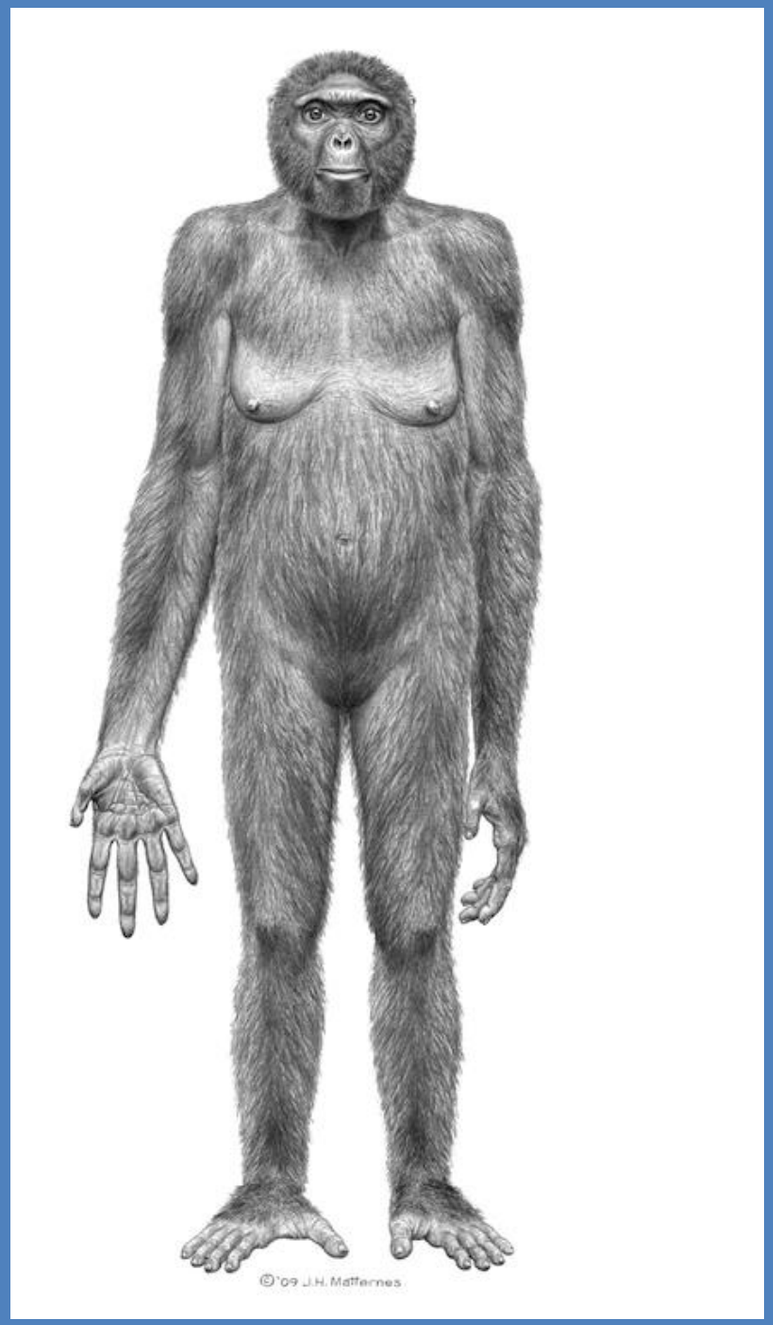
# The Story of (Non)Monogamy

# Horny Papillae
## McLean et al. (2011)





# Ardipithecus Ramidus
## (Lovejoy, 2009)



# Historical Reasons

- Scarcity of men
- High rates of infectious and dangerous diseases
- Men with ability to monopolize wealth (Barber, 2008)



# What is Relational Orientation?

- **Relational orientation** – refers to an enduring pattern of romantic or sexual attraction (or a combination of these two) to monogamy (marriage, partnership, serial monogamy), or nonmonogamy (polygyny, plural, polygamy, polyamory, polyandry), or to a degree of both monogamy and nonmonogamy (monogamish, swinging, open marriage, open relationship) (Blumer, Haym, Zimmerman, & Prouty, 2014; Davis, 2011).



# Monogamous Marriages/Domestic Partnerships

- **Monogamy**
  - –Both partners married to one mate
  - –1 in 6 (or 16%) of global societies enforces monogamy as a rule (Engber, 2012)
  - –Norm in many westernized societies
  - –In 29 countries worldwide can be differing and/or similar-gender partners; in England, Wales, and Scotland since 2014 and in Northern Ireland since 2020

# Cohabitating Partnerships

- Cohabitation versus marriage
- Social impact
- Wide international variation (example: stages of acceptance for cohabitation)



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Stage 1 | Fringe event | Italy, Spain, Greece |
| Stage 2 | Testing ground for marriage | Most European countries |
| Stage 3 | Alternative to marriage | France & French Canada |
| Stage 4 | Indistinguishable from marriage | Sweden & Denmark |

# Non-Monogamy

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"We can have sex with other people. As long as it's just sex. No love."

"We finally decided we were in a relationship with Alice and Bob. And why stop there?"

"You can only be my girlfriend if you agree to be my husband's girlfriend too."

"Yes, Mr. Hefner, I'd love to be part of your harem. Wow, nice mansion!"

"This is my wife, her boyfriend, my boyfriend, and our girlfriend. Her husband will be joining us later."

"My husband allows me to have another girlfriend but I am not allowed to have another man."

"My boyfriend digs that I'm an escort."

"We are looking for our third to complete our family."

"No, seriously, we're a poly/mono couple. My wife just doesn't know."

"My husband died. As his brother, Onan, it is your duty to give me a baby."

"I never specifically said we weren't exclusive. Never said we were, either."

"As the leader of this ~~cult~~ radical new religion of truth, I get a harem."

"My husband the senator is not having relations with his secretary."

"I now pronounce you man and wife and sister-wife."

"We sometimes hire a partner for threesomes."

"Since the Prophet wills it, we must be married."

"I see the credit card bills. Don't need to know any more."

"My husband isn't into BDSM, so I found another partner who is."

"Don't tell me about it, don't bring 'em home, don't fall in love."

"I'm bisexual, so I have one of each!"

"My husband the minister is not having relations with that male escort."

"As the Dom, I get a harem."

"I visit the brothels when I travel."

"As your Dom, I like sharing you with my friend Jay. He does, too."

"What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas."

"We've been swinging with Alice and Bob for 15 years. They almost feel like family."

"When my husband's on deployment, we can fool around."

"I like watching someone else dominate my husband."

"We're monogamous. Except when he's on the road."

"As your Dom, I've arranged this gang-bang for you. Have fun!"

"Dragon*Con! Need I say more?"

"As your sub, I like having sex with whoever you tell me to."

"We like swing clubs and public sex but only have sex with each other."

"Cuckold fetish! Need I say more?"

"We like swinging, but only with Alice and Bob."

"Dragon*Con Room Party! Need I say more?"

"You can do D/s stuff with other people, but only if there's no sex and no emotional connection."

"My wife and I like to hook up at raves."

"BDSM play parties! Need I say more?"

"I only go to BDSM play parties when I'm single."

"You can do D/s stuff with other people, but only if there's no sex."

"I'm too busy for a relationship. So are all my partners."

"You can have other partners, but I really prefer not to know the details."

"My husband's not gay, he just goes to the bathhouse on weekends."

"Oooh! Key party!"

"Dogging! Need I say more?"

"OK, honey, you guys go do that kinky stuff. I don't want to hear about it."

"My husband doesn't go to play parties, but my sub & I like hooking up at them."

"I am a prodomme."

"My husband visits a prodomme. I don't know what they do."

Open Relationships

Polyamorous Relationships

Unicorn Polyamory

Polyfidelity

Religious/Social Polygamy

Commerce

Cheating

Poly/Mono Relationships

Dating Around

Don't Ask Don't Tell

100 Mile Rule

Con Sex

Soft Swing

Swinging

Casual Sex

BDSM Play & D/s non-monogamy

Closed-Group Swinging

# Emotional vs. Physical Affairs





# Women vs. Men

# Why do People Engage in Non-Consensual Non-Monogamy?

- Intrinsic conflict within human nature
- Person's desire to reestablish sense of individuality and autonomy
- Unavailability of sex within the marriage
- Dissatisfaction in the marriage
- Time away from each other
- Availability in work relationships
- Dishonesty, marital instability, arguments over trust, and self-centeredness

# Extramarital/partner Relationships

- Cultural differences:
  - –Most cultures have restrictive norms; usually more restrictive for women
  - –Norm in many westernized cultures is serial monogamy
- Areas of significance:
  - –Varied and complex reasons
  - –Younger people have more affairs
  - –Role of internet
  - –Impact on marriage varies

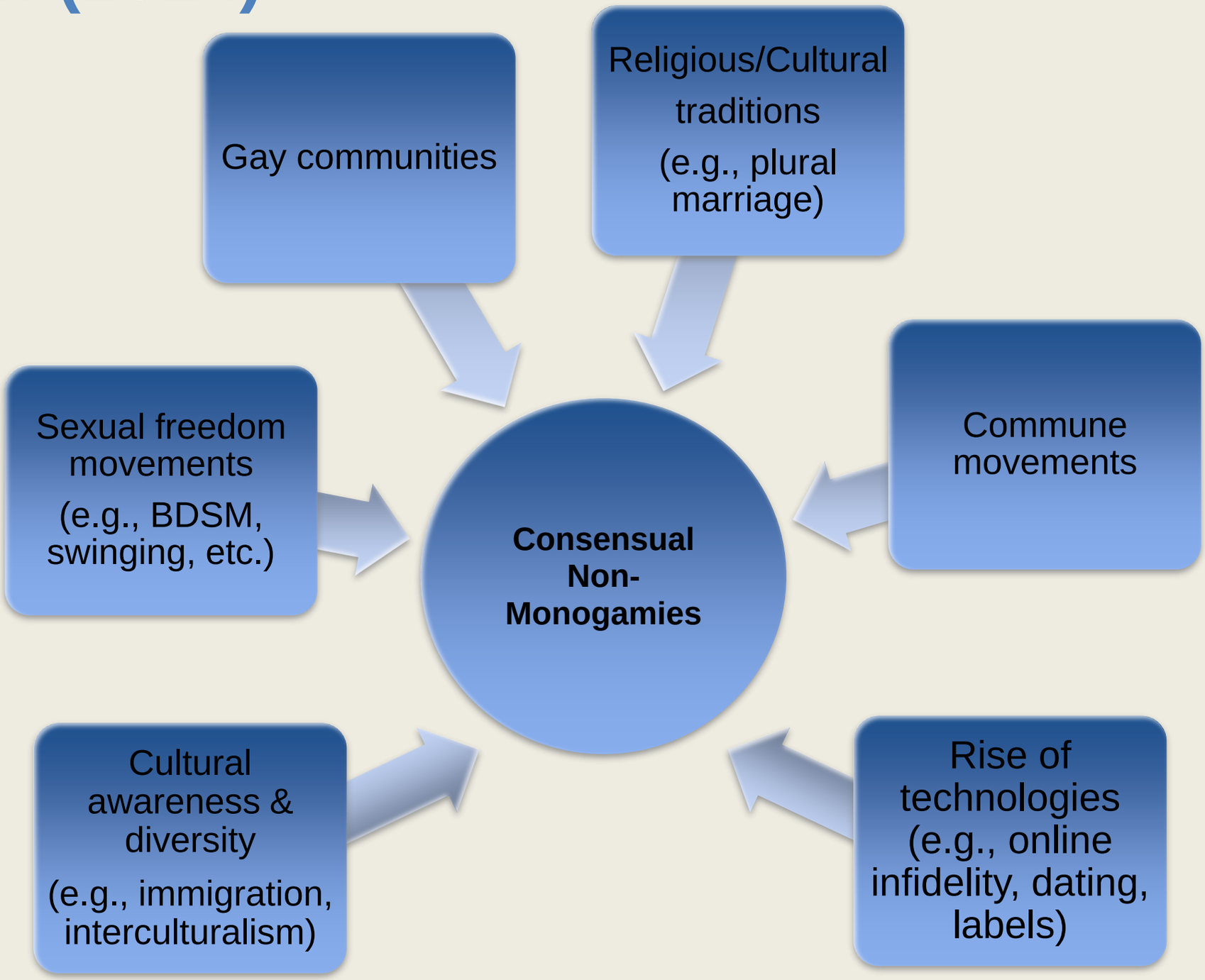
# Polyamory

## Haritawrn, Lin, and Klesse (2006)

At its most basic, the concept of polyamory stands for the assumption that it is possible, valid and worthwhile to maintain intimate, sexual, and/or loving relationships with more than one person.



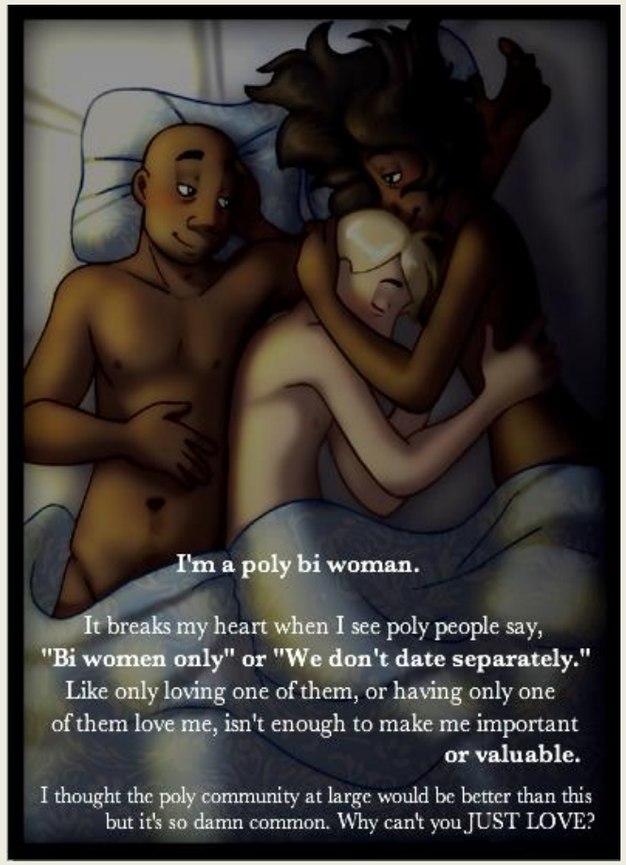
# Positioning Consensual Non-Monogamies Iantaffi (2014)

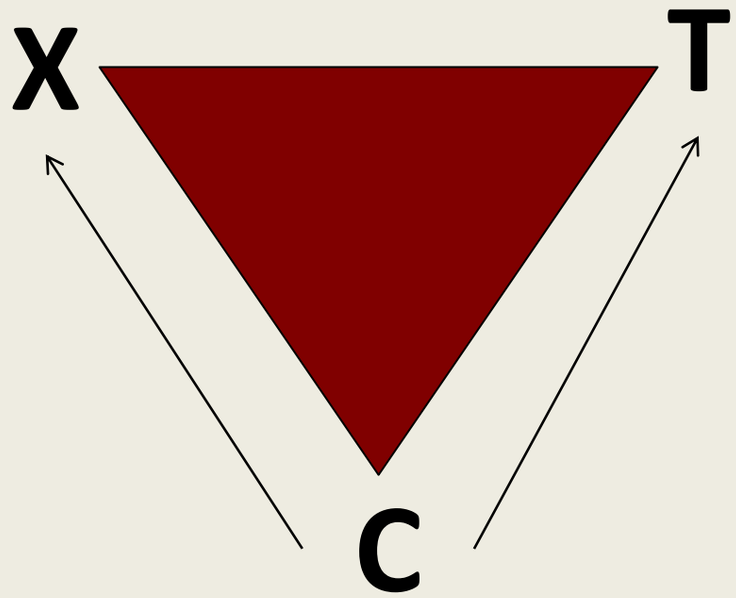


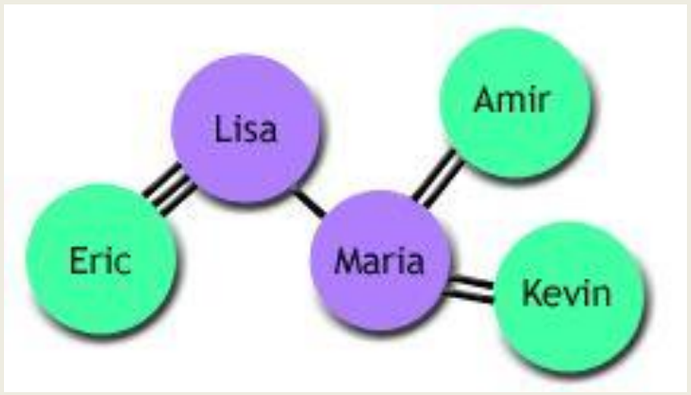
# Common Polyam Relational Patterns

## Iantaffi (2014)

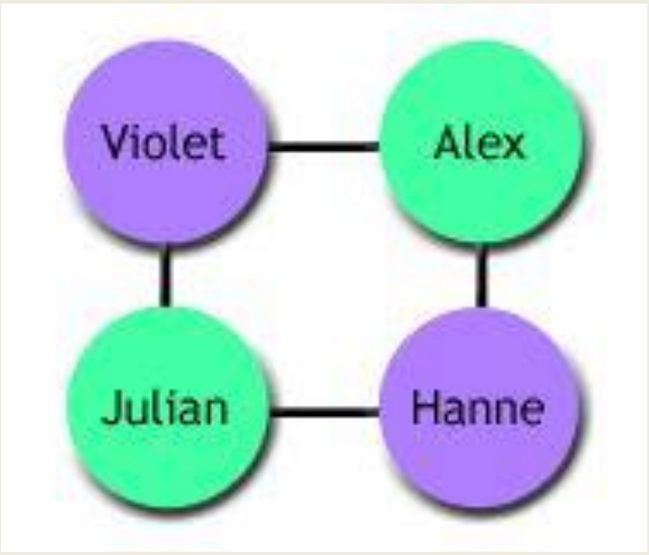


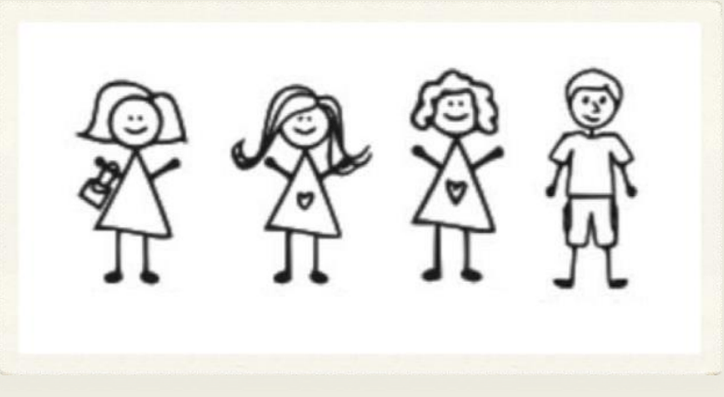





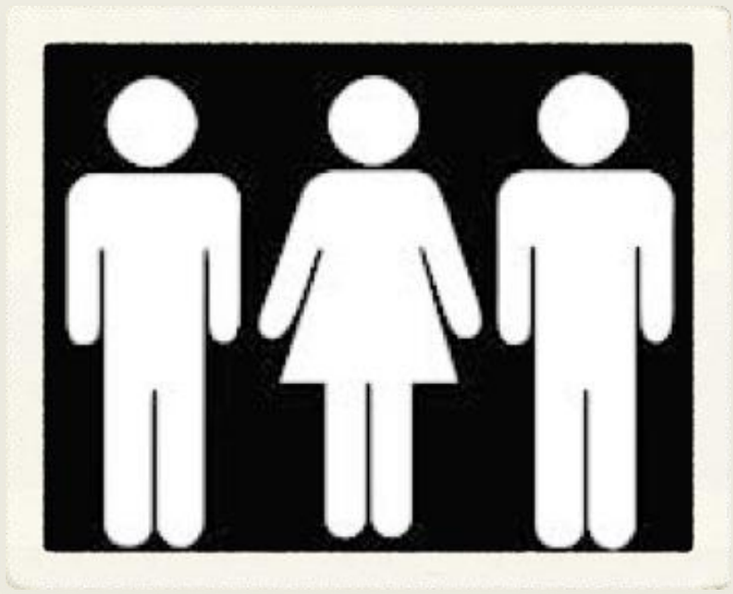



# More Polyam Relational Patterns

- **Polygamy:** where a primary person is ‘married’ to multiple persons;  gender can vary (e.g., one husband & four wives, one wife & four husbands)



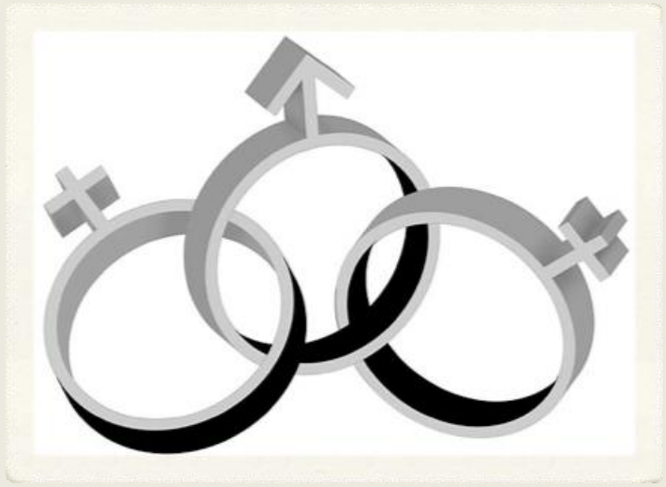
- **Polygyny**
  - One man, more than one woman
  - Common in Islamic and African societies
- **Polyandry**
  - One woman, more than one man
  - In societies where women wield more economic power



# Global Prevalence

- 850 different societies within Africa, Asia, Oceania, and Middle East.
- Up to 50% of marriages are polygamous within these societies (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2006; Hartung, 1982; Valsiner, 1989)
- 20-50% of marriages are polygamous in Africa and Middle East and 20% of Bedouin-Arabian societies (Elbedour, Onwuegbuzie, Caridine, & Abu-Saad, 2002).



- Legal status varies by region.
- Some countries, like India and Sri Lanka, ban polygamy but have legal exceptions for Muslims (e.g., The Muslim Personal Law Act of 1937), others ban it entirely.

# Global Prevalence

- Tibet practiced legal polyandry up until 1950 when China invaded & began occupying.
- Survey of 753 Tibetan families in 1988 found that 13% practiced Polyandry (Rong, 2000)
- Polyandry has and in some cases still exists within minoritized communities in India, Bhuton, Nepal, Nigeria, Nymba, China, Kenya, Tanzania, Brazil
- Inuit and Aleut First Nations groups until the 19th century (Starkweather & Hames, 2012).



# North American History

- U.S. outlawed bigamy 1862
- Under President Lincoln Congress created Morrill Anti-bigamy Act of 1862
- Aimed at members of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Utah territory
- 1879 *Reynolds v United States*
- By 1890 Native Americans confined to reservations, and polygamy, Ghost Dance, and other spiritual practices outlawed (Koster, 2012)

# North American History

- 1887-1888 Polygamous group fled U.S to Canada
- 1890 Canadian government outlawed polygamy, including based on cohabitation
- Historically & currently affects indigenous people, Fundamentalist Mormons, polyamorous-practitioners, Muslim practitioners, many immigrants who come from places where multiple marriages are legal, & others who are not visible in their relational orientation (Blumer et al., 2014).

# Institutionalization of Marriage

- Birth of monogamy and relatedly, monogamism and mononormativity came with European occupiers (Twist et al., in preparation).
- Marriage as institution (Cherlin, 2005) with purposes of procreation & economic security (Amato et al., 2007).



# Marrying for Love

- Institution of marriage began to weaken in early 20th century due to industrialization & urbanization, & other institutions became available (Amato et al., 2007).
- People began to see love as purpose of dyadic marriage (Twist et al., in preparation).



# Individualization of Marriage

- Next shift was in 1960s with no-fault divorces, women in workforce, children born outside of marriage, increases in cohabitation, & rise of heterogeneous relationships.
- This stage of marriage is identified as the individualized marriage (Twist et al., in preparation).






# Monogamish Movement

- Non-monogamous (consensual & nonconsensual) marriages & relationships on the rise (or just more visible) in last 10-15 years.
- In context of globalization, diversification, technologization, and individualization of society (Bergdall & Blumer, 2015; Blumer, 2014; Haym, Blumer, & Prouty, 2013).



# +Western Prevalence



* Researchers estimate US infidelity rates of 60% for men & 40% of women (Block, 2008).

* Researchers found 4-5% of the adult population in the US currently in a consensually non-monogamous relationship/s (Rubin et al., 2014), and a like percentage in adult population of Canada (Fairbrother et al., 2019). In the UK, researchers estimate it is nearly 1/5 of population with Northern Ireland housing the largest number of people in polyam relationships (Hanna, 2018).



* 100,000 people identifying as polygamous in US (Jankowiak, 2008). Most common in Utah, Idaho, Arizona, Texas, Nevada, Colorado (Jankowiak, 2008), & Pennsylvania (Hagerty, 2008). 2% of UT lives in polygamous families with 10 fold increase in last 50 years (estimate 40,000 people in UT) (Brooke, 1998).

- Describe monogamism and mechanisms and tools for managing monogamism in clinical practice.

# What is Monogamism?

- **Monogamism**– the dominant belief that the only legitimate relational orientation is being monogamous and the only acceptable relationship form is that of monogamy (Twist et al., 2015; Twist et al., in preparation).

# Forms of Monogamism

*****Often tied up with assumptions and phobias related to middle sexualities like biphobia

Some forms of monogamism…

- Binarizing (biphobia)
- Misidentifying
- Derelationizing
- Objectifying
- Ethnofamilism
- Marginalizing
- Erasure
- Pathologizing

# Binarizing

## Twist & Ansara (2017)

- Constructing the world as having only two relational orientations and relatedly two sexual orientations all through the lens of being with only one person at a time. Examples:
  - e.g., single, partnered, select one
  - e.g., married, divorced, select one
  - e.g., If you have a woman partner that is your only partner and you are a lesbian
  - e.g., If you have a man partner that is your only partner and you are straight
  - e.g., If you have more than one partner you are automatically seen as polyam or cheating even if you are neither
  - e.g., If you are bisexual you are often assumed to be polaym even if you are not

# Misidentifying

## Twist & Ansara (2017)

- People's own understanding of their own relational orientation and relational structures are invalid. Example:
  - e.g., therapist assumes that a family with 3 adults and one child is not a family, for instance

# With Partner?



# With Partner?



# With….?



# Derelationalizing

**Twist & Ansara (2017)**

- Selectively describing people's relational orientation and structure language using 'neutral' languaging, when others are described using assumed partnered languaging. Example:
  - e.g., 'Those people over there'



**With The Kody Brown Family (i.e., *The Sister Wives*)**

# Objectifying

## Twist & Ansara (2017)

- According to Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) means to "degrade to the status of a mere object." Examples:
  - e.g., Bisexuals are so hot
  - e.g., Threesomes with unicorns are especially hot
  - e.g., Polygamous marriages are not real marriages – the women are objects of the men





# Ethnofamiliasm

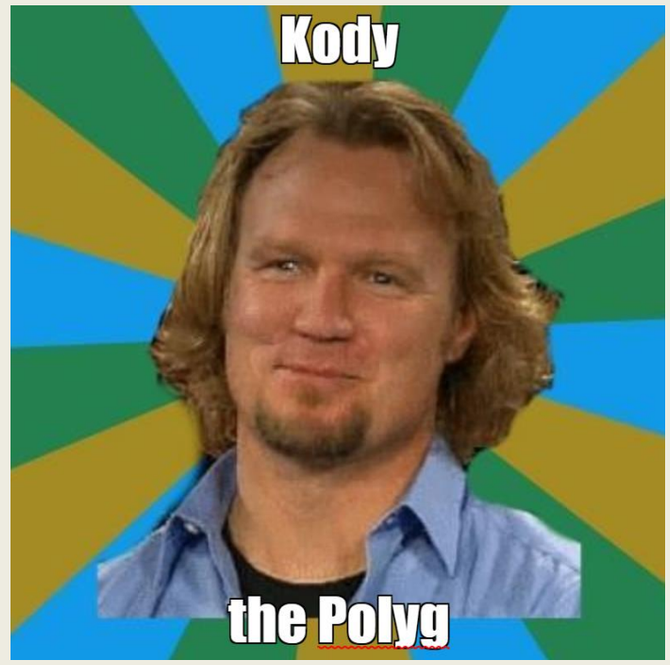
## Twist & Ansara (2017)

- Defined by combining two concepts—first, ethnocentrism, which according to Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) is “the evaluation of other cultures according to preconceptions originating in the standards and customs of one's own culture” and the second, familialism, which according to Merriam-Webster (n.d.) is “a social pattern in which the family assumes a position of ascendance over individual interests.” In western contexts, familism is viewed as the nuclear family of one father, one mother, and their child or children as the central and primary social unit of human ordering and principal unit of a functioning society and civilization and anything outside of this ethnocentric view is viewed as not family or the wrong kind of way to family.  Examples:
  - e.g., Polygamous family structure are norm in some places outside of many western contexts but westerners see dyadic family structures as norm and best way to family
  - e.g., Persons who immigrate from countries where they are legally married to more than one person cannot legally bring their whole family with them to many westernized countries because it is illegal to be married to more than one person at the same time

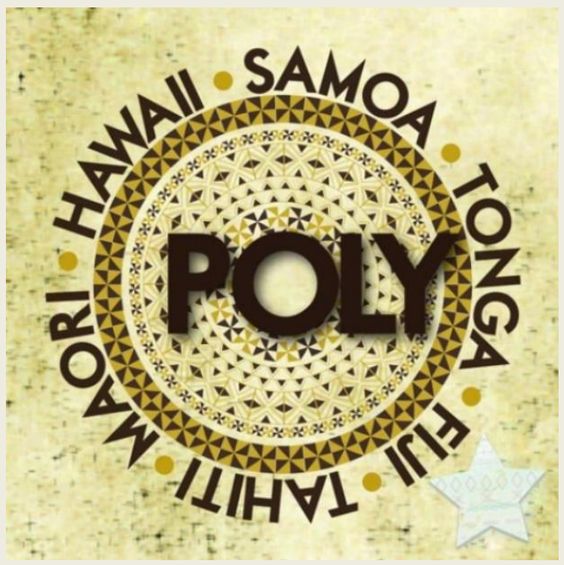
# Marginalizing

## Twist & Ansara (2017)

- Constructing people whose relational orientations and relationships structures are delegitimized as ‘marked categories’ or ‘effects to be explained.’ Examples:
  - e.g.,‘polyg’-
  - e.g.,‘poly’-
  - e.g.,‘*The poly community*’
  - e.g.,‘*The* polyg *cult*’










# Erasure

## Twist & Ansara (2017)



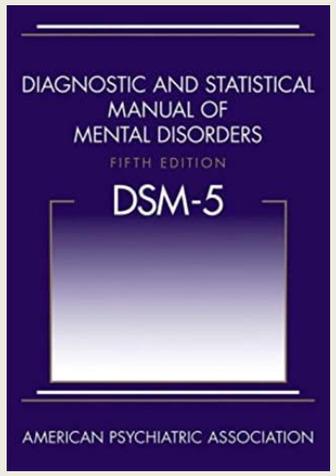
- Ignoring the diversity of relational orientations, identities, experiences, and configurations. Examples:
  - e.g., Forms that assume relationship
  - e.g., Forms that assume relational orientations
  - e.g., Convoluting persons of “LGBTQIAP” forms, which erases people of non-monogamous experience, identity, and/or orientation

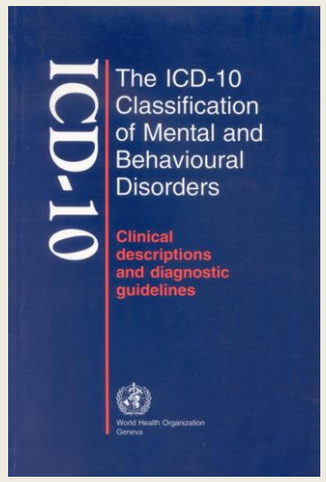
# Erasure in Systemic Family Therapy Field

- Content analysis from 1975-2014 of top-tier family therapy journal (Blumer & VandenBosch, 2015)
- Approximately 1,563 total articles
- 35 or 2.24%, focused on LGBT populations or issues, with bulk since 2000 (*n* =28, 80.0%), & remainder before start of new millennium (*n* = 7, 20.0%).
- Absent from any of the articles was content focused upon polyamorous or polysexual-identifying folks, or multi-partnered and/or polygamous relational configurations.
- Virtually non-existent attention in systemic family therapy field.
- Erasure appears to characterize both mainstream and ‘LGBT’ literature in the systemic family therapy field.

# Pathologizing

## Twist & Ansara (2017)




- There is no clinical ‘diagnosis’ of relational orientation, however, people who identify as polyamorous (and members of their relational systems) are often diagnosed with one or more of the following American Psychiatric Association (APA; 2013) or International Classification of Diseases (ICD; 1994) diagnoses:
  - e.g., relationship distress with spouse or intimate partner (e.g., attachment issues, problems committing)
  - e.g., child affected by parental relationship distress (e.g., bad parents/role models)
  - e.g., personality diagnoses (e.g., borderline personality disorder)
  - e.g., paraphilia diagnoses (e.g., fetish disorder like nymphomania)

# Overlaps with Sexual Orientation Minorities

- Visibility management
- Children may be bullied, etc.
- Marital/partnership rights
- Moral ground discrimination
- Extended family consequences/conflict
- School parental participation challenges
- Housing discrimination
- Relational/sexual orientation minority within group issues
- Difficulty finding community

# Legal and Social Implications

- Immigration and deportation
- Communal families and courts
- Legal contracts and documents
- Child parenting and protection
- Custody of children
- Divorce and dissolution
- Death
- Adoption
- Spousal Evidentiary Protection
- Visibility/invisibility management
- Medical, legal, and therapeutic access
- School
- Finances

# What is the One Intervention that Every Therapist Brings into the Therapy Room?

# + YOURSELF!

# Self-of-the-Therapist

- Therapy as a mirrored room (Hare-Mustin, 1994)
- Person of the therapist is main intervention (Aponte & Winter, 2000; Cheon & Murphy, 2007)
- Includes perception of self and others

# What can we do to manage Monogamism?

# Managing Monogamism

- Become more culturally aware or sensitivity or humility
- According to Kim, Cartwright, Asay, & D'Andrea (2003) cultural sensitivity comes from increases in three interrelated components:
  - Awareness
  - Knowledge
  - Skills

# Awareness

## Haym, Blumer, & Prouty (2013)

- Therapists need to remain open and non-judgmental (Zimmerman, 2012)
- Work to decrease invisibility management and be sensitive to client experiences with visibility management
- Increase awareness of mononormativity, monogamism, & monogamous privilege

# Privilege

- The Oxford Dictionary defines privilege as “a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group of people.”

- Attending to privilege increases awareness (Blumer, Green, Thomte, & Green, 2013; Case & Stewart, 2010).



# Monogamous Privilege

- Unearned benefits afforded those with a monogamous relational orientation, which also defines the relational orientation norm (Blumer et al., 2014; Davis, 2011).

# Examples of Monogamous Privilege
## Davis (2011)

- Lack of questioning about the validity and stability of relationship
- No assumptions about quality of: parenting, relationship, sexuality, character of individuals, etc.
- Society comfortable with the relational orientation
- Lack of fear of having legal, social, and economic consequences if someone were to find out about relational orientation
- No need to explain relational orientation and reasons for relationship(s)
- Availability of greeting cards for special occasions (Valentine's Day, wedding, etc.)

# Invisibility Management

- Privileges help maintain walls of invisibility.
- People and institutions construct walls of invisibility around individuals and multi-partnered relationships identifying outside of the dominant relational orientation (Blumer et al., 2014; Green & Blumer, 2013).

# Visibility Management

- Invisibility management, places less privileged in positions to practice visibility management (Green & Blumer, 2013).
- A consequence of this invisibility is that it forces relational orientation minorities to engage in ongoing visibility management (e.g., secrecy around and hiding of their relational orientation, isolation of individuals and families, etc.).

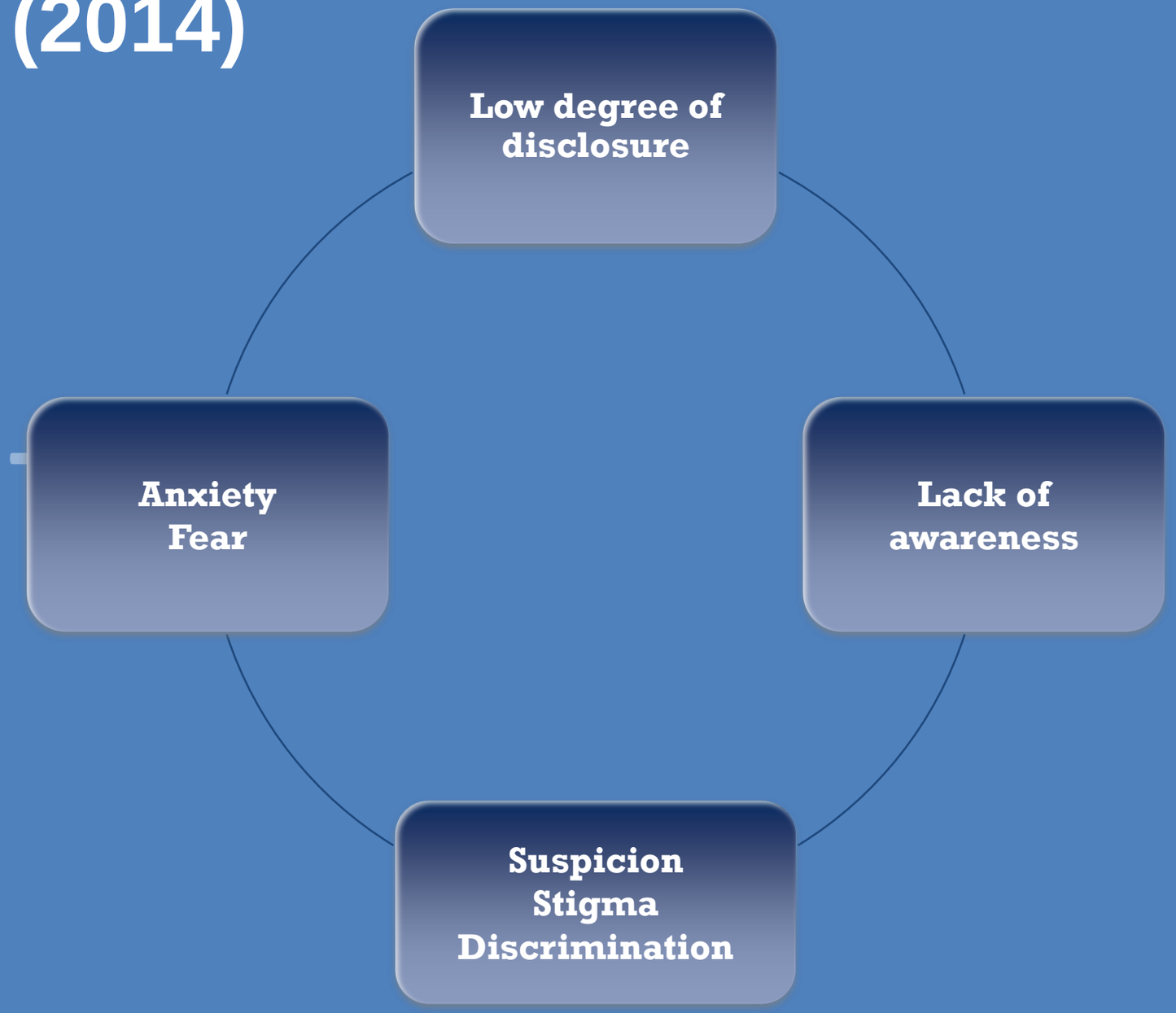
# Visibility Management
## Iantaffi (2014)



- Qualitative findings:
  - -Polyam as identity:
    - *It is part of who I am, I don't think it affects or influences me per se*.
  - -Parenting as identity:
    - *Being a parent affects polyam experiences as the kids/family come first*.
- Quantitative findings:
  - -75% of polyam parents responding to survey had desired to disclose but only 21% had disclosed to kids (Watson & Watson, 1982)
  - -45% polyam parents responding to survey were not "out" to their children (Weber, 2002)

# POLYAM PARENTING VISIBILITY MANAGEMENT CYCLE

## Iantaffi (2014)



# Knowledge
## Haym, Blumer, & Prouty (2013)

- Gain knowledge of terminology & culture, but take a non-knowing stance & when in doubt ask (Zimmerman, 2012)
- Knowledge bases: compersion, jealousy, non-linear development, co-constructing relationships, terms change & vary, identity of partners & intersectionality of identities, etiology, agreements & contracting, etc…

# Skills
## Haym, Blumer, & Prouty (2013)

- Intake paperwork needs to be inclusive of non-monogamous individuals & relational systems
- Languaging
- Use appropriate models and interventions
- Get more continuing education, training, & consultation to increase competency
- Longer joining process
- Spend additional time on confidentiality
- Time management & scheduling
- Increase in number co-providers
- Increase in size of clinical space
- Longer clinical sessions
- Individual, couple (couples), and family (families) system sessions
- Psychological testing bias
- Contracting and documents
- Have polyam resources to share

# Monogamism Measure

**Twist, Haym, Prouty, & VandenBosch (2018)**

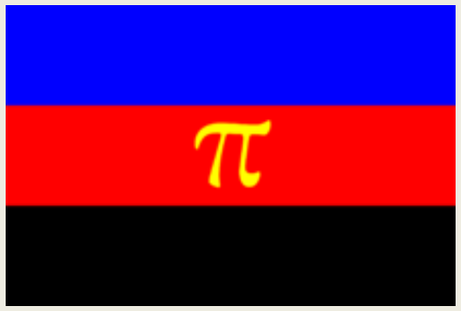
- Monogamism Measure: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14681994.2018.1526883

- Assess your level of monogamism on each of the areas of cultural humility/sensitivity—awareness, knowledge, and skills—and continue to assess and reassess as you become more polyam-aware in your practices to track your progress on your own managing monogamism.

- Identify polyamory-aware microskills, techniques, and models for working with relational orientation minority client systems.

# Microskill I
## Twist & Ansara (2017)

- **Creating a non-monogamist space**
- What kind of images and resources do you have in your space?
- How do you ask questions and take a history?
- How do you discuss people's sexuality, and relationships?
- How do you position yourself in "the system"?








# Microskill II

## Twist & Ansara (2017)

- **Relationship Cueing**
- How to establish a non-misidentifying environment? In real time in session? Outside of session?
- Forms, intake paperwork, etc?

# Microskill III

## Twist & Ansara (2017)

- **Determine salience**
- In their frame of reference, is presenting concern related to their non-monogamy?
- In their frame of reference, how do they see their non-monogamy?
- Is it a temporary state of being?
- Biological? Evolutionary? Cultural?
- An important core identity?
- A kink? Fetish?
- A meaningful experience?
- Tied to relationship(s) they are in?
- How does the family or relational system frame it? Similar? Different?

# Microskill IV
## Twist & Ansara (2017)

- **Validating the impact of monogamism**
- What's the problem with this statement - - - "I'm a woman in a relationship with another woman so I understand discrimination and stigma."

# Microskill V

## Twist & Ansara (2017)

- **Assessing and evaluating relationship constellation(s)**
- People in the room and outside of the room and how connected? (e.g., formal versus unacknowledged roles, paramour and metamour, etc.)
- How to include? Navigating needs and boundaries of all people in relational systems (e.g., emotional labor)
- Interconnected dynamics of relational systems

# Assessing Polyam General Presenting Concerns

## Haym, Blumer, & Prouty (2013); Weitzman (2006)

- Hesitant to seek help because of mononormativity, legal concerns, stigma, visibility/invisibility management, etc. (Altman & Ginat,1996).
- Defining who owns the problem?
- Concerns related to economics, adjustment/stress, etc.
- Milestones and growth tasks (stage of life, coming out, partner interest, dating, adding partners)
- Mismanaging polyam (new relationship energy & current partners, moving quickly, jealousy, overuse of veto power, triangulation, comparisons between partners, partners not liking each other, enthusiastic yes and nos)
- Polyamorous endings (time, needs, falling out of love, de-intensifying, non-linearity, monogamy)
- May experience similar struggles to sexual orientation minorities, blended families, parents of multiple children from various partners, and large families.

# Assessing Polyam Configurations Presenting Concerns

## Haym, Blumer, & Prouty (2013)

- Couples – sexual, power (Zimmerman, 2012), and fertility issues (Elbedour et al., 2001)
- Wives – anxiety, depression, and competition (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2006)
- Children - self-esteem, depression, aggression, and school problems (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2006)
- Familial – pride/shame issues, and visibility/invisibility management

# Assessing Polyam Children Presenting Concerns

## Haym, Blumer, & Prouty (2013)

- Ask about biological mother first
- Mother status effect on child
- Relationships with siblings, other mothers and other siblings
- Assure a voice for each child
- Each child is special
- Visibility/invisibility management

# Polyamory-Aware Model and Technique Suggestions

# Clinical Model Suggestions
## Haym, Blumer, & Prouty (2013)

- Family therapy and group family therapy (Al-Krenawi, 1998)
- Feminist-informed (Iantaffi, 2014)
- Polyamory-friendly (Barker, 2014)
- Conjoint therapy (get father involved) (Lander-Israel, 2013)
- Culturally sensitive and aware (Al-Krenawi, 1998)
- In-home family therapy
- Sex therapy conducted with individual, & couple(s) systems
- Systemic (LaSala, 2001)
- Contextual (fairness, checkbook)
- Structural (Al-Krenawi, 1998)



# Structural Family Therapy (Al-Krenawi, 1998)

- Especially helpful for polygamous configurations
- Defining and managing rules, roles, boundaries, system, and sub-systems/holons
- Rituals (overt/covert)
- Power, hierarchy, gender



# Suggested Clinical Techniques
## Haym, Blumer, & Prouty (2013)

- Strengths-based (same as monogamous families – focus on love, nurture, and support of family) (Altman & Ginat,1996)
- Enactments
- Focused genograms
- Family sculpting/sand trays
- Contracting and negotiating
- Family games and projects

+ Polyamcentric Role Play

# Polyamcentric Role Play
## Twist (2016)




- Watch the role play at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqE2VjPNBAU

- While watching be thinking about the microskills.

- Consider these questions:
  - What did the therapist do that was not helpful?
  - What are some of the microskills/affirming practices they should be using?

# Polyam Family Clinical Vignette

# Polyam Family Clinical Vignette

## Barker & Iantaffi (2014)

Ben, Jo, and Bo are looking for a family therapist because one of their children, Jay (8 years old), is being teased at school. They are currently parenting four children, ranging from 3 to 17 years old, and have been together for 22 years. They have some experience with therapy individually but have never gone to therapy together. They are very nervous because they have heard stories of child protection services being called on polyam families who sought therapy. However, they want support for Jay, who is wetting the bed at night and keeps looking for excuses to not go to school. Ben is particularly concerned as he experienced bullying in grade school and what is happening with Jay is very triggering for him.

# Polyam Family Clinical Vignette Questions to Consider

## Russo-Mitma, Blumer, Haym, Prouty, & VandenBosh (2013)

- What kind of polyam relational system do you think is being portrayed in this vignette? Do you need this answer to be helpful?
- How would you go about helping this family? What factors would you decide to focus on or ask about? What then would be your first steps, given the limited information you have here?
- What are your hypotheses of the key issues for this family system? What information would you like to find out more about in order to formulate initial therapeutic goals with this family, and how would you ask about this information?
- What some of the assessment considerations reviewed today that stand out to you as being essential to consider in working with this family system affirmingly?
- Who would you include in clinical work (i.e., the whole family, sub-systems within the family, only adults, etc.)? What resources would you suggest that this family connect with, if any? Who might you consult with to assist you on this case, if anyone?

# Polyam Family Clinical Vignette Questions to Consider

## Russo-Mitma, Blumer, Haym, Prouty, & VandenBosh (2013)

- Which of the microskills reviewed today stands out to you as being most relevant in working with this family system affirmingly?
- Which therapeutic modalities and clinical technique suggestions discussed today would you use? How come? Are there therapy models you would avoid using—how come?
- In what ways might your own self-of-the-therapist factors (i.e., cultural background, assumptions, values, biases, relational orientation, privileges, etc.) affect your work with this family? How would you go about managing these factors so that you can practice more affirmingly?
- How would you respond to Ben, Jo and Bo's concerns about the negative stories they have heard from other polyam families about therapy?
- Generally speaking, how would/do you practice in ways that are polyam-affirming, in your practice currently? What can you do to becoming more polaym-affirming in your practice in general?

# Of Note

- Thanks to COSRT for hosting me and this master class!

- Full references list available upon request.

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Merci beaucoup
Danke
Thank You
お疲れ様
Gracias
Grazie
Dank u
Obrigada
谢谢你
Thanks