Poly/logue: A Critical Introduction to Polyamory

Special Issue Editors

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Polyamory describes a form of relationship where it is possible, valid and worthwhile to maintain (usually long-term) intimate and sexual relationships with multiple partners simultaneously. Nevertheless, debates around polyamory have often suffered from an evasion of power in the ultimate and community contexts within which the concept arose. In this introduction, we trace the political contexts in which polyamory arose, investigate their implicit assumptions from an intersectional, multi-issue perspective, and position ourselves socially and politically as editors of this special issue. We hope to provide a critical introduction to polyamory.

Where we stand: Positionality and intersectionality

This volume was born out of our joint participation in the Gender and Ethnicity Research Discussion Group. The group was formed in summer 1996, by several postgraduate students and activists. Our monthly meeting place was Cema, the now defunct North London bar of our friend Rabiye Cinar, which hosted gay and migrant nights, and attracted a very diverse crowd. Most of our group's participants, too, were minoritized, often negotiating multiple subordinations in their lives. We shared the belief that multiple axes of oppressions interacted simultaneously, and that dominant gender and sexuality debates often resisted this insight. The group nurtured us intellectually as well as emotionally, and helped us survive the stresses of British society in and outside the university. It

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dissolved in 2004, but resulted in lasting connections between scholars and activists, many of who live in other countries today.

The three of us were pursuing our Masters and PhD degrees at the time. Our common interest in the social constructedness of intimacy did not stop at the library doors but extended to our own relationship choices, which we openly discussed amongst each other. Chin-ju chose to enter monogamous lesbian relationships, while Jin has experienced celibacy, non-relationship sex, and various forms of relationships with men and women. Christian has been in non-monogamous relationships with male and female partners for many years. Among us, we share histories and encounters with bisexual, LGB, queer, BDSM (Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism), sex work, and trans and gender variant scenes in Britain, Germany, Taiwan and Thailand. We consider ourselves lucky to have been able to witness, learn and borrow from each others' sexual journeys. Our queer kinship turned transnational after our various re-migrations to Taiwan, Britain and Germany. They have provided rare support in times and life circumstances that were often far from straightforward.

The idea for the special issue came out of Christian's PhD project on gay male and bisexual non-monogamies and sexual politics. Approached by Ken Plummer to guest-edit a volume on polyamory for *Sexualities*, he invited Chin-ju and Jin in as co-editors.[1] Our first call for papers yielded disappointing results. As a collective influenced by anti-racist feminism, we missed a critical engagement with difference. We were also shocked by the racialized new-age imagery in many of the submitted abstracts. We therefore revised our call for papers to focus even more on power relations within polyamorous and other non-monogamous encounters and scenes.

The resulting issue examines polyamory and non-monogamy from an intersectional perspective. This concept draws on black, postcolonial and anti-racist feminist theories, which highlight the need to examine different axes of oppression, especially gender, race/ethnicity and class, as interrelated rather than separable divisions or contradictions (hooks, 1981; Carby, 1982; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983; Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1995). We recognize alternative ways of theorizing this, such as Sherene Razack's 'interlocking systems of oppression' (Combahee River Collective, 1979; Razack, 1998). These may become increasingly important as 'intersectionality' is being mainstreamed into either a 'vulgar constructivism', that is, a postmodernism that is inimical to positionality (Crenshaw, 1995), or a lazy policy tool for the painless production of 'politically correct' research and practice. Gender, race and class here become discrete categories to be fed into a kind of 'intersectionality machine' that automatically spits out the desired results. Both positions tend to dodge their intellectual debt with minoritized thinkers and

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struggles and the hard work that distinguishes real solidarity from political vanity. To borrow from the powerful dedication in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, both refuse to become allies who 'suffer with [the oppressed] and fight at their side' (Freire, 1970: 5).

Nevertheless, we continue to regard intersectionality as a useful tool for Sexualities Studies that has the potential to kick-start this discipline's belated engagement with difference. Contrary to its all-inclusive claims, Queer Studies, too, has tenaciously resisted its margins' efforts to expand beyond the segregated sexuality of the most privileged gays (Anzaldúa, 1988; Prosser, 1998). We believe, however, that positionality is crucial to theorizing intersectionality. How are sexual subjects such as people in non-monogamous relationships positioned along multiple axes of oppression? How does this positionality facilitate our movements in and out of sexual encounters and spaces? Where do we find sex and partners, and what kind of capital – financial, physical or cultural – are we able to mobilize in this? Which bodies pass as attractive, which desires as 'cool' in the sexual economies that govern our scenes? What community knowledges of sexual entitlement and bodily integrity are available to us? How are experiences of pleasure and danger differentiated in our sexual scenes, and mediated not only by femaleness (Vance, 1984/1992), but also by race, class, disability and transness? How, in other words, do the politics of difference and the body play themselves out in non-monogamous relationships?

Poly dreams and poly promises: Polyamory in a social movement perspective

These questions differ from the ones that most extant writers have asked. This must partly be contextualized with the sparseness of existing publications, which renders publications like ours a matter of urgency. Only few article-length publications and no comprehensive studies have been published so far (Palotta-Chiarolli, 1995; Rust, 1996; Jamieson, 2004; Barker, 2005; Sheff, 2005). Most are confined to first-person narratives, activist writings, small studies and short theoretical contributions (Lano and Parry, 1995; Munson and Stelboum, 1999; Anderlini-D'Onofrio, 2004b); or fall, as we elaborate later, within the genre of popular advice literature (e.g. Nearing, 1992; Anapol, 1997; Easton and Liszt, 1997; cf. Noël, this volume).

Writers have neglected the violent racist, transphobic, ablist and bodyist context within which we all, as multiply positioned subjects, negotiate our sexual and partner choices. This is so despite the fact that the polyamory discourse has emerged at the crossroads of several progressive social movements. The feminist movement launched a powerful critique of marriage

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as the institutionalization of men's ownership of women, and gave rise to 'polyamorist' values, such as caring, intimacy, honesty, equality, non-exclusivity and relational autonomy (e.g. Vance, 1984/1992). Gay male sexual culture has developed rich repertoires of non-monogamous sexuality and intimacy (e.g. Weeks et al., 2001). Many bisexuals have experimented with various forms of intimate relationships with people of different gender and sexual identities (e.g. Rust, 1996).[2] The subcultural networks that have blossomed around BDSM[3] have provided further spaces for erotic play and sexual practices beyond the couple culture (e.g. Califia, 2000).

Historically, non-monogamy was central to the ideology of sexual liberationism, which profoundly shaped the cultural practices and political debates in many social movements (e.g. Red Collective, 1978). The commune movements of the 1960s and 1970s were important actors in experimenting with new forms of relationships, households, sexuality and politics (e.g. Abrams and McCulloch, 1976). They frequently drew on feminist, gay and socialist critiques of the family, monogamy and private property (e.g. Ryan, 1983; Weeks, 1991).

Polyamory has thus arisen from the confluence of a number of sexually emancipatory discourses. It tries to provide languages and ethical guidelines for alternative lifestyles and sexual and intimate relationships beyond the culture of 'compulsory monogamy'. 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. As the contributors to this volume underline, individuals and communities engaging in polyamorous practices are forced to negotiate monogamist normativities which pathologize them as untrustworthy partners and dysfunctional parents. These judgements are based in wider contexts of sex negativity which demonize all but a few practices and desires involving a small range of gendered bodies (Califia, 2000).

The radical changes within intimate and sexual cultures described in this volume are immensely relevant to current social sciences debates. An engagement with polyamory and non-monogamy can provide novel insights into the social construction and organization of kinship, households and the family, parenting practices, sexual identities and heteronormativity. What is more, polyamory opens up new sex-positive terrains for erotic, sexual and relational understandings and practices. It is an exciting new construction site that presents a rare and refreshing change from the anti-essentialist stalemate which has caged progressive sexual thought for the last one and a half decades. The articles in this volume reflect this sense of hope, optimism and belief in a positive queer presence and future, which does not remain stuck in deconstruction but dares to actively construct. These new narratives of emotional and sexual abundance and

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collective care may provide real alternatives to capitalist and patriarchal ideologies of personal ownership and scarcity. Polyamorist writing and activism contribute to the expansion of the languages and skills that are necessary for realizing cultural change in our emotional and sexual lives.

However, this potential has so far been limited by polyamorists' lack of engagement with power. In common with other writers on 'sexuality', including many sex radicals themselves, the sexualities that are described are those of an extremely exclusive circle. There is an indifference towards the survivors of colonialism, slavery and genocide – systems of violence which, as anti-racist feminists such as bell hooks (1981) have shown, have always also been sexually violent. There is a silence about the effects of classist ideologies of morality and 'respectability' on working-class women's sexualities (Skeggs, 1997). We learn nothing about the bodyistic representations of race, disability, transgender, transsexuality and size, which depict many bodies as asexual and unattractive, or attractive only for a fetishistic market of 'admirers' (Shakespeare et al., 1996; Wilchins, 1997; Edut, 2003). Theories of dominant identities such as whiteness, masculinity and heterosexuality (Pratt, 1984; Connell, 1995; Richardson, 1996), which could help to problematize who has so far gotten to define polyamory, its theoretical and political remit, and its social membership, remain acutely underexplored. In the next section, we locate this problem within the particular dominant context from which this discourse has arisen.

Poly writings and poly feelings: Late modernism, self-help individualism, and esoteric Orientalism

The extant literature is skewed towards two genres: Self-help and esoterism. Many of the self-help guides that instruct readers on how to successfully build multiple polyamorous relationships are widely known and discussed in polyamorous community networks. Dossie Easton's and Catherine A. Liszt's book *The Ethical Slut* is frequently referred to as the 'bible of polyamory'. Melita Noël (this volume) argues that the prominence of self-help literature in polyamorist circles may help to explain some of their power-evasiveness.

We identify three problems with the celebration and canonization of the self-help genre. First, the produced discourses are frequently unaware of their capacity for setting up their own regimes of normativity. Second, they tend to endorse an abstract individualism at the expense of critiquing the structural power relations around race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class. Third, the posited universalistic model of affect ties in easily with an imperialist narrative of the West as sexually and emotionally advanced and superior.

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Self-help discourse has a strong tendency to psychologize and individualize social processes and divisions. Although many popular books on polyamory locate their advice in the context of a political critique of hegemonic gender and sexual cultures, their emphasis is on free personal choice and agency. For example, Easton and Liszt argue:

> We are paving new roads across new territory. We have no culturally approved scripts for open sexual lifestyles; we pretty much need to write our own. To write your script requires a lot of effort, and a lot of honesty, and is the kind of hard work that brings many rewards. (1997: 72)

Although the authors stress the intensity of labour and efforts involved, their primary emphasis is on the individual capacity for change.

Serena Petrella (2007, forthcoming) maintains that polyamory self-help texts develop their argumentative strategy on the junction to 'know thyself'. Equipped with self-knowledge and self-awareness, readers may grasp the effects of repressive socialization and overcome the starvation economies that have shaped their psychic make-ups. Self-knowledge is described as the *sine qua non* of a successful polyamorous relationship life, as much as honesty, disclosure, partner-focused techniques of communication, and the readiness for permanent negotiation.

This ignores how emotions and desires are socially constructed in specific historical sites and power relations (Ahmed, 2004). What do our self-help texts contribute to the 'self knowledge' of those whose physical and emotional sense of self, entitlement and reality is undermined through daily acts of symbolic and material violence (Fanon, 1967)? What can they tell us about communication in interracial encounters, whose historical predecessors were forced, secretive or highly exploitative (Frankenberg, 1993)? How do experiences of 'repressive socialization' differ for those whose carers tried to protect them from attracting too much (hooks, 1981), or too little sexual attention (Shakespeare et al., 1996)? How does the label 'slut' (Easton and Liszt, 1997) stick differently to women and men, Thai women and white women, bisexual women and lesbians, 'whores and other feminists' (Nagle, 1997)? How do we reclaim desire and forge viable identities out of the ashes of multiple systems of pathologization (Haritaworn, forthcoming)?

A universal model of polyamorous affect can also be interrogated from a perspective of whiteness and other dominant-identity studies. How is our 'self-knowing', self-actualized poly subject positioned? How far is her 'maturity' and 'self-reflexivity' predicated on ignoring the terror in minoritized people's lives, possibly including her own lovers'? How, in other words, does a universal model of polyamorous affect particularize those who must directly struggle with systemic sexual, psychological and physical violence, while normalizing and even celebrating those who can

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evade these systems, and the privileges and pleasures which they derive from them?

This critique of universalism can be generalized to many writers who adopt late-modernist ideologies of intimacy. There is a striking overlap between the ground rules of polyamory in many self-help books and the essential components of what Anthony Giddens (1992) has termed the 'pure relationship'. This model describes a relationship that is based on mutual trust, disclosing intimacy, voluntary agreement, egalitarian decision making, and mutual consent. The affinity between the 'pure' and the 'polyamorous' relationship of the guide books may not be surprising, given Giddens's own intense engagement with self-help literature (Jamieson, 1998). Giddens sees the turn to self-help culture as a positive feature of individual self-reflexivity, an act of empowerment through *re-skilling*. In contradistinction, some critics have analysed the work that the individual is supposed to put into its self-development in order to maintain polyamorous relationship networks in the terms of governmentality (Petrella, 2007, forthcoming; see also Rose, 1998; Klesse, 2006a). Petrella (2007, forthcoming) points out that the conceptualization of relationships as 'work' recurs across the whole genre of polyamory guide books. This emphasis on work, she argues, smacks of an ascetic Protestant ethic. By claiming to undertake the considerable labour required to maintain these enormously complex and emotionally demanding relationships, polyamorists further manage to present themselves as the representatives of an advanced ethic that is far beyond a banal hedonism of simple pleasure-seeking.

Interrogating sexual and emotional universalism becomes more urgent under the hegemony of late-modernist ideologies of intimacy. Such universalism is especially dangerous where the West is represented as the vanguard of sexual and emotional development (Giddens, 1992; Weeks et al., 2001; see Klesse, 2006b). In particular, we are struck by the ease with which late modernist theories support an aggressive imperialist narrative of western civilization. Sexuality has become central to the 'war on terror' abroad and at home. Queer activists such as Peter Tatchell have ensured that 'gay rights' are joining 'women's rights' in providing the moral gun fodder for the attack on Black and migrant citizenship rights and increasingly aggressive methods to exclude those racialized as Muslim (Razack, 2004; Fekete, 2006; Puar, 2006; Haritaworn and Tauqir, 2006, forthcoming). Will 'relationship rights' join 'women's' and 'gay rights' in determining who can pass as 'civilized' and who is in need of military control abroad and of 'anti-terrorist' legislation at home?

It is no coincidence that writers on polyamory look to Polynesia and Southeast Asia, rather than West and Central Asia, for their significant non-monogamous Others. Yet while these sexual and racial Others

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emerge as the very opposite of the 'polygamous Muslim patriarch', their representation as peaceful, innocent and 'free' is simply the other side of Orientalism's ambivalent and divisive coin. The polyamorist fascination with Pacific Asian and Islander philosophies and sexualities can be contextualized with the centrality of spiritualist ideas and new-age thought in large parts of the polyamory literature (see Noël, this volume). According to Serena Anderlini-D'Onofrio, the spiritualist and/or religious influences that have shaped contemporary polyamory communities include:

> New Age spirituality, with its emphasis on taking into one's hand one's relationship with the sacred, and with its disregard for religious doctrine; new Paganism and Wiccan religions, with their rejection of monotheism and openness to polytheisitic belief systems and pantheistic spiritualities. (2004a: 165)

Anderlini-D'Onofrio describes the polyamorist embrace of polytheism as progressive, both sexually and racially:

> While 'monogamy' caused many nineteenth century Westerners to feel superior to 'primitives' and non-Westerners for they were capable of 'true love', many bis and polys today design lives for themselves in which the sacredness of true love is multiplied for the number of players willing to participate. The nexus between monogamy and monotheism thus becomes transparent. Monotheism can be seen as a self-imposed limitation to love only one deity; monogamy as a similarly self-imposed limitation to love only one partner to the exclusion of everybody else . . . This return to the plurality of polytheism involves a certain primitivism, the feeling of a cosmos pervaded with magic and inhabited by a number of deities, whose plants, animals, and natural sites are sacred. (Anderlini-D'Onofrio, 2004b: 4–5)

This description of non-monotheistic cultures as 'primitive' and 'premodern' explicitly cites 19th-century discourses on the colonized and enslaved. Eugenicist, geneticist, anthropological, and medical sexologist discourses constructed people of colour in particular as lacking in morality, overflowing with sexual physicality, and anathema to a 'civilized' culture of monogamous marriage, sexual modesty and romantic love (e.g. Gilman, 1992). Anderlini-D'Onofrio claims to reverse this racist tradition by re-evaluating and appreciating 'pre-modern' people and cultures. However, her romantic re-discovery of 'pre-modern' spiritualities and erotic cultures draws on the same colonial narrative of an 'evolved West' and 'backward Rest' (Hall, 1992), whose central tropes and categories it retells and reinforces.

Deborah Anapol, too, seeks remedy for the 'modern Judeo-Christian obsession with monogamy' by taking recourse to racialized religions and spirituality. 'Polytheistic cultures around the world, including Native American, African and Celtic cultures, have also honoured the power of sexuallove [*sic!*] and lack the modern Judeo-Christian obsession with

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monogamy' (Anapol, 1997: 139). Unspecific references to institutionalized forms of non-monogamy among 'non-western', 'primitive' or 'premodern' groups and cultures, occasionally backed by the mentioning of some anthropological research, are elements in many authors' attempts to challenge the hegemony of monogamous coupledom.

The centrality of Orientalism and primitivism in these writings illustrates the shortcomings of the dominant polyamorist discourse (see also Noël; Willey, this volume). Not only is a radical sexual critique of racism missing, its ideological bases are actively reinforced.[4] This is not to imply that politically radical and 'progressive' impulses are not at all identifiable in the polyamorist movement.[5] However, it underlines the need to move in new, transformative directions.

Whither poly?

If we are to construct poly communities which are open to those whose intimacies are most in need of emancipation – those whose bodies and sexualities have been violently exploited, demonized and suppressed through racism, transphobia, ablism and other systems of oppression – much work remains to be done. Since sexual empowerment is often regarded as a luxury of the most privileged sexual subjects, it is up to whites, non-trans people and non-disabled people to radically open up poly spaces, redistribute sex-positive resources, and actively share the power to directly define poly and other sex-radical discourses. This must go beyond the usual modes of sexual 'access' or 'inclusion', which tend to collapse back into narcissistic fantasies of 'helping the sexually disenfranchised', or even gaining access to their interesting bodies (Haritaworn, forthcoming). In fact, a poly politics of honest and self-reflexive positionality would start with the unspoken sexual realities and power relations within our very own poly, queer, dyke or BDSM spaces.

This also goes for us as an editorial team that is racially and sexually mixed but homogenous in terms of our non-disabledness and our dominance with regard to other body norms such as fat and age. While power and difference was at the forefront of our call for papers, it is no coincidence that the contributions we managed to invite had little to say about disability. They also tended to be from perspectives that were white and non-trans, albeit with varying degrees of race awareness. Huge gaps remain in the polyamory literature that this volume goes nowhere near filling. They include polyamorous accounts of whiteness and race; culture, religion and geography; transgender and transsexuality; disability; and age. Many other aspects of non-monogamy and polyamory are under-researched too – such as the specific poly cultures that have emerged in the BDSM, lesbian and gay male, and various other sexual scenes. In this

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special issue we present some pioneering studies, which explore this subject matter from diverse angles.

Angela Willey's article 'Christian Nations, Polygamic Races, and (White) Women's Rights' provides a genealogy of the racialization of discourses of non/monogamy. She documents how modern ideas about romantic love were formulated, with the support of racist science, against a backward 'polygamous' Other. With the case of the Mormons in the USA, she illustrates how white western feminists have been deeply implicated in such civilizationary missions. This contrasts with Orientalist representations of 'free native sexualities' in contemporary polyamorist publications. Racialized discourses on non/monogamy, Willey concludes, continue to dominate the polyamory movement.

Sik Ying Ho examines eight accounts by people with multiple partners in Hong Kong, most of whom did not embrace sexual identities as polyamorous or otherwise alternative. Her article 'The (Charmed) Circle Game' critiques Gayle Rubin's concept of sexual hierarchy for its rigid stipulation of a universal charmed circle of normative sexuality, which is surrounded by (marginalized) counter-normative sexualities. Ho points to the manifold ways in which non-monogamous agents negotiate sexual and gender norms, by situationally shuffling in and out of various social spaces. She underlines the need for a theory of non/monogamy and polyamory which is open to differences in both geographical context and individual life circumstances.

Christian Klesse describes polyamory as a specific and contested discourse on non-monogamy in his article 'Polyamory and its "Others": Contesting the Terms of Non-Monogamy'. The meanings of the polyamory concept are far from stable and are permanently negotiated in the emerging polyamorous movement. Drawing on an empirical research project into gay male and bisexual non-monogamous relationships in the UK, he argues that the discursive construction of polyamory as 'responsible non-monogamy' is marked by a strong tendency to set polyamory apart from other forms of non-monogamy, in particular from swinging, casual sex, and an abstracted notion of 'promiscuity'.

Ani Ritchie and Meg Barker explore the interrelation between language and relationship practice, identities, and emotions in their article 'There Aren't Words for What We Do or How We Feel so We Have to Make Them Up'. Drawing on research into linguistic forms in web-based communication in the context of discussion groups, community message boards, e-mail lists, and other websites, Ritchie and Barker describe how polyamorists challenge the culture of compulsory monogamy through the construction of new polyamorous languages.

In her article 'The Trouble with Polyamory', Melita Noël positions the 12 polyamory self-help guides circulated in the USA. She argues that these

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texts were written by white, middle-class, and educated authors. She confirms that polyamorists have developed in-depth critiques to monogamous relationships and promoted alternative family forms. However, the politics that polyamorists suggest have become a short-sighted and isolated one. Along with gay marriage proponents, polyamorists seem to serve a privileged few rather than show solidarity with those who are also oppressed by monogamous and heterosexual family forms.

A gendered critique to polygamous practices is provided by Elisabeth Sheff. In her article 'Poly-Hegemonic Masculinities', Sheff demonstrates that polyamorous relationships are not outside male privilege. By deploying R. W. Connell's framework of masculinities, she paints a complicated picture of the ways in which masculinities were practised by polyamory men. Although some men appeared to practise hegemonic masculinities, there were also men who were bisexual, who demonstrated working class heterosexual identities or who did emotional work. This diversity shows that there were also forms of marginal and subordinate masculinities in the polyamorous scene. In conclusion, Sheff argues that poly men simultaneously redefine their masculinities and resist hegemonic masculinities.

Finally, we present an interview with Dossie Easton, one of the forerunners of the polyamory movement. A feminist and BDSM activist and family and relationship therapist from the San Francisco bay area, she has co-authored a range of books on polyamory, BDSM and kinky sexuality. In the interview, Christian Klesse and Dossie Easton reflect on questions of jealousy, domestic violence, and polyamorous gender relations. They explore new poly agendas from their differing angles of sex radicalism on the one hand, and of an intersectional multi-issue approach on the other hand influenced by feminism and anti-racism.

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informed our views very deeply. We hope that this volume will enrich and stimulate further critical work on non-monogamy and polyamory.

Notes

1. For the first months Umut Erel, who had been one of the key organizers of the Gender and Ethnicity Discussion Group, was part of the editorial team, which she left because of time constrictions. Many of our insights into social divisions in intimate encounters have been formulated in conversation with her.
2. Of course, not all bisexuals are non-monogamous or polyamorous. In fact, the allegation that there is an essential link between non-monogamy and bisexuality is one of the most pervasive anti-bisexual stereotypes (Udis-Kessler, 1996; Klesse, 2005).
3. BDSM stands for Bondage and Discipline, Dominance and Submission, Sadism and Masochism.
4. As common within the new age movements in the West, many proponents of polyamory have appropriated ideas from within a range of eastern religious traditions. A striking example for this Orientalism is the frequency with which (white) polyamorists draw the spiritual significance of polyamorous practice from tantric sources. See, for example, the extensive references to book publications and articles linking polyamory with tantrism at the website of the Sasha and Kira Lessin's 'School of Tantra': http://www.schooloftantra.com/ (accessed 21 May 2006).
5. The shape and content of polyamory discourses seems also to be highly context specific – with regional and subcultural location and personal political awareness of practitioners being of high importance. For example, when Christian Klesse argued at the 'International Conference on Polyamory and Mono-Normativity' at the University of Hamburg in November, 2005, that sex-radical voices were rather an exception within the cacophony of narratives on polyamory (a theory that his qualitative research into non-monogamy and polyamory in the UK had brought forth; see Klesse, this issue), Robin Bauer noted that a completely different picture emerged from his research into dyke/trans BDSM cultures in the United States.

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