

### Effects of a Polyamorous Relationship in a Dysfunctional Marriage

Most people in traditional marriages would agree that monogamy is the model of a core family supported romantic love (Klesse, 2011). Studies have shown that because it is a standard that has not been challenged in Western society since the time of the Ancient Greeks, the process of obeying it and punishing those who do not follow the rules of monogamy releases oxytocin as a reward (Khazan, 2014). However, monogamous marriages can be unsuccessful, especially in modern society with rising divorce rates, declining marriage rates, and rapidly increasing occurrences of infidelity in monogamous marriages. In a deteriorating marriage, one might be more inclined to try an open polyamorous relationship as a last resort to rectify it (Anapol, 2010). As a result, a comprehensive investigation of whether transitioning into a polyamorous relationship might aid an ailing marriage should be held.

Polyamory is a paradigmatic form of consensual non-monogamy and the practice of negotiating desire with potentially more than one person in a relationship (Bunning, 2016). The same article mentions although polyamory fosters secure attachment, there are still emotional challenges that must be defused by all parties of a polyamorous relationship. According to Anapol (2011), jealousy is not the only emotional trial that monogamous relationships have and converting into a polyamorous relationship, which strongly encourages self-reflection and intense personal growth, may result in a healthy and functional marriage that a couple might not have otherwise. According to Nicole Graham's article (2014), although published research on polyamory has been limited and scarce, the available data indicate that openly polyamorous

families amount to more than half a million. The same article mentions a study involving interviewing 3,574 married couples and resulting in 15-28% of the sample size understanding and allowing non-monogamy under certain circumstances. These articles do not specify such circumstances, meaning that it could include a fading marriage. Thus, one question motivating this study is whether or not the powerful emotional work needed to successfully have a polyamorous relationship might ameliorate communication and trust between a married couple, assuming that impending divorce is an allowed situation for non-monogamy.

Even though polyamorous people are plagued with stigmas about what their romantic lifestyle is, studies suggest that they handle certain relationship challenges such as jealousy better than people in monogamous relationships (Khazan, 2014). Monogamy is based on the starvation model of love, which implies that the emotion is a limited resource seen as a type of currency to give to only one person. If one gives affection to another person, he or she has to withdraw from the metaphorical bank of love, ultimately giving less to each party involved. However, polyamory is based on the idea of having unlimited love for each person and celebrates the concept of compersion, or the warm feeling of happiness induced by a partner enjoying a relationship with another lover (Klesse, 2011). The notion of becoming happy for the sole reason of one's partner feeling content is going to be closely studied as the lynchpin for an unsuccessful marriage's road of recovery.

The purpose of this study is to systematically examine the effects of an originally monogamous marriage converting to a polyamorous marriage by studying each party's range of emotions on the experiment at the end of each week. In pursuing a relationship that values honesty, communication, and further intimacy, a married couple can remedy their marriage through practicing polyamory (Brunning, 2016). Participants for the present study will be

couples that are selected based on their dedication and drive to save their marriages. Consistent with the findings of Brunning (2016) and Anapol (2011), these couples are expected to improve their marriages by keeping an honest line of communication with each other. By opening up their marriages to other people, they can work on their personal reflections and gain outside perspectives on what a marriage can be.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Fifty pairs of unhappily married couples will be selected to be the participants of this study. The experiment's couples have to be on the verge of divorce and must be extremely committed to this experiment as a means to rectify their marriage.

### **Design**

This study will have two groups: a control group and an experimental group. The control group will not have access to a polyamorous lifestyle until the experiment is over. The dependent measures are the groups' evaluations on the level of improvement in their marriages every week.

### **Materials**

Each married pair must find one to two lovers outside of the entire experiment to share a connection with during, and perhaps after, the experiment. Ten therapists will be assigned for all the couples to ensure a safe space for open communication. To prevent skewed data, each therapist will have five control and five experimental pairs as patients for the duration of this experiment.

## **Procedure**

Fifty married couples will be randomly chosen from the group of a hundred pairs. They will be given one month to find one to two people to share a polyamorous relationship with. Failure to do so will result in the replacement of the couple.

Each couple will rate their weeks based on how well their marriage is doing ever since the experiment has started. The rating will be from one to ten with the latter being spectacular. They will meet with their assigned therapist once a week at their homes to converse about how the polyamorous lifestyle has been affecting them as romantic peers.

The goal of this meeting is to have each individual open up on their experiences throughout the week, starting with attractions and ending in the resolution of emotional challenges such as jealousy and affection. People outside of the married pairs are allowed to come to these meetings to smooth out interactions between the two marriage partners. The control group will not have access to a polyamorous lifestyle but will still have their weekly therapy sessions and ratings with their assigned doctor. Each session will end with a hug to induce compassion and positivity.

## **Results**

Couples that drop out due to immense negative feelings towards the study and those that end up getting divorced even after it ends will be counted as failures, or given a 1 on the score. Couples that stay together after the experiment and continue to show drastic improvement in open communication will be counted as a success, or given a 2 on the score. Whether or not experimental group participants stick with their polyamorous routine is up to them, for polyamory is all about freedom.

## **Conclusion**

The final score of the study will be what evaluates how successful the experiment is and whether the initial hypothesis is realized. If the results are as predicted, then number of 2's on the polyamorous group's score is equal or higher than the number of 2's on the control group's score. Successful results will indicate that polyamory can be used as a viable concept for fixing a failing marriage and mitigate stigmas concerning such lifestyle.

## Works Cited

Anapol, Deborah. *Polyamory in the 21st Century: Love and Intimacy with Multiple Partners*.

Blue Ridge Summit, US: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 2 November 2016.

Brunning, Luke. "The Distinctiveness of Polyamory." *Journal of Applied Philosophy* (2016): n. pag. Web.

Graham, Nicole. "Polyamory: A Call for Increased Mental Health Professional Awareness."

*Archives of Sexual Behavior* 43.6 (2014): 1031-034. Web. 17 Oct. 2016.

Khazan, Olga. "Multiple Lovers, Without Jealousy." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 21

July 2014. Web. 16 Oct. 2016.

Klesse, Christian. "NOTIONS OF LOVE IN POLYAMORY—ELEMENTS IN A DISCOURSE

ON MULTIPLE LOVING." *Laboratorium: Russian Review of Social Research* 3.2

(2011): 4-25. Web. 16 Oct. 2016.