

# Open to Love

## Polyamory and the Black American

CHRISTOPHER N. SMITH,  
*Howard University, Washington, DC*

**ABSTRACT**—It is estimated that 4% to 5% of the adult population within United States are openly engaging in polyamorous style relationships. Black Americans are substantially underrepresented in that percentage. This composition discusses polyamory and how polyamorous relationship structures may be beneficial in black community building, restoration and strengthening efforts. The first section focuses on polyamory, its history, manifestations, and theory. The second section dissects Black American social conditions throughout American history. The third section discusses polyamory and its implementation within the Black American community. The fourth section highlights a personal interview with a Black American polyamorous woman to provide intimate insight into life as a polyamorous Black American.

**KEYWORDS**—polyamory, Black, open relationships

**CONTACT**—Correspondence for this article should be addressed to Christopher Smith, 705 Quincy Street NW Washington, D.C., 20011 or [tenabilitymovement@gmail.com](mailto:tenabilitymovement@gmail.com).

## Approaching the “Norm”

**M**ONOGAMY, THE CONDITION OR PRACTICE OF HAVING A SINGLE mate during a period of time, is presented as the norm in American culture. Peruse through social media, legal documentation, court precedent and popular television will easily reveal that monogamy is promoted as the “natural” hegemonic relationship ideology. Mono-normative constructions and values still dominate even the most sexual and gender “alternative” relationship structures. However, upon closer inspection, the actual practice of monogamy by the American population, currently and historically, may display trends counter intuitive to monogamy as “natural.”

A key aspect of the mono-normative relationship structures is the agreement to sexual and emotional fidelity between partners. In studies focused to the United States population however, it was revealed that 60% of men and 50% of women have had sex with others outside of the relationship while married (Vangelisti and Gerstenberger, 2004). The CDC/NCHS National Vital Statistics System which reports that in 2014 the marriage rate was 6.9 per 1,000 total population and divorce rate was 3.2 per 1,000 total population; nearly half the marriage rate. Of divorces, the Institute for Divorce Financial Analysts surveyed 191 certified divorce financial analyst professionals from across North America and found that 28% were due to infidelity.

In American samples it has been demonstrated that approximately 4% to 5% of people are currently openly involved in consensual non monogamous relationships (Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2011). Consensual non monogamy (CNM) is considered a relationship orientation in which all involved parties are knowledgeable of and consent, to an agreed upon degree, to other involved parties romantically/intimately interacting emotionally, mentally, and/or physically with other parties. CNM includes the relationship structure Polygamy, the practice or custom of only one party having more than one female and/or male mate at the same time. Polygamy’s two specific manifestations, Polygyny, the practice or custom where only a man has more than one male and/or female mate at the same time; and Polyandry, the practice or custom where only a woman has more than one male and/or female mate at the same time. CNM incorporates Polyamory as well, “a form of association in which people openly maintain multiple romantic, sexual and/or affective relationships” (Emens, 2004). Although mono-

normative structures may be the culturally accepted ideology, in practice it may be that adherence to the norm is not as “natural” as assumed.

To be clear, monogamy can be a healthy relationship orientation. The monogamous ideology, like any other ideology, can be and is beneficial to the people whom adhere to it with integrity, purpose, honesty, effective communication and transparency. A reality however may be that human interactions, defined as romantic or otherwise, transcend binary based relational perspectives that are often propagated. Not all structures provide the same economic and relational benefits and fulfillment for all people. Possibly the most appropriate approach to relationships is flexibility and acceptance of various models.

Additionally, though this composition’s primary focus is the “Black” American, there is significance in discussing CNM relationships that are not in the “black” racial context popularized today; meaning only African or of African descent. Foremost, popular understanding is grossly misinformed concerning “race” and ancestry. “Racial” designations are social constructions, institutionalized in the 18th century, based on phenotypical traits, limited and used to classify humans. Similar phenotypical traits do not necessitate similar ancestry. Evidence for this stance arises when considering the ethnic additions to the “white” and “black” racial categories in America and many other “western” countries over the centuries. A “white” person may mean someone who is Irish, German, Scottish, British, and even fairer skinned Spaniards, Latinos and Africans. Similarly, “black” may mean someone who is African, dark skin Latino, dark skin Indian; half African, half Irish; one-third African, one-third Irish and one-third Native American; and the list continues. Therefore, attempts to connect “race” with ancestry are erroneous at worst, troublesome at best and do not accurately account for the ancestral genetic quagmire that is a human.

Furthermore, historical accuracy is paramount when discussing humanity. In paleoanthropology, the African origin of modern humans, also called the “Out of Africa” theories (OOA), single- origin hypotheses (RSOH) and African origin models (RAO), are the dominant model of the geographic origin and early migration of anatomically modern humans; *Homo sapiens*. According to this model, modern humans originated in Africa and started to disperse through the world roughly 50,000 to 100,000 years ago. Recent single origin of modern humans in East Africa was cited as the scientific consensus as of the mid-2000s (Liu 2006). Accordingly, all humans, from Finland to Australia, the Federated States of Micronesia to China, Mongolia

to Brazil, Russia to the Maldives and all in-between are technically of African descent. Consequently, it is imperative to account for all “races”, “ethnicities”, “genders”, sexes and whatever other designations that exists when discussing CNM relationships.

Presenting phenotypically and experientially similar examples to communities when communicating a message that is meant to inform, challenge and inspire is undeniably important. Just as undeniable and direly overdue is the need to discontinue rhetoric and actions, in all communities, that accept fallible created constructs as absolute truths and promotes the destructive relationship cycles we have been plagued with. For this article to serve its purpose it does not and will not exclusively include “black” voices, “black” examples and “black” materials. All “communities” can learn, develop and progress from the examples lived and set by other “communities”. Hope, leadership, guidance, insight, love and inspiration should not be and cannot be solely contingent upon human made classifications.

### Historical and Current Manifestations of Consensual Non Monogamy

Consensual non monogamous relationship structures are not anomalies. Anthropological documentation time and again highlights their existence throughout human history across the planet. The Oneida community, founded by John Humphrey Noyes in 1848 in what is now considered upstate New York, is an example of a polyamorous relationship structure. Noyes established a system of “complex marriage”, in which “each male was theoretically married to each female, and where each regarded the other as either a brother or a sister” (Muncy, 1973). This rejection of monogamous marriage was intended to offer an alternative to “the monogamous relation which fostered exclusiveness and selfishness, and worked to counter communism” (Muncy, 1973). Children similarly lived together in communal children houses. Parents were not permitted to show special affection to their own children, but were instead mandated to treat all children of the community equally.

The Mosuo ethnic group, often called the Na, are matriarchal society located in the Yunnan province in China that has practiced a form of polyamory called “Zou Hun,” translated to “walking marriages,” for centuries. It is so called because the men will walk to the house of their ‘partner’ at night, but return to their own home in the morning. The Mosuo generally live in

large extended families, with many generations all living together within the same house. For the most part, everyone lives within communal quarters, without private bedrooms or living areas. However, women between certain ages can have their own private bedrooms (Anon, 2006).

Traditionally, a Mosuo woman who is interested in a particular man will invite him to come and spend the night with her in her room. Such pairings are generally conducted secretly, so the man will walk to her house after dark, spend the night with her, and return home early the next morning. While it is possible for a Mosuo woman to change partners as often as she likes and in fact, having only one sexual partner would be neither expected nor common, the majority of such couplings will actually be more long term. (Anon, 2006)

Most significantly, when children are born, the father may have little or no responsibility for his offspring. If a father does want to be involved with the upbringing of his children, he will bring gifts to the mother's family, and state his intention to do so. Every man will share responsibilities in caring for all children born to women within their own family, be they a sister, niece, aunt, etc. In fact, children will grow up with many "aunts" and "uncles," as all members of the extended family share in the duties of supporting and raising the children. (Anon, 2006)

The result, as different as it may be from other systems, is a family structure which is extremely stable. Divorce is a non-issue, there are no questions over child custody (the child belongs to the mother's family), no splitting of property (property is never shared), and if a parent dies, there is still a large extended family to provide care. (Anon, 2006)

Polyandry has existed throughout human history in many localities. Among the Irigwe of Northern Nigeria, women have traditionally acquired numerous spouses called "co-husbands." The Irigwe have 25 agnatically organized "sections" each with a ritual speciality of vital importance to the tribe, often pertaining to the tribe's yearly cycle of ceremonials regulating subsistence agriculture and hunting activities. Twenty-four of these sections and their subdivisions are united by an elaborate two-tiered network of consanguineal and affinal ties including co-husband relationships. These ties result from their traditional marriage system which prescribes both primary and secondary marriages while prohibiting section "brothers" from becoming co-husbands, and also prohibits co-husbands from sharing more than. (Sangree, 1980)

Girls characteristically start rounds of marriages soon after puberty, and

usually a year or more passes before they first become pregnant. During this period each new marriage brings a girl kudos from her pleased father, her female age peers, and possibly increased marriage interest from young. Once pregnant, a wife remains with the husband she is currently residing with until after the infant's successful delivery. That husband becomes recognized as the legitimate father and if their child lives, the woman's pattern of marriage mobility changes. The infant's health, and that of subsequent infants she bears, is the principal concern directing her future marriage alliances and choice husband to live with at any given time. However, this does not bring an end to further marriages. (Sangree, 1980) Additionally, 53 societies, outside of the 28 known societies that polyandry experts note in one classical area, the classical Himalayan and Marquesean area, also permit polyandrous unions. (Starkweather, 2012)

Polygyny is the most commonly identified consensual non monogamous relationship structure. In Russia, several adult partners are not punishable in accordance with Criminal Code of Russia and Code of the Russian Federation on Administrative Offenses revisions. Though multiple marriages can't be registered and officially recognized by Russian authorities due to the Family Code of Russia, polygamy is tolerated in predominantly Muslim republics such as Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan. (Osborn, 2006) Ramzan Kadyrov, President of the Chechen Republic, supported by Nafigallah Ashirov, the Chairman of the Council of Grand Muftis of Russia, stated on the radio that legalizing polygamy is justifiable due to depopulation; a consequence of war. Russian politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy offered to legalize polygyny to encourage population growth and correct the demographic crisis of Russians. Zhirinovskiy first proposed to legalize polygyny in 1993, after Kadyrov's declaration that he would introduce an amendment to legalize polygyny for all Russian citizens. (BBC, 2006)

Presently, polyamorous and other CNM communities exist openly in many localities in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Russia and Europe. In the USA, the polyamorous and CNM movement has achieved a high degree of organization. Region based meet ups, lifestyle groups, and online communities have arisen almost everywhere. The social media venues such as Facebook, the Polyamorist Dating App and FetLife contain hundreds of poly centered groups, both secret and public, that function as safe havens for dialogue, relationship building and partner meetings. Some of these groups membership number over twenty thousand and have intersect-

ing focuses such as “Black and Poly,” “Latino and Poly,” “Disabled and Poly,” and “Intersectional Polyamory.”

United States based organizations, such as the Loving More Nonprofit Inc., the Woodhull Freedom Foundation and the Relationship Equality Foundation, have organized to support the polyamorous community. The Loving More Nonprofit Inc., whose mission is to educate people about and support polyamory as a valid choice in loving relationships and family lifestyle, has sponsored annual polyamory conferences, retreats and educational events for over 27 years. These educational efforts have now grown to include two hotel conferences known as “Poly Living” on the East and West Coasts, the annual Loving More Retreat in upstate New York, and the Loving Choices one-day seminars around the country. Loving More Inc. also sponsors classes, workshops, and support groups, and runs an online bookstore.

The Woodhull Freedom Foundation works to advance the recognition of sexual, gender, & family diversity and improve the well-being, rights and autonomy of every individual thru advocacy, education and action. Named after Victoria Woodhull, this organization runs the “Family Matters Project,” which is dedicated to advancing and protecting the fundamental human right to family by eliminating discrimination based on family structure and relationship choices. Woodhull lobbies at the State and local levels for sexual freedom, ensuring that the issues include a focus on human rights that is often missing from political debates. Woodhull works collaboratively with other organizations, even at the level of the United Nations, to advance and affirm sexual freedom as a fundamental human right. It conducts trainings and provides workshops on the integration of the human rights framework into existing advocacies. Additionally, it hosts the annual Sexual Freedom Summit where the “Vicki Awards” are presented to recognize phenomenal individuals for their extraordinary personal achievements in advancing sexual rights and freedom.

The Relationship Equality Foundation’s (REF), a Georgia based advocacy organization, purpose is to provide outreach, education, and support for those involved in or seeking relationships with non-traditional structures as well as education and outreach to the general public about these relationships. The REF is run by individuals directly from the communities they serve and dedicate their time, energy, and passion to advance a cause that affects all those around them. The REF hosts and supports many events across the country, including Atlanta Poly Weekend, sends representatives to con-

ferences to promote our organization, and maintains relationship educators available who can to attend and teach workshops.

### What is Polyamory?

Polyamory, the combination of the Greek word forming element poly-meaning multi or many and the Latin word forming element-amory meaning love. As previously stated, Polyamory is often described as “a form of association in which people openly maintain multiple romantic, sexual and/or affective relationships” (Emens, 2004). Polyamory endorses the values of shared knowledge, integrity, and consent. Although polyamory is the accepted colloquial term, linguistics dictates that Greek and Latin word forming elements should not be mixed. Therefore, the linguistically correct terminology for this relational ideology would be either “Multiamory” in Latin or “Polyphilia” in Greek. In this exposition, polyamory will be the term used to identify the relational structures in discussion.

It is a core principle of polyamory that both men and women can enter multiple partnerships, which distinguishes it from patriarchal polygyny, the most common practice of polygamy worldwide (Sheff, 2005). The structures that spawn from these values, due to their open, equity and/or equality focused nature, may even manifest multi-partner relationships that raise children, a fact which adds to the complexity of polyamorous relationships or family networks (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2010; Sheff, 2010). Additionally, there can be patterned multiplicity with research indicating that rule-based prioritization (e.g. around primary/ secondary partner distinctions) is quite common (Klesse, 2007). Nonetheless, the number of people in poly relationships has no theoretical limit, therefore models of poly relationships are also theoretically limitless making rigid typologies unhelpful (Emens, 2004).

### Theory Concerning Polyamory

Due to the cutting-edge nature of polyamorous research there are very few theoretical constructs that effectively and accurately account for polyamorous structures with human society. Dr. Sari M. van Anders, associate professor in the Departments of Psychology & Women’s studies Neuroscience, Reproductive sciences, and Science, Technology, and Society programs at the University of Michigan, is a researcher and scholar that has arguably



made immense strides in this field. In her 2015 paper entitled, *Beyond Sexual Orientation: Integrating Gender/Sex and Diverse Sexualities via Sexual Configurations Theory*, she integrates gender/sex and diverse sexualities into one fluid construct which provides a thorough explanation of human sexual, relational, sex & gender constructs and identification.

In her paper, Dr. van Anders explains how sexual orientation typically describes people's sexual attractions or desires based on their sex relative to that of a target. However, despite its utility, sexual orientation has been critiqued in part because it fails to account for non-biological gender-related factors, partnered sexualities unrelated to gender or sex, or potential divergences between love and lust. In this article, she proposed the Sexual Configurations Theory (SCT) as a testable, empirically grounded framework for understanding diverse partnered sexualities, separate from solitary sexualities.

Dr. van Anders believes that Sexual Configurations Theory (SCT) changes existing understandings and conceptualizations of sexuality in constructive and generative ways informed by both biology and culture; and that it is a potential starting point for sexual diversity studies and research. With SCT, Dr. van Anders focuses on and provides models of two parameters of partnered sexuality, gender/sex and partner number; delineates individual gender/sex; discusses a sexual diversity lens as a way to study the particularities and generalities of diverse sexualities without privileging either; and discusses how sexual identities, orientations, and statuses that are typically seen as misaligned or aligned are more meaningfully conceptualized as branched or co-incident.

In reference to polyamory, her model concerning partner number sexuality, partner number eroticism, and partner number nurturance is the most applicable. Partner number sexuality refers to the number of partners people have or are interested in having. The concept of partner number sexuality is sometimes called relational identity, relationship orientation, or is folded into sexual orientation or sexual identity. However, to Dr. van Anders these terms may fail to identify the particular variable of interest, and therefore, are less useful for science than they might be. Most theories of sexuality focus on eroticism as the defining feature of sexual orientation but, as has been theoretically and empirically demonstrated, nurturance is also implicated even in traditional understandings of sexual orientation. Partner number eroticism and partner nurturance are used by Dr. van Anders to acknowledge that some people's attractions and/or statuses can be partitioned separately into nurtur-

ance and eroticism; as well as map out both orientations, how many sexual, erotic and/or nurturing partners one would like to have, and statuses, how many sexual, erotic and/or nurturing partners one does have.

Dr. van Anders uses a step-by-step process to describe how partner number sexuality is built from various dimensions; partner number eroticism and nurturance mirror this explanation. One dimension is sexual partner number type, which has two levels: binary and nonbinary. Binary partner number sexuality refers to orientations toward having one sexual partner, multiple sexual partners, or either; sexual partner number openness. Sexual partner number openness refers to sexualities that are oriented more towards the specific partner(s) than the partner number: for example, a person at sexual partner number openness might be “happy” to have one partner or many, depending on the partner(s). This to Dr. van Anders is continuous, such that people can be polar or somewhere in-between. In terms of statuses, a person could be partnered with one person, multiple people, or be in a more ambiguous location of sexual openness, where partner number is not so clear cut. There are many cases where partner numbers are ambiguous, including differing degrees of commitment or contact, timescales, and plans.

Like sexual partner number openness, multiple sexual partners could refer to a number of things. It may refer to having multiple sexual partners over a discrete time period. It may be an orientation towards having multiple sexual partners during the same event. It also could refer to wanting multiple sexual partners in a series. Though one could easily demarcate a numerical preference or status, Dr. van Anders considers sexual configurations to be more about the presence of multiplicity than its count. Partner number sexuality above one may be less a function of how many partners one wants than how many partners with whom one can cope or be meaningfully connected.

In Dr. van Anders article, her model depicts the binary sexual partner number of one and multiple sexual partners as somewhat near each other, but separated by a gap. Dr. van Anders purposely leaves this separation because orientations towards only one or multiple sexual partners are conceptually more specific than orientations that are open, and the gap is actually closed by nonbinary partner number sexuality. Nonbinary sexual partner number refers to orientations that exist outside of mononormativities and polynormativities. There are multiple locations in nonbinary sexual partner number; one of these is sexual partner number challenge.

Dr. van Anders explains sexual partner number challenge as orientations

that are not identified as normative for one or multiple sexual partner numbers and challenge, transcend, or destabilize this dichotomy. Examples are monoamorously partnered individuals who have internet sex with others, multiply partnered individuals who engage in different sexual activities with each partner, and/or people who engage in penetrative sexual activities with one partner and non-penetrative sexual activities with others. Sexual partner number challenge does not necessarily reference action or intentionality. People might self-position and/or be positioned by others in ways that may overlap or not. For this reason, sexual partner number challenge is separated from one and multiple sexual partner numbers by contingent norm boundaries in her model.

Contingent norms boundaries are margins between one and multiple sexual partner numbers and sexual partner number challenge. Dr. van Anders acknowledges that who is counted as having one or multiple sexual partners is largely contingent and subjective, rather than universal. Accordingly, these contingent norm boundaries are malleable, permeable, and moveable. In her model there are gradations of nonbinary partner number sexuality with lines of isospecificity intersecting sexual partner number and ending at the contingent norm boundaries. Accordingly, a person at the very middle point of sexual partner number challenge in the models might have an orientation that completely challenges both one and multiple sexual partner norms, whereas a person closer to the multiple sexual partners contingent norm boundary in the models might have an orientation that fits more closely with norms around multiple sexual partners; however this positionality is culturally relative.

In Dr. van Anders' model the straight lines of isospecificity from sexual partner number challenge join up at all sexual partner numbers, another location in nonbinary sexual partner number. All sexual partner numbers also refer to orientations that challenge sexual partner number norms, and are rooted in a pluralistic view of partnered sexualities. Here, too, in the model there is a gradation from binary to nonbinary shown via the curved lines of isospecificity radiating out from the perimeter to all sexual partner numbers. A person at all sexual partner numbers might be open to any form of sexual partner number configuration. A person intermediately between all sexual partner numbers and the left-most side of the circle in the model might be oriented considerably to one sexual partner, somewhat to multiple sexual partners, and somewhat to sexual partner numbers that challenge partner number norms.

Both sexual partner number challenge and all sexual partner numbers represent nonbinary gender/sex in specificity. High specificity marks sexual partner number challenge, which is a specific (nonbinary) orientation to a specific sexual partner number. Low specificity marks all sexual partner numbers, which is a nonspecific (nonbinary) orientation to any and all formations. Sexual partner number challenge and all sexual partner numbers in the model thus are located at opposite ends of a specificity continuum. Similarly, high specificity marks being oriented to one or multiple sexual partners, which is a specific (binary) orientation. Low specificity marks sexual partner number openness, which is a nonspecific (binary) orientation. Orientations to one or multiple sexual partners or to a specific kind of sexual partner number challenge are similar in high specificity. Orientations to sexual partner openness or all sexual partners are similar in low specificity.

In her model, partner number sexuality involves several overlapping dimensions in partner number sexuality type; binary/nonbinary and a specificity dimensions. It also shows a third dimension: sexual partner number strength. Sexual partner number strength refers to how strongly sexual partner number matters to one's partnered sexuality, and ranges from highly allosexual (100%) to nonallosexual 15 (0 %). At nonallosexual, sexual partner number ceases to be relevant to partnered sexuality.

Like allosexual, nonallosexual could refer to status or orientation. One could have no sexual partners or contacts or have no interest in sexual contacts or partners. A person could have an allosexual orientation and a nonallosexual status; wanting but not having partnered eroticism. A person could also have a non allosexual orientation and an allosexual status; not wanting but having partnered sexuality. In the model, allosexuality has gradations, this is shown via the repeated allosexuality type disc vertically iterated. Thus, at any non-zero degree of allosexuality, a person has a partner number sexuality type; for example, allosexuality could have minor importance to a person even as their orientation is only towards one sexual partner.

In using constructs like Dr. van Anders's Sexual Configuration Theory relationship complexity can be approached in a logical and multivariate accountable manner. Binary, non-binary, erotic, nurturing and sexual partner numbers (all important aspects within polyamorous relationships) are considered facilitating sound relational understanding. Dr. van Anders, SCT and similar theories are able to map out some existing identities, and detail its applied implications for health and counseling work. Additionally, it can highlight its importance for sexuality in terms of measurement & social

neuroendocrinology and the ways it may be useful for self-knowledge, feminist & queer empowerment, and alliance building.

## The Black American?

The 2014 US Census Bureau estimated 45,672,250 African Americans in the United States meaning that 14.3% of the total American population, 318.9 Million, is labeled Black. The Black American demographic has been subjected to systemic abuse, social humiliation, familial destruction and economic deprivation. There have been considerable progressions in treatment of, opportunities for, and recognition of the contributions and achievements of Black Americans that should be highlighted and lauded. These positive progressions however do not negate the internal wounds and social impairments caused by European colonization that have not healed and/or been properly rectified. The legacies and impact of slavery, segregation, the purposeful destruction of prosperous Black communities, like “Black Wall Street” June 1, 1921 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the current police brutality issues still stain the evolving Black American community. It is quite conceivable that the Black American demographic may suffer from a form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The Black American demographic has existed in America under European and “White” American control for 397 years. For 246 years (approximately 62% of the total time) the Black American demographic was subject to an abusive and inhuman form of slavery that purposely attempted to cripple its familial, economic, emotional, mental, social and spiritual (as noted in the introductory quote from the Willie Lynch letter for this section) life. For 89 years (approximately 22% of the total time) the Black American demographic existed in the United States in a state of direct public discrimination, neglect from governmental and private structures; multilevel abuse for the American public and second class citizenship. It has only been for 62 years (approximately 16% of the total time) that Black Americans have been considered “equal” citizens even though noticeable economic disparities, discriminations, and social injustices still exist to this day nationwide.

Table 1 demonstrates that the median income disparities between the Black American families and all the United States families. This disparity applies to median income and the percentage of the population that falls into those familial categories. Strikingly, the Black American demographic makes up a substantially smaller population of families in the United States,

Table 1. Black Family Income

	Blacks	All US
Families	8,763,279	76,509,262
Median Family Income (\$)	\$40,946	\$62,527
Married-Couple Family	43.9%	72.9%
Median Income (\$)	\$65,914	\$76,035
Male Householder, No Spouse Present	9.7%	7.3%
Median Income (\$)	\$33,860	\$42,588
Female Householder, No Spouse Present	46.3%	19.8%
Median Income (\$)	\$25,594	\$30,486

Source: US Census Bureau, 2012 American Community Survey.

Table 2. Individual Black Income

	Blacks	All US
Individuals	39,623,138	313,914,040
Per Capita Income (\$)	\$18,102	\$27,319
<i>Mean Earnings (\$) for Full-Time, Year-Round Workers</i>		
Male	\$46,357	\$64,650
Female	\$40,473	\$47,001
<i>Median Earnings (\$) for Full-Time, Year-Round Workers</i>		
Male	\$37,526	\$47,473
Female	\$33,251	\$37,412

Source: US Census Bureau, 2012 American Community Survey.

however, it has higher male and female single parent household percentages than the national average, and has a median income \$5000 to \$10000 less than the national median average in both male and female single parent household categories. Additionally, the Black American demographic has a lower married couple family percentage than the national average, maintains a median income almost \$10000 below the national median average, and in the cumulative family category maintains a median family income almost \$12000 below the national average.

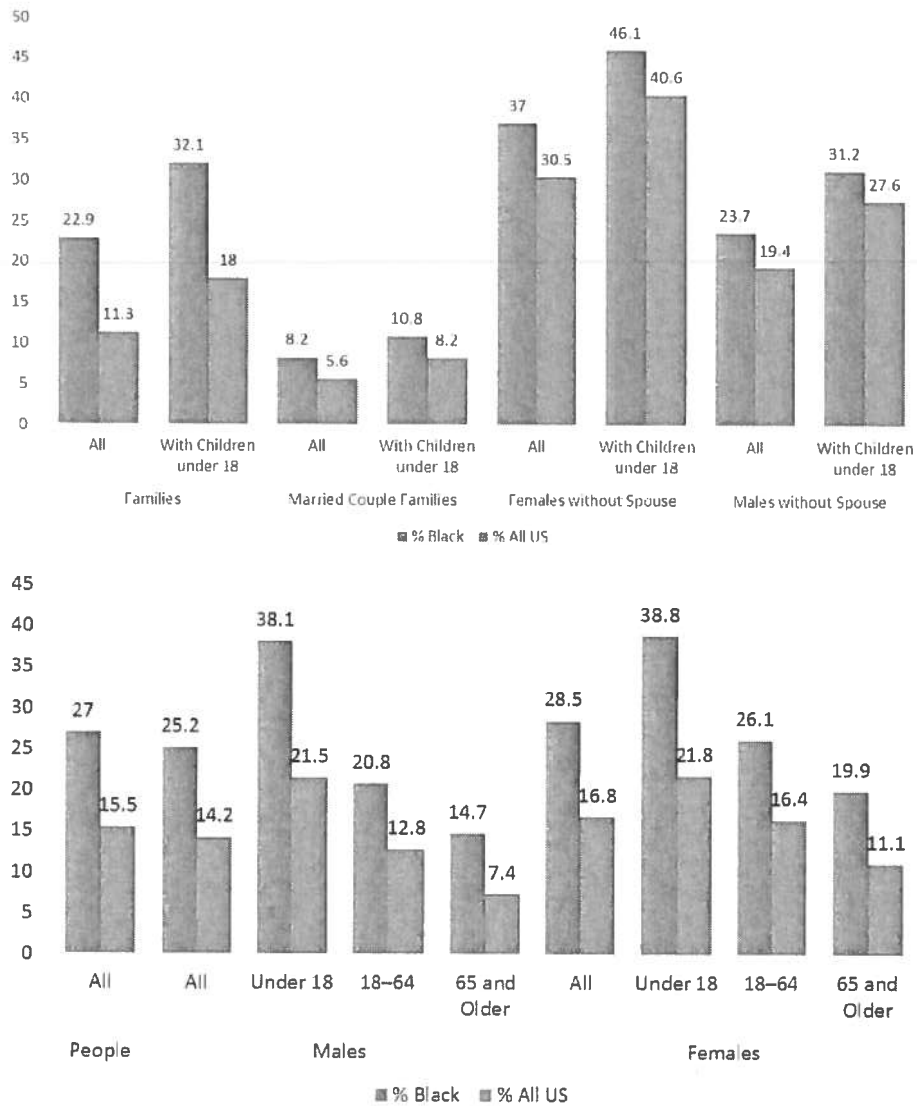


Fig. 1a & b. Black Poverty Rates

Table 2 demonstrates the disparities that exist between the Black individual mean and median income and the United States mean and median income. Black Americans cumulatively, regardless of gender, earn almost \$10000 less per capita than the rest of the United States, only \$6000 away from the U.S. Census Bureau One Person Poverty Threshold, 2014 of \$12,071. In the mean and median earnings, for full time year round workers, the Black American regardless of sex earns less. The Black female mean and median earnings are closer to the national female mean and median aver-

Table 3. Black Marriage Trends

(15 and older) 2010	<i>African American</i>			<i>Other Races</i>
	All	Female	Male	
Now Married	32%	28.7%	35.8%	51.3%
Widowed	6.2%	9.1%	2.7%	5.9%
Divorced	10.9%	12.4%	9.1%	9.8%
Separated	4.1%	4.6%	3.5%	2.3%
Never Married	46.8%	45.2%	48.8%	30.7%

Source: US Census Bureau: 2010 America's Families and Living Arrangements.

ages, though they are still \$4000 to \$7000 less. The Black male mean and median incomes are \$10000 to \$18000 less than the national male mean and median averages.

Considering the statistics presented in Tables 1 & 2, it should be no surprise that the results from Figure 1a & 1b mirror the trend. In all categories, individual and family type based, the Black American community has higher poverty rates than the national average rates. The issue of income and poverty in the Black American community is just a small piece of the picture unfortunately. In resource ownership, incarceration, educational attainment, business ownership, and marriage trends (Table 3), the Black American community has close to the worst percentages in the United States.

The unfortunate reality is that despite the progressions that have been made, the Black American community still suffers as a demographic in the United States. There is no one factor or variable that can completely shift the tide of this reality. Collaborations in systemic, systematic, and individual forces led to the manifestation of these trends. Naturally, it will take those same collaborations to turn the tide on these disparities. In social scientific inquiry, familial structure and familial health have been highly considered and utilized variables in research centering on social, health, education, and economic trends. Accordingly, challenging interested professionals and researchers to critically analyze how diverse relational configurations may positively or negatively impact familial health may be an appropriate starting point.



## Polyamory: Another Avenue of Attack

To counteract the intentional and unintentional damage done to the “Black” American population by European colonization and the self-defeating relational narratives that have partially spawned from it, Polyamory may be a suitable tool. Non-monogamous committed relationships, like polyamory, offer a great opportunity to overcome attachment and its allies, such as jealousy, greed and hatred. In polyamory, jealousy can be perceived as a conquerable by product of fear and attachment that is destructive to relational health and freedom. It is a reality that human interactions may develop strong attachments through sexual, mental, emotional and/or other experiential connective opportunities though they may already be in “relationship” with another. This reality’s consideration or manifestation may lead a person to fear being minimized, deemed unimportant, labeled insufficient and/or fear that their relationship is in jeopardy. This perception, if unchecked, develops the emotion termed “jealousy.” Jealousy in turn may manifest relationship sabotaging actions and reactions (i.e. communication breakdowns, avoidance, oppressive ultimatums, aggression, stress, distrust, stalking, lowered self-esteem, depression etc.) that may irreversible damage the relationships health, longevity and the individual.

In the downloadable booklet on Buddhism and Polyamory Zen practitioner H.E Hoogstra argues that suffering in relationships is caused by attachment, not the sexual behavior itself in any intrinsic sense. Recognizing the cycle, the polyamorous community promotes two key personal and relational characteristics. The first is compersion and the second is what I have come to term as “emotional self-responsibility.” Compersion is the genuine feeling of joy a partner feels when another partner invests in and takes pleasure in external romantic or sexual relationship. This is possible when deficit relational models that promotes “loving” a person as desiring to them limit them are challenged and abundance relational models that promote “loving” a person as desiring to see them have all they desire and need are embraced. Emotional self-responsibility is the conscious act of dissecting one’s own perceptions and orientations to locate the foundations of their existence, communicate them, and come to solutions without projecting blame upon the external stimuli. In collaboration, compersion and emotional self-responsibility allow the individual to combat fear through direct communication, grow to accept life’s temporary nature, respond to attachments and situations constructively, arrive at compromise based solutions, maintain

multiple relationships and maintain personal health. With processes set to handle jealousy, fear and attachment, polyamory can facilitate relationships that may drastically improve the quality of life in multiple arenas; a change direly needed in Black American community.

“Synergistic Economics,” a term used in the study of global economics and mergers, within the Black American family due to adherence to Polyamorous structures. In the book *Mergers, Acquisitions, and Corporate Restructurings* Patrick A. Gaughan explains;

The term synergy is often associated with the physical sciences rather than with economics or finance. It refers to the type of reactions that occur when two substances or factors combine to produce a greater effect together than that which the sum of the two operating independently could account for. For example, a synergistic reaction occurs in chemistry when two chemicals combine to produce a more potent total reaction than the sum of their separate effects. Simply stated, synergy refers to the phenomenon of  $2 + 2 = 5$ . In mergers this translates into the ability of a corporate combination to be more profitable than the individual parts of the firms that were combined.

The anticipated existence of synergistic benefits allows firms to incur the expenses of the acquisition process and still be able to afford to give target shareholders a premium for their shares. Synergy may allow the combined firm to appear to have a positive net acquisition value (NAV).

$$NAV = VAB - [VA + VB] - P - E \quad (4.1)$$

where:

VAB = the combined value of the two firms

VB = the value of B

VA = the value of A P = premium paid for B

E = expenses of the acquisition process

Reorganizing equation 4.1, we get:

$$NAV = [VAB - (VA + VB)] - (P + E)$$

The term in the brackets is the synergistic effect. This effect must be greater than the sum of  $P + E$  to justify going forward with the merger. If the bracketed term is not greater than the sum of  $P + E$ , the bidding firm will have overpaid for the target. What are to be considered synergistic effects? Some researchers view synergy broadly and include the elimina-

tion of inefficient management by installing the more capable management of the acquiring firm. Although it is reasonable to define synergy in this manner, this chapter defines the term more narrowly and treats management-induced gains separately. This approach is consistent with the more common uses of the term synergy.

The Black American families could engage in polyamorous parenting which allows poly relationships and families to pool resources, share parenting, and care responsibilities among multiple adults (Emens, 2004; Riggs, 2010; Sheff, 2010). This may create a synergistic economic atmosphere where each member of the family unit could gain beyond what they would individually financially, relationally and socially.

For example, instead of a one adult, two child household living off 25K a year living in a two to three-bedroom space, due to the fact that one man or woman had children with two different men or women. In a polyamorous family structure, there could be three adult, two child household, living communally in the same two to three-bedroom space with the three adults each making 25K increasing the monetary resources to 75K a year. The time spent caregiving could be split evenly; and the skills, strengths and specialties of the adults can be balanced with each adult's lesser strengths and insufficiencies to create an effective family management plan. As a by-product the adults may then enjoy increased time for personal cultivation and self-care which may decrease the likelihood of "burn out". Additionally, research suggests that multiple healthy influences on children may aid their learning and adjustment capabilities as they grow. This could dynamically assist in improving economic, educational, and criminal trends within the Black American community.

Lastly, the reasons why a person may engage in an open relationship are less about sex, and more about freedom and getting to know others. Marisa T. Cohen wrote a paper entitled *An Exploratory Study of Individuals in Non-traditional, Alternative Relationships: How "Open" Are We?* Her study examined the perceptions of 122 individuals who have been in or were currently in an open relationship. In terms of the best feature, most (44.3 %), selected the ability to experience new things, followed the ability to feel "free" and not to be "tied down" (18 %), and finally, being able to sexually satisfy yourself in other ways (11.5 %). Many (26.2 %) chose the open "other" and a common theme which appeared was the ability to feel fulfilled. From "other" choice the majority of the answers fell into four themes:

“Keeping your relationship with your partner fresh and preventing the slumps that often come with long term relationships”

“The ability to find more people who share different interests in my life and not feel stuck at just friends if there is mutual attraction”

“The ability to meet new people and get to know them intimately without breaking any expectations in your primary relationship”

“Living honestly, loving multiple people on a deep level” and “radical honesty”.

The prioritized focus on relational health, personal health, honesty, progression, relational depth, and community with sexual activities could be a positive influence on the Black American family’s strength and flexibility.

### Is it really that simple?

With any structure there are challenges and disadvantages that the practicing demographic must face and polyamory is no exception. The narrow sexually-focused socially propagated interpretation of sexual orientation fails to capture all of the intimate phenomena people actually use it to mean. Due to the assumptions of binary complementarity, a lens that is often uncritically imported from cultural value judgments into theories, there is unfair categorization of alternative relationships structures, particularly polyamory, as abnormal and/or deviant. This in turn forces the polyamorous people to challenge and redefine commonly held relational norms and concepts of respectability while facing the social consequences of doing so and attempting to live regular day to day lives.

There have not yet been any remarkable legal provisions which aim at safeguarding the recognition and equal treatment non-monogamous or polyamorous people, relationships or families (Bhattacharyya, 1998). The lack of consideration of alternative households and families leads to biased strategizing in planning which has negative implications among others for polyamorous households (Emens, 2004; Klesse, 2013). Bullying within neighborhoods is a not uncommon experience for poly families which is why suitable housing may present a significant problem (Andersson, 2007). Additionally, religiosity and/or generational moral codes that may be based off religious belief structures, particularly in the Black American communi-

ty, can cause internal dissonance, family disapproval and rejection, and form hostile environments for those in non-monogamous structures.

Research has shown that therapists associate non-monogamy with relationship dysfunction and individual psychopathology (Butler et al., 2010). Lack of awareness of and appreciation for non-traditional relationship patterns can have deleterious effects. Lack of objectivity, criticism and pathologization of individuals could cause damaged therapeutic alliances resulting in non-adherence, and poor patient outcomes. This is particularly problematic for the Black American community who already carries distrust for health care providers and organizations due to a dark history of abuse, misdiagnosis and life altering stigmatization by medical professionals on Black American community.

In the paper *Poly Economics—Capitalism, Class, and Polyamory* Christian Klesse points out that academic research and popular media on non-monogamy and polyamory has so far paid insufficient attention to class divisions and questions of political economy. This is striking since research indicates the significance of class and race privilege within many polyamorous communities. This structure of privilege is mirrored in the exclusivist construction of these communities. Additionally, Bourgeois nationalism construed monogamy and sexual respectability as the civilizational achievement of white Christians of European descent and the prerequisite of the higher classes. This went hand in hand with the denunciation of Black people and other ethnic or religious groups as oversexed and lacking of sound ethical standards. Therefore, Black people and working class people are likely to be exposed to grave stigmatization if they publicly assume non-monogamous identities (Mosse, 1985).

The polyamorous concept, though it has been practiced worldwide by multiple civilizations, is still a particularly new to American popular culture. When polyamorous images do appear on television or social media venues it is predominantly white Americans. There is only one YouTube series entitled *Compersion*, from the YouTube channel Enchant TV, that depicts the lives of a modern Black American family's journey into the practicing polyamory. Also, within the Black American community particularly, a community that is considered socially conservative and religiously oriented as mentioned prior, recognition of the term polyamory and actually having a comprehensive understanding of what it is may be farfetched.

On July 22nd, 2015 I released a survey monkey questionnaire web link concerning polyamory over the social media venue Facebook that I contin-

ue to collect responses from. It is comprised of 14 questions multiple choice questions with open answer “other” options for some questions. Since that date there has been 99 responses.

From those 99 responses collected so far, 95 out of 99 respondents identify as Black, African American or Black American. Concerning gender identity, the majority of the respondents identify as a woman, 60 out of 99, 37 out of 99 identify as a man and 2 identify as other. The largest age group is 21 to 29 years of age, 66 out of 99, and the second largest is 30 to 39, 21 out of 99. 76.76% of the respondent’s approximate household income were in the \$0-\$24,999, \$25,000-\$49,999 and \$50,000-\$74,999 groups, with the most, 31 out of 99, in the \$25,000-\$49,999 range; the second most 25 out of 99, in the \$0-\$24,999 range and the third most, 20 out of 99, in the \$50,000-\$74,999 range.

All the respondents have graduated High School and have at least one year of college. 42 out of 99 have graduated college and 25 of 99 have completed graduate school. 93 out of 99 are born in the United States, with the majority, 35 out of 99, hailing from the South Atlantic (Delaware, Maryland, District of Columbia, Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida); the second most, 22 out of 99, from the Middle Atlantic (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania); the third most, 15 out of 99, from the East North Central (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin); followed closely by the East South Central (Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi) with 10 out of 99.

Majority of the respondents 82 out of 99 have never been married. 45 out of 99 respondents have parents/guardians that have been married, 22 out of 99 respondents have parents/guardians that are divorced and 30 out of 99 respondents have parents/guardians that were never married. The majority of respondents identified as Christian (inclusive of those who identify as catholic, protestant, and/or inter/non-denominational) 75 out of 99 followed by 18 out of 99 that have no religious affiliation. Concerning sexual orientation, heterosexual identifying respondents made up 76 of the 99; heterosexual identifying respondents made up 5 of the 99; homosexual identifying respondents made up 5 of the 99; and bisexual identifying respondents made up 9 of the 99.

Out of the 99, only 72 have heard of the term polyamory before and of those 72 respondents 60 actually choose the “accurate” provided definition of polyamory (the state or practice of both partners having sexually intimate and/or emotionally intimate committed relationships during a period of time). Out of the list of options followed 10 who choose the definition of

polygyny (the state or practice of only the man being allowed to have multiple sexually intimate and/or emotionally intimate committed relationships during a period of time).

No valid statistically significant conclusions can be derived from this study as of yet due to insufficient sample size and the need for a more diverse sampling to properly represent Black American community. However, as more data is collected, inquiries concerning what factors may significantly impact knowledge and understanding of polyamory within the black community can lead to more thorough research studies. In turn, this research can inform programs, organizations and individuals where to focus efforts in order to improve awareness and advocacy for polyamory within the Black American community.

### What is it like living as a Black polyamorous American?

Through respondent assisted sampling via the “Black and Poly” Facebook group that has 5900 members and the “Polyamory” Facebook group which has over 27000 members, I interviewed 6 Black American men and women from across the United States. Each participant, between the ages 18–60, was given a consent form to sign with the option for anonymity. The interview questions were 10 open ended questions that could be answered via a 60-minute face to face audio recorded, 60-minute live recorded video chat or typed and emailed. Below is the full manuscript of the interview from one of the six participants in the study. This respondent is a middle aged Black woman from the west coast of the United States:

My introduction into polyamory was catching my parents having “orgy” type parties when I was younger. My parents were very sexual and they didn’t really hide it from my brother and me. We weren’t supposed to come out of our rooms but you already know that was like telling us to come out of our room. Between being exposed to that and being exposed to both of my parents’ infidelities, my takeaway as a young child was that this behavior is normal. I also was very fascinated about polygamy after Sunday school one day, the prospect that I could have a family with more than one wife always intrigued me and I always wanted a life similar to that. I say similar because I’ve known since I knew anything about my sexuality that I like girls and boys.

My personal transition into polyamory was messy. LOL My husband and I didn't really know what we were doing, we knew what we wanted, a dual relationship with a woman but that's as far as we went with it. We didn't make agreements; we didn't have a game plan it was just let's find someone that is willing and go from there. He ended up talking to an old girlfriend of his that had just gotten out of a 2-year relationship with a woman. He asked her point blank to date us and at first she flipped out on him and hung up the phone. I told him not to chase her because I didn't want someone to do it for any other reason than they wanted to. About 2 weeks later she contacted him and they talked about it seriously. She was hurt at first because she always thought they would end up together, but not in this way. However, she was open to meeting me so about 2 days after that she and I met at a restaurant and I immediately was drawn to her. She was very sweet, very open and vulnerable during that meeting. I think we both were, but what we both know is immediately we felt comfortable with each other and after that meeting which lasted about 2 1/2 hours, she told him she would try this. He always teases and says none of this would have been possible without me because he always felt I was the one that really won her over. When we started though, none of us were truly prepared for the myriad strong emotions we ended up feeling. Jealousy, envy, hurt, but at the same time joy and love. The feelings were so conflicting; there have been many moments where either she or I said we can't do this anymore. Partner 1 has been the glue that actually keeps us together and on course and I'm glad he has, I love both of them immensely, this is the first time I have ever loved a woman and I truly love her. The negative emotions have subsided as her and I have gotten to really know each other, we aren't out of the woods completely but we definitely are on that right track now.

Personal Growth for me from the initial experience until now has been getting to know aspects of myself that I didn't know existed or maybe never wanted to admit existed. I didn't realize I could be that jealous or envious of someone else. I never thought I would ever be intimidated by a woman in this kind of relationship. I have gained a lot of perspective on myself, I have matured greatly, I am learning patience and I have so much confidence in myself that I didn't have before. The most challenging aspect for me has been giving them time alone. I hate being alone and I went into this wanting to be a group more than having individual relationships. I think we are working towards that but stepping back and



allowing for her and he to develop in their own relationship without me has been my biggest challenge.

My partners are partner 1 and partner 2. Partner 1 is the one true love of my life thus far. When I fell in love with him, I truly realized what love really is. He has wanted nothing but for me to be whole, I was so broken when we met, broken from life, disappointments and a failed and abusive marriage. I was just a shell of a person when he began pouring love and light into me. Everything he learns about coping he passes to me. He has helped me stop drinking (alcoholic), he has helped me lose weight and keep it off, and he helped me heal and was instrumental in that healing. Partner 1 is a remarkable person who has the uncanny gift to inspire people to do things. The great thing about him is he never uses that gift for evil, at least not since I've met him. Partner 1 is in prison doing 20 to life for the murder of a teenager. Long story short he was abandoned by his drug addicted mother when he was 8 years old. She left him at a crack house. From there he entered foster care; a lady that lived across the street from the crack house noticed him and took him in. Partner 1 always longed for family and community so just like most kids in his predicament he fell in with a gang and as he has said to me a million times, he would have done anything for them because they basically took care of him. They fed him, gave him nice clothes, cars, whatever so when they asked him and 3 other members of the gang to kill a rival there was no question he was going to do it. One night in 1997 he and his friends found the guy they were looking for in a van and opened fire. What they didn't know was there were 2 girls who they knew from school in the van as well; unfortunately one of the girls lost her life to their gunfire that night. Partner 1 was the one picked up by the police and he never told who the others were so he took a plea for 15 years to life with a 5-year gun enhancement.

He had no hope for a future, he thought he was doing the right thing by the only real "family" he had, the gang. He has since realized the fallacy in his thought process, but now he is 34 years old and has effectively been raised in some of the toughest prisons in California. Partner 1 is extremely smart and I tell him all the time, had any adult he came into contact with taken any time with him, his whole circumstance could be different. He is not the monster people think he is, that gang persona was just that, a persona, the real person is so different, so hurt and crippled from being thrown away by his drug addicted parents. His story is truly

compelling and I pray that he gets paroled soon so he can have the one chance at life that he was robbed of as a child.

My other partner, partner 2, is everything in life that I am not and I love being around her because of that. She is sweet, smart, and funny as hell whenever I feel bad she ALWAYS makes me laugh, she's very spiritual and self-reliant. She has a ton of friends of family who adore her, as I do. It is easy to adore her. She's very petite with a huge personality. I'm the quiet one that's always in my head she is constantly talking and joking around. The history of my interaction with partner 2 is more limited than what I've had with partner 1. Partner 2 is quite guarded about her life so getting to know her intimately has been a little more difficult. When we first started I think we were both attracted to one another and it was easy, until partner 1 came in the picture (she couldn't visit partner 1 at first she had to be approved as a visitor. I was able to fast track that process for her though because a lot of the guards like me at the prison.) So her and I were extremely affectionate with one another in the beginning, we had sex a couple of times but when she was able to visit partner 1 the affection waned a little bit which I then took as rejection so I stopped being affectionate with her altogether. We are working on that portion of our relationship after having a really long and honest talk. I'm optimistic about our future together at this point.

Everyone important to me in my family does know about my sexual orientation and polyamorous relationship. The hardest conversations I had were with my children who previous to this never had a clue about my true self. They were hurt that I never shared how I felt with them, but they are also happy that I am happy today. My children have rarely seen me happy because I was never living my truth on any fronts. I was in an unhappy marriage with their father where they saw him cheat constantly and consistently and they saw me martyr myself by trying to be the best mother and wife I could be based on totally unrealistic models of what I "thought" or was "taught" was normal and productive. The more I delved into this "role" I was playing, the more and more I lost my true self. My parents know about my choices but not because I sat down and talked to them about it. They are not the kind of parents I can do that with, even though they were very open and accepting when I was younger and even though they have been very loose in their lives, they expected perfection from their children, so they are not people I can talk to honestly but I don't hide it so they know but we don't talk about it. It was important

for me to be honest with my babies though, because they are all I have in life, they are the most important people in my life so their acceptance of me was very important, their understanding was very important to me. I cling to my children quite tightly, it's almost like sometimes they aren't my children but my siblings because we are close in age (I started having children at 18, hence the reason I have grandchildren at 41!) As they have gotten older we have developed a very interesting and close relationship that doesn't really resemble a mother/child dynamic, it's more friendship at this point. They have seen me at my very worst and now they get to see me at my very best, either way, they always love me, unconditionally so I felt compelled to let them know before I started telling everyone else.

I talk about my relationship(s) freely with anyone who asks. I find women are very intrigued at how I can "tolerate" partner 1 being in another relationship, without thinking about the fact that I too have a relationship with partner 2. Women's reactions are very interesting to me. At first the men (other inmates) thought it was something salacious. I'm glad that we have been able to dispel that myth by being a true family with one another. They see us being affectionate, but they also see when we argue, they see that partner 1 is not a "pimp" and us blindly following behind him, they see that we are all in a relationship and that we all love one another. A lot of the other inmates have come and shook his hand and told him they absolutely respect him because it isn't salacious. Partner 2 is fiercely protective over both of us too and our image.

Being a Black polyamorous person is unique because we have the stigma of our own community's homophobia and inflexibility when it comes to different family dynamics. I find other cultures; particularly those of European descent are much more accepting than Black folks are. Black people are extremely homophobic for one and usually get their morals and values from contemporary Christian beliefs that are usually very judgmental and very inflexible. I never feel displaced at other poly events that are not centered around being Black and poly. Poly people are very accepting period. To be poly you have had to do some major work on yourself, you have to know yourself intimately, you have to be honest with yourself and others at all times and that can be very difficult. Poly people are usually very self-aware, very empathetic, mature and forward thinking. I have not experienced any racism or sexism in this community at all.

I think Black people are underrepresented in this community because either they are totally against it for a lot of ignorant reasons, or because

they are embarrassed by it. I know a lot of Black women that know they are in a polyamorous situation but they want to keep the illusion that they don't know so they can save face! This is why I am so vocal about this lifestyle. I think it could cure a lot of what ails the Black community in particular.

I think people like me, who are not afraid to be themselves in all areas of their life, will start to break down the many myths that surround poly people. I talk about my family members freely with everyone. When people talk about their husbands/wives I always bring up partner 1 and partner 2 together so people always know and I do it in such a way to make them feel stupid if they act surprised! I talk like it is the most normal thing ever. Because of that people respect me and the situation right off the bat. They may ask questions and I welcome that dialogue. That coupled with television shows that are starting to be shown on mainstream television I think will go a long way with getting the message out there that there are all kinds of families in this country.

Being poly is a part of who I am as a person so yes I see myself always living in a polyamorous situation. I am fulfilled being able to fulfill both sides of who I am as a bisexual individual. Even though it has been difficult at times, I wouldn't have it any other way, I love my little family unit and I hope we are together forever.

### What's next?

Dr. Marianne Brandon, clinical psychologist and diplomat in sex therapy, stated "If we as treaters cannot accept and contain the monogamy challenge, how can we help our patients to do the same . . . And if we chose to criticize our patients' non-monogamous choices can we still optimally assist them in the intimate challenges for which they seek help? Probably not. And our patients need our help now more than ever." Critical research in the field of relationship structures, separate from and in conjunction with the already established sexuality field, could stimulate critical self-reflexive practice on the level of community relations and activism. As clinicians, sexologists, and researchers, the adoption of theory that accounts for various relational models such as the Sexual Configuration Theory from Sari M. van Anders pivotal. Incorporating open non-monogamy in therapy would also involve presenting various ways of being non-monogamous rather than signpost-

ing a return to monogamy as the only other alternative if one style of non-monogamy is not working for a client or couple. This will better enable clinicians and therapists to serve that community and improve relations between health professionals and the polyamorous community.

As educators, activists and lay people, the focus should be the formation of Black focused support groups and organizations to lobby government for inclusive legislation. Secondly, the creation of educational programs on alternative relationship structures for communities, public education and private education is pivotal. Lastly, joining and/or supporting pre-existing advocacy organizations to build a collective force must be a top priority.

Dr. Mae Jemison once stated “Never be limited by other people’s limited imaginations.” Every avenue, traditional or non-traditional, is a viable pathway for the collective and individual Black American to consider in the movement toward change. The utilization of all weapons, tools and resources are necessary in the push for social advancement. Though this composition is not intended to establish or insinuate polyamory nor non monogamy as an absolute solution to the social disparities that plague Black American lives, there is substantial untapped theoretical, research and practical opportunities for the Black American community in polyamory and non-monogamy. This potential, if actualized, may enhance perceptions and approaches to the struggle for social equality and improvement; and advance the Black American as a collective economically, socially, and in all forms of health in manners never before experienced and/or sustained in the United States. In full faith and hope scholarly attention will be drawn to this subject matter with confidence that more thorough and extensive discourse, research and praxis regarding this subject will manifest.

.....  
**Christopher N. Smith** is pursuing a PhD at Howard University where his research centers on consensually non-monogamous relationship trends and history. His prior education includes an MA in Religious Studies with a concentration in Religion and Society and a BS in Psychology with a minor in Anthropology from Howard University.

## References

- Anapol, D. (2010). *Polyamory in the 21st Century: Love and Intimacy with Multiple Partners*. Lanham, Maryland, United States: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc.
- Andersson, C. (2007). Non-coupled cohabitation—the case of polyamory. [Conference paper]. [http://www.enhr2007rotterdam.nl/documents/W18\\_paper\\_Andersson.pdf](http://www.enhr2007rotterdam.nl/documents/W18_paper_Andersson.pdf). Accessed 27 Feb 2016.

- Anon. 2006. "The Mosuo Culture." Lugu Lake Mosuo Cultural Development Association. Retrieved March 19, 2016 (<http://www.mosuoproject.org/walking.htm>).
- BBC. (2006). "Polygamy proposal for Chechen men". BBC News. 2006-01-13.
- Bhattacharyya, G. (1998). *Tales of dark-skinned women*. London: UCL Press.
- Brooten, B. J. (2010). *Beyond Slavery: Overcoming Its Religious and Sexual Legacies*. New York, New York, United States: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Butler, C., das Nair, R., & Thomas, S. (2010). The Colour of Queer. In L. Moon (Ed.), *Counseling Ideologies* (pp. 105-112). Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Clymer, J. (2013). *Family Money: Property, Race, and Literature in the Nineteenth Century*. Oxford, New York, United States: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, Mrisa T. (2016). "An Exploratory Study of Individuals in Non-Traditional, Alternative Relationships: How 'Open' Are We?" *Sexuality & Culture*, 20(2), 295-315.
- Conley, T. D., Moors, A. C., Matsick, J. L., & Ziegler, A. (2011). Prevalence of consensual non-monogamy in general samples. Unpublished data.
- Emens, E. F. (2004). Monogamy's law: compulsory monogamy and polyamorous existence. *New York University Review of Law & Social Change*, 29(2), 277-376.
- Engles, F. (1942). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. New York, New York, United States: International Publishers.
- Gaughan, Patrick A. (2015). *Mergers, Acquisitions, and Corporate Restructurings*. 6th ed. John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- "Inter Press Service-News and Views from the Global South." Ipsnews.net. Retrieved 29 December 2016.
- Klesse, C. (2007). *The Spectre of Promiscuity*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Klesse, C. (2013). Polyamory—Intimate Practice, Identity or Sexual Orientation? *Sexualities*
- Klesse, Christian. (2013). "Poly Economics—Capitalism, Class, and Polyamory." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 27, 203-220.
- Liu, Hua. (2006). "A Geographically Explicit Genetic Model of Worldwide Human-Settlement History". *American Journal of Human Genetics* 79 (2), 230-237.
- Mitchell, K. (2015, February). *There's a Big Problem With Polyamory That Nobody's Talking About*. Retrieved from Connections.MIC: <http://m.mic.com/articles/109616/there-s-a-big-problem-with-polyamory-that-nobody-s-talking-about>.
- Mosse, G. (1985). *Nationalism and sexuality*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Muncy, R. (1973). *Sex and Marriage in Utopian Communities*. Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press.
- Osborn, Andrew (2006). "War-ravaged Chechnya needs polygamy, says its leader". *The Independent*. London.
- Page, D. R., & Kilbride, P. L. (2012). *Plural Marriage for Our Times: A Reinvented Option?* (2nd ed.). Santa Barbara, California, United States: Praeger.
- Pallotta-Chiarolli, M. (2010). *Border sexualities, border families in schools*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Riggs, D. W. (2010). Developing a 'responsible' foster care praxis: poly as a framework for examining power and propriety in family contexts. In M. Barker & D. Langdridge (Eds.), *Understanding non-monogamies* (pp. 188-200). London: Routledge.

- Sangree, Walter H. (1980). The Persistence of Polyandry in Irigwe, Nigeria. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 11, 335–343.
- Sheff, E. (2005). Polyamorous women, sexual subjectivity and power. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 34(3), 251–283.
- Sheff, E. (2010). Strategies in polyamorous parenting. In M. Barker & D. Langdrige (Eds.), *Understanding non-monogamies* (pp. 169–180). London: Routledge.
- Starkweather, Katherine E. and Raymond Hames. (2012). "A Survey of Non-Classical Polyandry." *Human Nature An Interdisciplinary Biosocial Perspective* 23:149–72.
- van Anders, S.M. (2015). "Beyond Sexual Orientation: Integrating Gender/Sex and Diverse Sexualities via Sexual Configurations Theory." *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 44, 1177–1213.
- Vangelisti, A. L. & Gerstenberger, M. (2004). Communication and marital infidelity. In J. Duncombe, K. Harrison, G. Allan and D. Marsden (eds.) *The State of Affairs: Explorations in Infidelity and Commitment*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Veaux, F. (2015). *More Than Two*. Retrieved from More Than Two: <http://www.morethantwo.com/>.
- Zeitlin, I. M. (2000). *Ideology and the Development of Sociological Theory (7th Edition)*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, United States.

