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Rethinking Intimacy, the Self, and Ethics:
A Postcolonial Feminist Analysis of Polyamory Cultures in the US and South Korea

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for
the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Communication with a specialization in Critical Gender Studies

by

Jungyoung Kim

Committee in charge:

Professor David Serlin, Chair
Professor Patty Ahn
Professor Suzanne A. Brenner
Professor Valerie Hartouni
Professor Todd Henry

2021

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The dissertation of Jungyoung Kim is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2021

DEDICATION

For My Beloved Mother (Ŏmma) and Father (Appa)

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Rethinking Intimacy, the Self, and Ethics
A Postcolonial Feminist Analysis of Polyamory Cultures in the US and South Korea

by

Jungyoung Kim

Doctor of Philosophy in Communication with a Specialization in Critical Gender Studies

University of California San Diego, 2021

Professor David Serlin, Chair

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of the development of polyamory cultures in the US and South Korea with a focus on how individuals experience polyamory within the dynamic of governing the self. Based on three years of multi-sited fieldwork in Southern California and Seoul, South Korea, this study unearths how Americans and South Koreans adopt polyamory—a consensual non-monogamous

relationship—by negotiating agency, identity, and social constraints. As a non-normative intimate practice which rejects the norm of monogamy, polyamory has grown in association with the values of freedom, autonomy, and gender equality in the US since the 1990s. Through transnational mobility and communication, polyamory was introduced to South Korea in the 2000 in the contexts of the neoliberal socioeconomic reforms after the Asian financial crisis of 1997. Drawing from critical studies on intimacy, Foucault's theory of ethics, and postcolonial feminist epistemology, this study theorizes polyamory as an agentic practice through which individuals construct and govern selfhood in relationship to the self as well as to the reality that circumscribes their conduct and identities. This study offers a postcolonial feminist analysis of polyamory by mapping out four themes: (1) the racialized development and practice of polyamory, (2) South Koreans' translation of the American polyamory culture, (3) anti-patriarchy and gender complexities in polyamory cultures, and (4) the ethics of self-realization in private life.

The first part of the dissertation examines polyamory culture in the US. Chapter one illustrates how the normativity of white and middle-class individuality is essentially embedded in polyamory culture in the US. Chapter two focuses on American individuals' everyday practice of polyamory. Highlighting the virtue of authentic self in the practice of polyamory, chapter two reveals how race plays out in individuals' practice of polyamory. The second part of this dissertation analyzes polyamory culture in South Korea. Chapter three contextualizes the growth of polyamory within the reconstruction of South Koreans' lives after the Asian financial crisis of 1997. Chapter four analyzes how polyamory culture has grown in South Korea through the complex process in which South Koreans translate the American culture of polyamory. Chapter five scrutinizes South Koreans' experience of polyamory by focusing on what polyamory signifies in the management of the self. Demonstrating that polyamory manifests the growing moral value of self-realization in South Koreans' lives, chapter five addresses how gender complicates individuals' practice of polyamory. Ultimately, by illuminating polyamory as a racialized, gendered experience of practicing the self, this dissertation addresses broader issues of the political economy of intimacy, everyday politics of selfhood, and ethics in private life.

PART ONE: Introduction & The Development of Polyamory Culture in Southern California

Introduction Polyamory as a Practice of the Self

My dissertation examines the development of polyamory culture in the US and South Korea, with a focus on how individuals experience polyamory within the dynamics of governing the self. This examination is driven by my question of how our intimate practices affect the way we perceive and manage ourselves as particular individuals. Through ethnographic fieldwork carried out over three years in Southern California, the US and Seoul, South Korea, I illustrate how individuals utilize polyamory as a means to construct and manage the self while grappling not only with their racial, gender, class, and sexual identities but also with the moral values of individuality, intimacy, and family. This dissertation contends that polyamory is an agentic practice of the self by which individuals constitute and govern selfhood in relationship with the self as well as with the reality that circumscribes their identities, conduct, and beliefs.

As an intimate practice that rejects the norm of monogamy, polyamory emerged in the US in the 1990s and has spread to other countries, including South Korea. I first heard the term polyamory in 2014 when I attended a seminar held by a South Korean feminist organization. One of the members introduced herself as a polyamorist while explaining polyamory as a consensual non-monogamous relationship in which individuals could be free from their partners' possessiveness and control. I remember that I was intrigued at that time by how polyamorists could manage their non-monogamous practices and overcome the internalized belief of monogamy. The next time that I heard the term was in the US after I started my PhD program at UC San Diego. Realizing that there is a sizable polyamory community in San Diego, I took the opportunity to attend a polyamory community meeting. Because of that meeting, I realized that polyamory does not simply mean an intimate relationship with multiple partners, but, as polyamorists argued, it is one's attempt to reorganize their intimate life according to the virtues of freedom, equality, and autonomy.

Given that practitioners claim that polyamory is an intimate practice through which one can manifest the values of individual freedom, equality, and autonomy, I found it to be a compelling site where I could explore a burning question that has long interested me: what role do our intimate experiences play

in the way we perceive, value, and manage ourselves? Though polyamory is not an intimate practice that a great majority of people adopt (as of now), polyamory offers an appealing case for studying the significance of intimacy in an individual's life, especially their management of selfhood. That is, by examining the experiences of polyamorists who willingly choose a non-normative practice of intimacy to manifest a set of values in their lives, this project illuminates what an intimate experience signifies to one's sense of self and how one's intimate practice interacts with one's sense of self.

Approaching polyamory as a practice of constructing and managing selfhood, my examination covers individuals' experiences of polyamory not only in the US but also in South Korea. Interestingly, while I was developing my dissertation project on polyamory, I witnessed the development of polyamory in South Korea. Though I happened to meet a South Korean polyamorist in 2014, polyamory was hardly a word that South Koreans understood until the mid 2010s. In South Korean news media, polyamory was periodically introduced as an exotic or surprising sexual lifestyle practiced by Westerners. However, polyamory started to draw social attention in the mid and late 2010s in South Korea. In 2017, not only was the first polyamory book written by South Korean polyamorists, *We Practice Polyamory*, published, but also the first online polyamory community, *Yŏrŏ*: *Polyamory Network*, was formed.

In my dissertation, examining the development of polyamory culture in the US and in South Korea is both essential and valuable for understanding the different, complex ways individuals experience polyamory in their management of selfhood as well as how their different experiences of polyamory are shaped through larger cultural, political, and economic forces. Above all, I point out that South Korean polyamory culture has developed under the influence of polyamory culture in the US. Understanding polyamory as an intimate lifestyle that originated in the US, South Koreans practice polyamory by actively consuming polyamory resources (e.g., books, blogs, websites, and podcasts) that are produced by American polyamorists. In this respect, I claim that the way South Koreans perceive and adopt polyamory is closely entwined with US-South Korean relations, which have colonial legacies. Considering the postcolonial power dynamics between the US and South Korea, my dissertation elucidates how South Koreans have established polyamory culture within their own cultural, political, and economic contexts by actively

utilizing, interpreting, and transforming polyamory culture in the US. At the same time, examining polyamory culture both in the US and in South Korea allows this project to understand the self as a culturally-specific, flexible concept. Analyzing polyamory as an individual's practice of constructing and managing selfhood, this project aims to decenter the Euro-American modern narrative of the self. By describing different experiences of polyamory between and within the US and South Korea, this dissertation sheds light on how the way in which individuals perceive and manage the self is informed not only by larger cultural, political, and economic forces but also by gender, race, class, and sexuality.

This project utilizes a mixed-method approach that combines my ethnographic fieldwork in Southern California, the US and Seoul, South Korea, from 2017 to 2019 and media discourse analysis. It explores four domains related to individuals' experience of polyamory in the US and South Korea: (1) American polyamory books and online polyamory materials, including personal blogs, websites, and podcasts, that were produced between the 1990s and the 2010s, (2) the online and offline activities of polyamory communities in Southern California, (3) cultural representations of polyamory in the South Korean media from 2000 to 2019, and (4) the online and offline activities of polyamory communities in South Korea. Together, these domains allowed me to conduct a postcolonial feminist analysis of the development of polyamory culture in the US and South Korea.

In the following section, I address the theoretical foundations that inform my approach to polyamory. This project mainly draws on critical scholarship on intimacy and Foucauldian studies on subjectivation and ethics. Then, I briefly introduce polyamory as an object of inquiry and explain why polyamory is a compelling site for studying intimacy as an ethical practice. After that, I offer an illustration of my epistemological and methodological approaches. Finally, I close the chapter by providing chapter outlines.

Theoretical Foundations: Intimacy, the Self, and Ethics

My dissertation investigates the development of polyamory cultures in the US and South Korea by shifting focus away from identity or the politics of gender and sexuality. Instead, this dissertation conceptualizes polyamory as a *practice of the self*—an agentic practice through which individuals constitute and govern selfhood in relationship with the self as well as the reality that circumscribes their positions, conducts, and beliefs. This project puts forward a new perspective on intimacy to elucidate how polyamory involves the everyday politics of selfhood and substantiates an individual's moral ideal of the self. To that end, this project draws from two bodies of scholarship: critical studies on intimacy and Foucauldian studies on subjectivation and ethics. In what follows, I will address these two bodies of scholarship to delineate how they inform my approach to polyamory and the scope of this project.

Intimacy as an Analytic Concept

This dissertation intervenes in the emerging field of critical studies on intimacy by undertaking intimacy as an analytic concept to examine polyamory cultures in the US and South Korea. Here, I will provide a brief explanation of intimacy as an analytic tool and elaborate how I employ intimacy to analyze polyamory as a practice of constructing and managing selfhood.

At the intersection of feminist, queer, and postcolonial studies, there has been renewed attention to intimacy not only as a research subject but also as an analytic rubric. Rather than suggesting an intimate experience that is natural or universal, many scholars of feminist and queer studies have illustrated our intimate experience is informed by and performed through a particular set of discourses, knowledge, institutions, laws, and administrative measures (Berlant 1998; Povinelli 2006; Oswin and Olund 2010; Wilson 2012, 2016). These scholars argued that, similar way to gender or sexuality, intimacy offers an investigative lens to account for the systems of power relations and their effects.

These scholars identify three main ways that intimacy is a useful analytic tool, which informs my project. First, intimacy serves as a critical domain to scrutinize the personalized, individualized effects of larger relations of power. Lauren Berlant (1998, 282) mentioned that individuals construct their intimate

lives by both "absorb[ing] and repel[ing] the rhetorics, laws, ethics, and ideologies." In other words, between one's longing for belonging, attachment, and happiness and society, intimacy is the very site where individuals manifest, reproduce, and/or transform the normative practices, institutions, and ideologies. Second, intimacy allows for sidestepping or unsettling existing social categories such as friendship, family, and the public/private. Pointing to its unfixing nature, Ara Wilson (2012, 32) illustrated that the concept of intimacy facilitates "a nondeterministic, nonreductive exploration" of social patterns of relationships and feelings. With a focus on specific patterns of how individuals are related to others, intimacy helps to reexamine and challenge social categories that have often "unwittingly perpetuated" the existing unequal power relations. Lastly, intimacy shies away from the essentialist, stable notion of identity. Wilson (2012, 48) stated the basic emphasis of intimacy is relationality. Replacing the stable understanding of identity, the use of intimacy enables us to discuss "identity in terms of relationship" while unveiling ways in which individuals perform their identities through social relationships and mutually produce a sense of self.

Building on these accounts, I take up the concept of intimacy to unravel individuals' experience of polyamory in the US and South Korea as *the process of the construction and management of selfhood*. When intimacy assumes neither fixed identities nor existing social categories, what lies at the core of intimate experience is a sense of self. Intimacy, in other words, is "the sphere in which we become who we are, the space in which the self emerges" (Oswin and Olund 2010, 60). Without employing existing social categories such as family or assuming particular identities of polyamorists, I deem polyamory as a process of the construction of selfhood. By utilizing intimacy, this project unfolds specific processes through which individuals construct their sense of self in their practice of polyamory and how these processes are entangled with the larger cultural, social, economic relations of power.

Approaching polyamory through the concept of intimacy, this project draws on two contrasting understandings of intimacy: intimacy as a project of self-realization and intimacy as a regulatory apparatus. First, I focus on how the concept of intimacy is inherently entwined with the modern individualistic ideal of *self-realization*. Many social theorists argued that intimacy is a modern construct born with the development of modern individualism through the Western Enlightenment project (Beck-Gernsheim and

Beck 1990; Habermas 1991; Giddens 1992; Fromm 1995). For instance, Habermas (1991) demonstrated that the advent of the autonomous, free, and self-interested modern subject is closely bound up with an individual's new experience of intimacy. Habermas (1991, 46-48) illustrated that from the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, there emerged new consciousness that the patriarchal conjugal family is constructed by marital contract between two privatized individuals based on their affection free from social constraints or coercion; and through the new experience, or image, of the conjugal family as an intimate sphere, people came to perceive and construct themselves as autonomous, free, and self-serving individuals.

Similarly, Anthony Giddens (1992) claimed that intimacy developed as a modern project of self-realization. Making a distinction between passionate love and intimacy (or romantic love), Giddens (1992, 40) explained that while passionate love is a universal experience, intimacy is a particular form of love tied to the value of individual freedom and self-realization. When modern individuals are expected to build their narrative of the self being unbounded by social controls, it is a practice of intimacy by which they build their self-narrative. As such, these scholars proposed that, based on the ideal of the modern individual, intimacy is an individual's essential experience through which to exercise freedom and autonomy and further realize themselves.

Drawing from these scholars' arguments, this project primarily conceives intimacy as a practice through which individuals construct and realize the self with the exercise of freedom and autonomy. That is, when individuals in the US and South Korea practice polyamory, this project illuminates how polyamory serves as the process in which individuals affirm and actualize their selfhood by exercising their autonomy and freedom.

While identifying intimacy as an individual's project of self-realization, this project, however, also importantly takes on feminist and queer critiques of intimacy. Many scholars of feminist and queer studies criticized the idea that intimacy is the self-realization based on individual freedom and autonomy is a mere fantasy. They contended that intimacy has mainly operated as a regulatory apparatus to discipline individuals' lives according to their gender, class, ethnicity, race, and sexuality (e.g., Spiller 1987; Cott 2002; Stoler 2002, 2006; Povinelli 2006; Eng 2010; Shah 2012). For instance, in *Carnal Knowledge and*

Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule (2002), Ann Laura Stoler adeptly showcased how intimacy played a pivotal role in the way that European colonial regimes created and managed boundaries between the colonizer and the colonized. Stoler (2002, 2) noted that it was a primary concern in colonial policy to make "a racially coded notion of who could be intimate with whom, and in what way".

Along with that, in *Stranger Intimacy*: *Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (2012), Nayan Shah, by tracing South Asian migrants' intimate experiences in the US and Canada in the first half of twentieth century, illustrated how nation-states employed intimacy as a tool not only to police but also to racialize migrant workers' lives. Arguing that "the normative nuclear family" was a racially uneven experience, Shah claimed that intimacy was a key domain where migrant workers encountered state power and their illegitimate, marginalized status of national citizens.

While Stoler and Shah illuminated how intimacy functioned as a device of domination, David Eng (2010) offers another perspective, elucidating how racial disparities are embedded in the intimate sphere. Eng argued that when queer liberalism promotes sexual freedom as the "universal" right dismissing racism, sexual liberation does not challenge but reinforce racialized experience of intimacy. In a nutshell, these scholars of feminist and queer studies illuminated the gendered, racialized, sexualized, and classed nature of an intimate experience, suggesting that if intimacy is ever an individual's project of self-realization unconstrained by social forces and norms, it would be white, middle-classed, heterosexual men's project.

Taking these insights together, this project considers that while intimacy is one's practice to recognize and realize the self, it is one's experience that is necessarily shaped by and through their gender, class, race, and sexuality. To frame the tension between intimacy as a project of self-realization and intimacy as a regulatory apparatus, this project draws on Elizabeth Povinelli's insights into intimacy. In *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (2006), Povinelli demonstrated that intimacy is experienced at the intersection between discourses, practices, and fantasies about the self-making, self-governing liberal subject and discourses, practices, and fantasies about social constraints placed on the liberal subject by inheritances. Intimacy, in this sense, is a practice in which an

individual's desires to be a free, self-governing individual meet specific obstacles that are put on the individual by inheritance.

By taking up Povinelli (2006)'s understanding of intimacy, my project emphasizes an individual's agency in the practice of intimacy. Supposing that intimacy is an experience where individuals encounter not only their desires to be a free, self-governing individual but also different social constraints that are put on them according to their gender, class, race, and sexuality, I highlight that individuals, in their practice of intimacy, do not simply submit themselves to the given social constraints. Rather, I deem intimacy as a practice or domain in which individuals struggle to recognize and realize themselves as a free, self-governing individual by actively negotiating and dealing with different social constraints placed on them by inheritance. In such a manner, this project scrutinizes polyamory as an agentic practice by which individuals construct and manage their selfhood in relationship with the self as well as the reality that circumscribes their positions, conducts, and beliefs.

The Practice of the Self and Ethics

The other important body of scholarship that grounds my project is Foucauldian studies on subjectivation and ethics. By conceptualizing polyamory as a practice of the self—an agentic practice through which an individual constitutes and manage selfhood—my usage of the self primarily builds on Foucault's theory of subjectivation. Here, I will briefly introduce Foucault's notion of subjectivation to illustrate how his theory informs my understanding of the self, and then situate my project in Foucauldian studies on ethics.

In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1*, Foucault (1990a, 95) wrote "Where there is power, there is resistance." This well-known quote shows the complexity of Foucault's understanding of subject-formation. In his earlier works, Foucault's main focus was how power produces particular subjects—"technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject" (Foucault 1997, 225). By analyzing the clinic and prison, Foucault illuminated how Western modern societies developed technologies of power characterized

by surveillance and discipline, thereby producing free yet docile, productive subjects (see Foucault 1995, 2003). However, in his later works, Foucault made a noticeable shift of his focus toward *subjectivation*—the way in which individuals constitute themselves as subjects. This later work provided new insights for subject-formation, revealing complex meanings of being a subject, which I mainly rely on to formulate my usage of selfhood.

Regarding his focus on subjectivation, Foucault (1990b) made it clear why and how he had to make that shift in *Volume 2* of *The History of Sexuality*. While examining the development of modern sexual subjects, who seek to decipher the hidden truth about themselves from their sexual acts, verbalize that truth to others, and then transform their attitude and conducts toward sexuality (Blasius 1993, 199), he realized that neither fields of knowledge nor types of normativity could exactly explain modern individuals' experience of sexuality. Foucault (1990b, 6) said that "in order to understand how the modern individual could experience of him[them]self as a subject of a "sexuality"", it appeared as an essential task to scrutinize forms by which the individual recognizes and constructs themself as the subject. And Foucault illustrated that historically, there have been different ways individuals construct themselves as subjects, and these forms are concerned with modes of how one perceives, relates to, and cares for the self. That is, in the same way as there are technologies of power, there are "technologies of self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault 1997, 225). And it is through interaction with both technologies of power and technologies of self that individuals are led to constitute themselves as sexual subjects—that is, the process of subjectivation.

Subjectivation, according to Foucault, is not at all a simple process. Forming oneself as a sexual subject does not merely mean that one recognizes themself by sexual morality and complies with it. Instead, Foucault (1990b, 26-28) stated that while subjectivation entails a set of decisions and tasks, in its process, an individual encounters different possibilities of how to make themselves as a subject. At first, an individual, given the sexual moral rules, needs to build a particular relation to the rules and perceive themself being subject to the rules. The individual is also required to determine a certain part of themself

as the material of their moral conduct. And importantly, the individual has to conduct themself not only to make their behaviors in accordance with the moral rules but also to transform themself as an ethical subject, a subject who commits to their moral goal. To put it briefly, far from simply obeying the moral codes, the process of subjectivation requires the individual to act upon themself for their moral goal and to transform themself as a mode of being that is characteristic of ethical subject.

With regard to this, Foucault illustrated the process in which an individual constructs themself as a sexual subject engaged not just in the relationship with the reality in which moral behaviors are carried out but importantly in the relationship with the self. To become as a sexual subject, an individual is required to constantly "monitor, text, improve, and transform" themselves in their relationship with the self (Foucault 1990b, 28). As such, for Foucault, subjectivation indicates a continuous process or practice of self-formation.

By drawing on Foucault's account of a practice of self-formation as a subject, this project conceptualizes selfhood as a constant practice or process. Rather than a static, fixed, or complete unit, this project conceives selfhood as a process or practice through which an individual, to make themself as an ethical subject, constantly reflects on, examines, and changes themself in the relationship to the self. And with that understanding, this project situates a practice of polyamory within the process of subjectivation. As considering that individuals experience polyamory as part of the process in which they construct themselves as ethical subjects, this project examines how polyamory functions in that process and what polyamory signifies in a way that individuals identify themselves as particular ethical subjects. Specifically, in chapter 2 and chapter 5, through the framework of the process of subjectivation, I analyze individuals' experience of polyamory in Southern California and in Seoul, respectively.

In my project, Foucault's theory of subjectivation is especially useful in examining various and complex ways in which individuals experience polyamory between their exercise of agency and existing moral values and norms, including a sexual norm of monogamy. As many scholars noted, Foucault's later works allowed him to turn away from his previous illustration of omnipotence of power. While admitting that the existence of subjects is fundamentally the effect of power, Foucault's theory of subjectivation also

shows that subjects do not merely replicate and secure the logic of power. While an individual subordinates themself to existing moral codes to become an ethical subject, the moral codes that initiate the emergence of the subject can fail to remain consistent with the behaviors that the subject carries out (Butler 1997, 12). In short, by elaborating the process of subjectivation, Foucault suggested a possibility for transgression of power—subjects who resist the power that conditions their existence (Bernauer and Mahon 2005, 151).

As a matter of fact, it is his famous concept of *ethics* whereby Foucault plainly explicated the possibility of resistance. While morality and ethics are often used interchangeably, Foucault made a clear distinction between these two. As Foucault (1990b, 25) described, morality is a system of values and rules of actions which are prescribed by society, and which individuals are mandated to follow in a juridical, institutional manner. Ethics, on the contrary, means particular manners in which individuals perform on themselves to become subjects of moral conducts. Put another way, given the moral codes and prescriptions, ethics is "an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being" (Foucault 1997, 282). Grounded in the existing moral system, ethics is certainly not an individual's free-floating creation that has indefinite possibilities. Yet, ethics is essentially an individual's exercise of agency in a way that they interpret, appropriate, or transform existing moral codes. And this is why Foucault emphasized ethics as the practice of freedom. With this in mind, by approaching polyamory as an exercise of self-formation as a subject of moral conducts—a practice of ethics—this project elucidates how individuals form themselves as ethical subjects through their everyday experience of intimacy.

In this respect, I should mention that this project engages with a growing body of literature on ethics. Inspired by Foucault's elaboration on subjectivation and ethics, in recent decades, there has been an increasing scholarly interest in ethics as a conscious, embodied practice of self-formation as a moral subject (e.g., Faubion 2001, 2011; Laidlaw 2002, 2014; Lambek 2015; Keane 2016). Instead of looking at how moral codes guide and regulate individuals' lives, anthologists and other scholars analyzed how individuals cultivate a "good" sense of self while reflecting on existing moral codes as well as their own aspirations, hopes, and wills (e.g., Mahmood 2003, 2005; Hirschkind 2006; Gregory 2009; Schielke 2015). And their

works unfolded different, ambivalent ways in which individuals "live moral code" in their everyday lives (Mahmood 2003, 846). My project aligns with these scholars' works to examine a practice of ethics in the everyday life. While many of those scholars focused on the religious life to showcase how individuals struggle to form themselves as pious beings while negotiating their secular life with religious beliefs and values, this project, however, distinctly puts forward an individual's intimate experience as a practice of ethics. When there operate various moral and sexual values and norms surrounding one's intimate life, this project examines how individuals practice polyamory by selectively absorbing and rejecting existing values and norms and what polyamory signifies in a way that they fashion themselves as particular mode of ethical beings. Particularly, considering that intimate practice is entwined with one's gender, race, class, and sexuality, my project advances scholarly discussions of ethics by illuminating the gendered, racialized, and classed dynamics of an ethical practice.

Why Practice the Polyamorous Self?

Before turning to the explanation of my epistemological standpoint and methodological approach, I will first introduce polyamory as my object of inquiry. By providing a brief history of polyamory in the US and laying out the basic characteristics of polyamory, I will address my rationale for why polyamory is a good site for scrutinizing and reconsidering intimacy, ethics, and the self.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, which added an entry for polyamory in 2006, polyamory is defined as "the practice of engaging in multiple sexual relationships with the consent of all the people involved" (OED). The coinage of the word "polyamory" itself is generally credited to Morning Glory Zell, an American pagan woman.[1] As a leader of the Church of All Worlds (CAW), she published the article "A Bouquet of Lovers" in a pagan magazine in 1990.[2] In the article, Zell first used the phrase

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[1] Alan M, ""Polyamory" enters the Oxford English Dictionary, and tracking the word's origins," Polyamory in the Media (blog), January 6, 2007, accessed October 13, 2018
http://polyinthemedia.blogspot.co.uk/2007/01/polyamory-enters-oxford-english.html

[2] A polyamorous lifestyle is in fact an essential aspect of the Church of All Worlds. As a pagan church founded by Morning Glory Zell's husband Zell Oberon, CAW denounces the patriarchal monogamous marriage as a fatal flaw of the Christian church. While both Zell Oberon and Morning Glory Zell were greatly influenced by Robert Heinlein's

"poly-amorous lifestyle" to explain strategies for responsible non-monogamous relationships. Yet, polyamory was by no means Zell's invention. Before the term polyamory came into being, people already practiced responsible non-monogamous relationships. Particularly, the practice was common in the Kerista village, an egalitarian utopian commune formed in 1971 in San Francisco. At the core of the Kerista commune was its unique sexual arrangement of polyfidelity, a form of non-monogamous relationship in which all members of the relationship are equal and agree to be sexual and romantic partners with the other members.

Though the Kerista village fell apart in the early 1990s, Loving More—which is the oldest polyamory organization in the US—was formed from the legacy of the Kerista commune.[3] Influenced by the Kerista commune, Ryam Nearing, who practiced consensual non-monogamy, established the organization Polyfidelitous Educational Productions (PEP) in 1984. Adopting the term polyamory to define the organization, PEP was later renamed Loving More in 1991. Then, in 1992, Jennifer Wesp founded the Usenet newsgroup alt.polyamory to help connect people who were interested in polyamory and enable them to discuss polyamory and related issues.[4] Thereafter, Deborah Taj Anapol published the first polyamory book, *Polyamory, New Love without Limits,* in 1997. In the same year, Dossie Easton and Janet H. Hardy's *The Ethical Slut: A Guide to Infinite Sexual Possibilities*, which is one of the most popular polyamory guidebooks, also came out (both Easton and Hardy as well as their book are introduced in chapter 1).

At the same time, polyamory started to appear in the American mainstream news media. In 2009, Newsweek published the article "Polyamory: Next Sexual Revolution?", reporting that more than half a million people were in polyamorous relationships in the US at that time. Also in 2009, MTV aired a one-hour documentary titled "I'm Polyamorous." The reality TV show *Polyamory: Married and Dating* was launched on the American television network Showtime in 2012. Since the 2010s, media representations

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science fiction novel *Stranger in a Strange Land*, their vision for their pagan church was the endorsement of all types of loving relationships, regardless of gender or number of partners (Source: https://caw.org/).

[3] Alan M, "A History of Loving More," Loving More Nonprofit, Accessed November 12, 2018 https://www.lovingmorenonprofit.org/aboutus/history/

[4] "Section 1) What's alt.polyamory?" alt.polyamory Frequently Asked Questions, accessed November 14, 2018, http://www.faqs.org/faqs/polyamory/faq/section-1.html

of polyamory have been gradually increasing; it is not difficult to find polyamory in news articles, and more TV shows and films have started to portray polyamory and its possibilities.

Given that polyamory has become, albeit not common, a more recognizable form of intimate relationship in the US in the last three decades, polyamory is a compelling case for studying intimacy as an ethical practice because of three main characteristics. First, polyamory is relevant to examining intimacy as an ethical endeavor because it is a non-monogamous practice based on *an attempt to challenge the norm of monogamy*. In contemporary American society, there are different forms of non-monogamous practices, such as swinging, open marriages, and casual sex. However, what distinguishes polyamory from other types of non-monogamous practices is that polyamory mainly developed as a way to oppose the normative status of monogamy. In contrast, swinging, for example, is a popular and well-developed non-monogamous lifestyle in the US, but it does not necessarily defy monogamy. While engaging in non-monogamous sexual activities, swingers tend to highly value the monogamous couple as a basic unit and put a great amount of effort into preserving their monogamous unions (Jankowiak and Mixon 2010). Polyamorists, on the other hand, tend to contest the norm of monogamy, seeing it as a source of sexual repression, and resist social stigmas against their non-monogamous practices. Furthermore, polyamorists seek for social and legal recognition for their relationships whereas swingers do not (Emens 2004; Tweedy 2011). In light of these differences, polyamory serves as an interesting example for exploring the processes in which individuals creatively interpret, appraise, and even oppose existing moral values and norms to form themselves as moral subjects as well as the ways in which their gender, class, and race interact with those processes.

Second, *the indeterministic, flexible nature of polyamory* also makes it of interest when studying ethics. Since polyamory is broadly defined as a consensual non-monogamous relationship with the premise of resistance to monogamy, it encapsulates a wide range of intimate relationships and sexual practices (Munson and Stelbom 1999; Klesse 2006). Polyamory has no fixed rules or formats. As individuals practice polyamory, they design their relationships according to their own sexual, intimate desires and different situations. In other words, individuals must decide independently not just how many intimate partners they would like to have, but also how they will structure their relationships (e.g., whether there is a hierarchical

arrangement among partners, such as a primary partner and secondary partner, or not) and what kind of relationships they would like to build with their partners' other partners. As a matter of fact, not everyone in a polyamorous relationship has multiple intimate partners, and some polyamorists remain single without developing any committed intimate relationships at all. As polyamory is an indeterministic, flexible relationship form, my project unearths the specific processes in which individuals create and manage their polyamorous relationships through constant reflection, decision-making, and negotiation. In doing so, it elucidates the complex dynamics through which individuals attempt to transform themselves into a particular mode of ethical being using self-examination, self-reflection, and self-knowledge.

Lastly, given the set of values—freedom, honesty, gender equality, and growth—underlying polyamorous relationships, polyamory provides a good opportunity for exploring the particular modes of being that individuals seek to attain through their practice of intimacy. Since there is no fixed form for polyamorous relationships, I point out that the defining feature of polyamory is the particular values that polyamorists typically uphold. Elisabeth Sheff (2016), a sociologist who conducted a longitudinal study on polyamorous families, claimed that polyamorists share common values in their practice of love, sex, and relationships: freedom, honesty, emotional intimacy, gender equality, openness, and growth. Indeed, these values are repeatedly elaborated and emphasized as the core of polyamory in polyamory guidebooks and other polyamory education resources, such as podcasts and blogs produced by polyamory activists and polyamorists (e.g., Easton and Lizst 1997; Taormino 2008; Anapol 2010; Veaux and Rickert 2014). Put another way, these values lie at the heart of the ways in which polyamorists perceive, perform, and appraise their polyamorous relationships when practicing polyamory to oppose the norm of monogamy. Polyamorists' emphasis of these values is crucial to understanding what particular mode of being they seek to become through the practice of polyamory. By analyzing how polyamorists recognize these values in their practice of polyamory and how they struggle to actualize them in their relationships, this project illuminates what mode of being polyamorists seek to become through polyamory.

To put it in a nutshell, three basic characteristics make polyamory a compelling case for exploring intimacy as an ethical practice: (1) polyamory as an attempt to challenge the norm of monogamy, (2) the

indeterministic, flexible nature of polyamory, and (3) polyamory's emphasis on a set of values, specifically freedom, honesty, gender equality, and growth. In what follows, I will present my epistemological and methodological approaches.

Epistemological/Methodological Approaches

Before providing a brief summary of the dissertation's organization and chapters, I will address my closely-entangled epistemological and methodological approaches: the postcolonial feminist standpoint and feminist ethnography. First, I will explain how the postcolonial feminist standpoint informs my analysis of polyamory culture in the US and South Korea. Then, I will discuss the process in which I conducted my fieldwork and offer reflections on my shifting positionality during my fieldwork in the US and South Korea.

The Postcolonial Feminist Standpoint

The other major scholarship that informs my dissertation is postcolonial feminist studies. Challenging mainstream Western feminism, which universalizes white, middle-class, and heterosexual Western women's experience, postcolonial feminism has significantly grown since the 1980s to unsettle the notion of universal "woman" (Rajan and Park 2000, 54). By centering on non-Western and/or non-white women's diverse lived experiences, postcolonial feminist scholars, such as Audre Lorde, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gloria Anzaldúa, Ien Ang, and Lisa Lowe, have illuminated how colonialism and patriarchy intertwiningly function to create and consolidate women's oppression. Postcolonial feminist works have revealed that the social position of women cannot be simply defined by one's gender identity but is necessarily entangled with one's class, race, nationality, and sexuality. In light of this, I take a postcolonial feminist standpoint to examine the development of polyamory cultures in the US and South Korea. At a basic level, this project is committed to bringing critical focus on Americans and South Koreans' different experiences of polyamory according to their race, ethnicity, and class beyond the dualistic model of the Western and the non-Western. This also means my commitment to tackling not just patriarchy but also colonial legacies that underlie the development of polyamory in the US and South Korea.

The postcolonial feminist standpoint that I undertake in this project is closely informed by my positionality as a non-Western woman of color coming from South Korea. Frankly speaking, I did not start this project from the postcolonial feminist perspective. As I have developed my dissertation project on polyamory, I have (re)established my identity as a non-Western, woman of color, feminist scholar through my lived experience in the US academia. And this has importantly allowed me to be attentive to the interplay between patriarchy and US colonialism, which produces various yet asymmetrical oppression of women. Having grown up and been educated in South Korea, I had long understood the signifier "Western women" as a single, unified unit. Having said that, as living as a woman of color in the US, I have realized that the signifier primarily means white, middle-class women while concealing working-class women of color's dissimilar experiences. At the same time, I also came to be critical of the issue of the representation of non-Western women. When there is the complexity or the multiplicity of non-Western women that I have lived through and known in South Korea, their experiences are too easily objectified or generalized under the name of non-Western or Asian women. In "The Project of Feminist Epistemology: Perspectives of a Nonwestern Feminist" (2004), Uma Narayan described the "epistemic advantage" of oppressed groups, especially non-Western women. As Narayan (2004, 221) noted, while living in a society where the Western world-view is dominant, non-Western women often have to "operate with two sets of practices and in two different sets of contexts," which allows them to have "epistemic advantage." In this project, I utilize the "epistemic advantage" that I have obtained through my mobile, multilayered positionality as a non-Western woman of color to analyze not only the different and unequal experiences individuals have of polyamory between and within the US and South Korea but also the larger power relations that underlie their different experiences.

With the postcolonial feminist perspective, I have mainly focused on three different aspects concerning the way in which polyamory cultures have developed across the US and South Korea. First, I put forward how the US colonial history and racism play out in the emergence of polyamory culture in the US. As The Combahee River Collective (2003, 165) shrewdly characterized Black women's experience with the interlocking nature of "racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression," many postcolonial

feminist studies have unveiled how American colonial history of slavery and immigration has fundamentally embedded in American women of color's experience of family, marriage, intimacy, and motherhood (e.g., Spiller 1987; hooks 1999; Ang 2001; Collins 2002). In this context, I explore how the development of American polyamory culture is entwined with a gendered, racialized history of heterosexual monogamy in the US. Particularly, in chapter 1, I review how heterosexual monogamy has been constituted as a civic norm to represent the white, Christian, American identity while functioning to discipline and control African, Asian, or Indigenous Americans. And by drawing from the gendered, racialized experience of heterosexual monogamy, I showcase how the white, middle-class normative experience of sexuality and individuality is rooted in the way in which polyamory has developed in the US.

Second, I address the cultural, ideological, and historical contexts under which South Koreans experience polyamory. In her foundational article for postcolonial feminist studies, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse" (1988), Mohanty acutely analyzed how diverse experiences of so-called "Third World Women" are either conveniently erased for the sake of universal knowledge about women or objectified as the singular, monolithic Other. And as one of the main reasons for improper representations of non-Western women in mainstream Western feminism, Mohanty (1988, 63) pointed out that non-Western women's experiences are often discussed "without their specification in local cultural and historical contexts." Though the family, marriage, patriarchy, household, and gender roles are social, institutional practices that have cultural and historical particularities, many feminist studies applied them as universal concepts only to distort meanings of non-Western women's experiences. In this regard, I center on the specific cultural, historical contexts in which South Korean individuals' experiences of polyamory lie. Chapter 3, for example, explores how the social discourse of polyamory has grown in close interaction with the change of South Korean familism (or familialism) culture, which has been established through South Korean modernization project, after the Asian financial crisis of 1997. And under the South Korean specific cultural backgrounds, I elucidate how South Koreans' experiences of polyamory are divergent according to their gendered positions in the patriarchal family (chapter 5).

Finally, my dissertation foregrounds colonial legacies between the US and South Korea as well as the economic forces of neoliberalism that inhere the development of polyamory culture in South Korea. In responding to critiques on her article "Under the Western Eyes," Mohanty (2003) clarified that her emphasis is not just to reveal particular, different experiences of non-Western women. Looking at particularities and differences is crucial because they are linked with the macro-politics of global political economic systems and processes. That is, Mohanty reemphasized the importance of identifying larger social, economic forces that produce diverse yet unequal women's experiences. While showing individuals' different experiences of polyamory between and within the US and South Korea, I hence pay critical attention to the larger historical, economic forces that affect the development of polyamory in South Korea—which are the colonial history of the US-South Korea relations and the impact of neoliberal globalization in South Korea since the late 1990s.

Given that polyamory is introduced to South Koreans as a Western, or American, intimate practice, I consider how the US colonial legacies that remain in South Korea are connected with the way in which South Koreans perceive and adopt polyamory. After the independence from the Japanese colonial rule, South Korea was *de facto* under the US colonial power, and especially after the Korean war, the US influence was predominant in South Korea, militarily, economically, and politically. In South Korea, the American cultural hegemonic power effectively operates until now while signifying progress, advancement, democracy, and individual freedom. At the same time, I also take into account neoliberal economic globalization in the development of polyamory culture in South Korea. As neoliberal has become a dominant logic to organize South Koreans' everyday lives since the Asian financial of 1997, I situate South Koreans' experience of polyamory within the broader neoliberal reconstructions of South Korean society.

As such, my postcolonial feminist standpoint as a non-Western woman of color is useful for this project in a way not only to disclose the complexity and multiplicity of individuals' experience of polyamory in the US and South Korea but also to identify the larger political, economic forces that are underlying individuals' complex, diverse experiences of polyamory. In the following, I discuss my methodological orientation to this project.

Dual Positionalities and De/Colonial Possibilities

To explore Americans' and South Koreans' complex, varied experiences of polyamory in their everyday lives, I utilize feminist ethnography as the main methodology for this project. In what follows, I will introduce my methodological approach as a feminist ethnographer. Then, drawing from Kamala Visweswaran (1994)'s illustration of feminist ethnography as a failure, I will discuss possibilities and limits of my ethnography.

In "Situated Knowledge: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" (1988), Donna Haraway illustrated that feminist objectivity begins by deconstructing the doctrine of objectivity that promises the transcendent, disembodied vision. Against the universal, unlocatable, and thus irresponsible objectivity, Haraway (1988, 583) instead argued that "feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object." Far from relying on the illusionary transcendent vision, feminist knowledge affirms its situated and embodied objectivity by revealing our partial, limited way of seeing and a specific location of where we see. Haraway (1988, 587), in this sense, considered positioning as the key practice in feminist knowledge production, which allows us to take responsibility for our knowledge claims. Following Haraway's insight, as a way of ensuring feminist objectivity, here, I provide my reflections on my shifting positionality and processes by which I collected ethnographic data for this project.

Between 2017 to 2019, I conducted an ethnographic study in two different field sites—Southern California and Seoul. In both sites, I began my fieldwork by engaging with local polyamory communities. With the agreement of communities' organizers and members, I conducted participation observations in communities' online discussion forums, monthly meetings, and informal gatherings. During the fieldwork, I also attended polyamory-related events, such as workshops, colloquiums, and book talks. Based upon rapport that I gained through participant observations, I conducted one-on-one interviews with 80 polyamorists at the last stage of my fieldwork. Interviews consisted of mainly four parts: (1) trajectories of becoming a polyamorist, (2) current and previous experiences of polyamorous relationships, (3) strategies

to manage polyamorous relationships and difficulties, and (4) general perceptions about polyamory—its meanings, principles, and values.

While I conducted fieldwork in Southern California and Seoul over three years, I was the same person throughout the period, but my positionality significantly differed depending on which site I was in. As I approached local polyamory communities in Southern California, I initially introduced myself as a graduate student who was conducting a doctoral dissertation project on polyamory cultures in the US and South Korea. While polyamorists that I met in Southern California were overall favorable to my research, they were also curious about why I chose to study polyamory. Many of them questioned if I was studying polyamory because I myself am a polyamorist. The unequal relationship between researcher and informants has long been a pivotal issue of feminist ethnography (e.g., Stacey 1988; Abu-Lughod 1990, Vis). Though giving voice to the voiceless is the faith of feminist ethnography, it is the researcher who, in the end, has authority to tell a story of the voiceless—that is, the inherent power imbalance between researcher and informants (Lather 2001). Having said that, I found that their questioning of my polyamorous practice was not simply about their curiosity. But importantly, it was the way that they tried to make sure how I would represent their polyamorous experiences. In fact, when they found that I am not an "insider" who is practicing polyamory for myself, some polyamorists inspected how I thought of polyamory, in what way I became interested in studying polyamory, or whether I was personally positive in practicing polyamory in the future. That is, through this process, polyamorists gauged how or how much they would show their polyamorous lives to me. Put another way, it was the active negotiation process of the asymmetrical power dynamic between me as a researcher and polyamorists as research "subjects."

However, there was another important layer that shaped my relationship with polyamorists in Southern California, which was my identity as a non-Western woman of color coming from South Korea. Though some polyamorists seemed skeptical that I, as an "outsider" of polyamory communities, was studying their polyamorous lives, almost all polyamorists appeared to be intrigued by the cross-cultural nature of my research. Given the common perception that Asian societies are sexually repressed more than the US, they tended to expect that my study would contribute to promoting polyamory and help oppressed

polyamorists in South Korea. In this way, it appeared clear that my being a non-Western Asian woman was central to the way Southern Californian polyamorists perceived me (and my research). Indeed, during my fieldwork in Southern California, I was hardly blended in with polyamorists. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, polyamory communities in Southern California are predominantly white, and it was especially hard to find Asian Americans. Under these circumstances, I was often seen as a non-Western woman of color who was conducting research for sexual liberation in "my" society.

In this respect, my relationship with polyamorists in Southern California was complex, mobile, and multidimensional. While there was, on the one hand, the inherently unequal power relation between a researcher and informants, there was, on the other hand, hierarchical relation between the West and non-West, which informed my relationship with polyamorists. That is to say, as being Westerners who enjoy more sexual freedom, polyamorists in Southern California willingly cooperated with my research in a way that they could help more oppressed polyamorists in South Korea.

My relationship with polyamorists in South Korea, on the contrary, was significantly different. I was initially more careful to approach South Korean polyamory communities. Around the time I started fieldwork, there was an issue that attracted polyamorists' attention, which was that one polyamorist got indefinite suspension from college after being outed (Chapter 5). And because of that, I was worried that polyamory communities would be hostile to me, as someone who is not a polyamorist, to attend their meetings. However, South Korean polyamorists, unlike my expectation, were very welcoming. As I introduced myself as a graduate student in the US, who was conducting research on polyamory cultures in the US and South Korea, many polyamorists showed a great interest in and curiosity about my research. Above all, given the lack of polyamory representations, they appeared to be excited about my research while hoping that it would contribute to improving the social perception of polyamory. At the same time, I found that they were also curious about my knowledge of polyamory culture in the US. Considering that polyamory culture was originally developed in the US, many South Korean polyamorists wanted to learn from me about American polyamory culture, and some of them also asked me for practical tips for their practice of polyamory. While it was helpful for my project that many polyamorists actively approached me

and participated in my research, it created the critical tension between their request for my polyamory knowledge and my role as a researcher. During my fieldwork in Seoul, I hence had to be conscious not to play a role in conveying polyamory information that I learned from my fieldwork in the US and not to influence South Korean polyamorists' understandings and practices of polyamory.

In opposition to my experience in Southern California, I could be easily assimilated into South Korean polyamorists. Although I was not a polyamorist, I was not so much considered an outsider during my fieldwork in Seoul. Nevertheless, the power imbalance between me and polyamorists was more apparent in South Korea compared to one in Southern California because of my familiarity with the US. In other words, my experience of the US and my knowledge of American polyamory culture lie at the core of the way in which South Korean polyamorists perceived and related with me. For them, I was not just a researcher who has the voice to tell their story but also an expert with the knowledge of the US, which is seen as more advanced and progressive.

After all, my ethnography was a symptom and indicator of the existing gender, racial, and national power dynamics, which I intended to address in this project. By conducting ethnography, my aim was to disclose Americans and South Koreans' diverse yet unequal experiences of polyamory and to tackle the larger historical, political, and economic power relations that are embedded those unequal experiences. Yet, my very practice of doing ethnography was also shaped by and entangled with the existing power relations. In this way, the danger of reproducing and reinforcing the postcolonial gender, racial power relations essentially inheres in my project.

In *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (1994), Kamala Visweswaran discussed the inescapable or necessary failure of feminist ethnography while challenging the premise that "better" methodology will make better ethnographic accounts. She illustrated that repeated failures of feminist ethnography are fundamentally connected with more critical issues of epistemology. Moving away from the fiction of giving voice to the voiceless, Visweswaran (1994, 98) thus argued that we can use our failures "as a means of pointing up the difficulties in our epistemological assumptions and representation strategies." In this regard, what I have shown here is the failure of my postcolonial feminist ethnography. As much as I aimed to

dismantle the remaining colonial legacies between the US and South Korea through my research, my ethnography is certainly a failure. To some extent, my ethnography was conducted in compliance with the hierarchical order that exists in US-South Korea relations. Yet, as Visweswaran (1994) noted, my failed ethnography raises an important epistemological question: how can we address the existing unequal power relations that are embedded in the research process? Put differently, given that our very practice of knowledge production inherently embodies unequal gender, class, and racial relations, how does the knowledge that we produce disrupt the existing social order? To answer this question is beyond the capacity of this dissertation. Instead, my project reveals its own failures and I seek to be accountable for my interpretations of and claims about individuals' experiences of polyamory in the US and South Korea.

Chapter Outlines

My dissertation mainly consists of two parts: Part One (Introduction, Chapter 1, and Chapter 2) focuses on the development of polyamory culture in Southern California and Part Two (Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Chapter 5) is an analysis of how polyamory culture has grown in South Korea.

Chapter 1, "The Making of Polyamory Culture," traces the formation of polyamory culture in the US since the 1990s. Drawing from Chakrabarty (2000)'s notion of provincializing Europe, this chapter contends that polyamory culture has developed in the US entangled with America's specific gender and racial dynamics as well as the American dominant cultural value of individuality. It first considers the history of monogamy in the US to illustrate how the civic norm of monogamy was established as a governmental mechanism not only to consolidate a white, civilized American identity but also to discipline and regulate Black, Indigenous, and Asian Americans. Under the historical contexts of the racialized construction of the social norm of monogamy, it examines how polyamory primarily developed as a means by which white, middle-class American women could realize their sexual agency, autonomy, and freedom against the heteropatriarchal nuclear family and how the popular moral imperative of the liberal individual became embedded in polyamory culture. In the end, this chapter suggests that polyamory culture has been

shaped by and through America’s racialized history of monogamy, the gendered experience of patriarchal monogamy, and the dominant American belief of liberal individualism, while embodying the normativity of white, middle-class liberal individuality.

Chapter 2, “Practicing Polyamory, Realizing the Authentic Self,” examines Americans’ practice of polyamory in their everyday lives. Drawing from ethnographic data that I collected from fieldwork in Southern Californian polyamory communities, this chapter addresses how individuals experience polyamory in the process of subjectivation. As the ideal of the liberal individual is embedded in polyamory culture, the chapter describes how Southern Californian polyamorists articulate the exercise of freedom and autonomy as crucial values in their polyamorous lives. By detailing how Southern Californian polyamorists create and maintain their polyamorous relationships, it also illustrates that polyamory serves as a constant practice of introspecting, analyzing, and improving the self though psychotherapeutic knowledge and techniques, by which individuals ultimately construct and govern themselves as free, autonomous individuals. Accordingly, the chapter elucidates how Southern Californian polyamorists utilize polyamory as a means to search for and attain an authentic self, which is a prevalent ethical ideal in the US, and how their particular racial, classed positionalities are intertwined with their practice of polyamory.

Chapter 3, “Polyamory’s Emergence in South Korea: From a Western Fantasy to an Anti-Normative, Feminist Practice,” explores how the social discourse of polyamory evolved in South Korea entwined with its sociopolitical and economic changes in the 2000s and 2010s. To analyze the development of polyamory discourse in South Korea, this chapter begins by describing South Korean modern familism culture and its change after the Asian financial crisis of 1997. Based on these specific South Korean social contexts, this chapter illustrates that, while polyamory was first brought into the public discourse through the neoliberal reforms of the South Korean socioeconomic system after 1997, it was primarily represented as a Western fantasy that was impossible for South Koreans. However, the social discourse of polyamory showed a significant change in the 2010s. Samp'osedae—a new generation who abandoned dating, marriage, and childbirth—arose as a serious social issue, indicating the changing social atmosphere for the heteropatriarchal nuclear family model in South Korea. In line with this, polyamory also started to draw

social attention, especially among young people who stressed their freedom and choice, and polyamory gained new meaning as an anti-normative, feminist intimate practice. Above all, by showing significant changes in cultural representations of polyamory for the last two decades, this chapter contends that the reconstruction of the individual's private life in the neoliberal, post-crisis contexts of South Korea was central to the development of polyamory discourse.

Chapter 4, "(Re)creating Polyamory Culture in South Korea," scrutinizes the growth of polyamory culture in South Korea. By utilizing the analytic framework of translation, this chapter discusses how polyamory culture was built in South Korea through a complex process in which South Korean polyamorists interpreted the American culture of polyamory, dealt with untranslatable cultural elements between the US and South Korea, and constructed new meanings of polyamory. Given that South Koreans identifying as polyamorists have emerged since the 2010s, this chapter describes how polyamorists reshaped, reorganized, and/or rediscovered their non-monogamous desires in interaction with American polyamory discourse. In this process, this chapter also illustrates the uneven ways that polyamorists access, circulate, and produce polyamory knowledge. While individuals have different access to polyamory knowledge according to their social status, the asymmetrical circuits of polyamory knowledge allow for the development of conflicting meanings of polyamory among South Koreans. Finally, this chapter addresses how different meanings of polyamory were essentially shaped through the changing dynamics of patriarchal gender relations in South Korea. This chapter concludes that South Korean polyamory culture has grown entwined with the postcolonial power dynamics of US-South Korea relations as well as changes in the heteropatriarchal order and individuals' intimate desires and choices.

Chapter 5, "Becoming a Polyamorist, Crafting the Private Self," discusses South Korean individuals' practice of polyamory in their everyday lives. Based on ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted in Seoul, South Korea, this chapter examines how individuals experience polyamory as part of the process in which they form themselves as ethical beings. It first showcases how South Korean polyamorists perceive their practice of polyamory as an agentic choice not only to express their own desires but also to organize their lives on their own terms. By identifying the difficulties and issues South Korean

polyamorists encounter to live as polyamorists and how they deal with them, the chapter illustrates that the practice of polyamory requires individuals to recognize and express their inner thoughts, desires, and feelings in opposition to their roles in familial or intimate relationships as well as social norms. Ultimately, this chapter illuminates how polyamory essentially operates in South Korean society as a process through which one can cultivate the private self—the self that is untethered from social roles, relationships, and status—and how one's gendered position is intertwined with that process. It claims that, while the notion of the private self has developed in the post-crisis, neoliberal contexts of South Korea, unequal gender dynamics within the heteropatriarchal family are rooted in the cultivation of the private self.

Conclusion, "Between "Ethical Sluts" and Invisible Housewives: Polyamory as a Racialized, Gendered Project of the Self" addresses the implications, limitations, and future directions of this dissertation. By going back to Foucault's theory of subjectivation and ethics, this chapter discusses how we can understand the racialized, gendered nature of individuals' experiences of polyamory. It suggests that polyamory is *a practice of ethics* through which individuals, within very specific conditions and limits, struggle to transform themselves into ethical beings by actively analyzing, employing, or modifying existing social norms and values. Also, it illustrates how this dissertation contributes to three different fields of scholarship—critical studies of intimacy, theories of selfhood, and studies of ethics—by providing a postcolonial feminist analysis of the development of polyamory culture in the US and South Korea. Lastly, this dissertation concludes with four future directions of how I would like to expand and deepen critical understandings of intimacy, the self, and ethics based on the six chapters of this dissertation.

Chapter 1 The Making of Polyamory Culture

Provincializing Polyamory

In the US, along with numerous online and offline polyamory communities as well as increasing media representations of polyamorous relationships, polyamory culture has grown noticeably in a relatively short period of time. Less than thirty years after Morning Glory Zell first coined the word polyamory in 1990 (introductory chapter), it has become a comprehensible, even popular, idea to indicate "the practice of engaging in multiple romantic (and typically sexual) relationships, with the consent of all the people involved" (Oxford English Dictionary). Yet, the US is not the only country in which polyamory has developed. Through transnational mobility and communication, individuals who identify themselves as polyamorists and form polyamorous relationships have appeared in many other countries, including not only European countries but also South American and Asian countries, in the twenty-first century. One of those countries is South Korea, where polyamory has grown in conjunction with American polyamory culture.

Considering the transnational development of polyamory, this chapter intends to provincialize American polyamory culture by drawing from Dipesh Chakrabarty's work, *Provincializing Europe* (2000). Indicating how categories and concepts produced by European thinkers in the course of the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century are built into the way South Asians—if not everyone in non-Western, colonial nations—perceive and experience modernity, Chakrabarty proposed provincializing Europe, which has operated as an abstract, universal figure. As he defined it, provincializing Europe is "to find out how and in what sense European ideas that were universal were also, at one and the same time, drawn from very particular intellectual historical traditions that could not claim any universal validity" (Chakrabarty 2000, xiii). By revealing how so-called universal thoughts are relevant to their places of origin, Chakrabarty sought to dismantle the normative, teleological understanding of European thought. Informed by Chakrabarty, I scrutinize the making of polyamory culture in the US to illustrate how the very idea of polyamory inherently carries social dynamics and cultural ideas that are specific to the US.

While showing how the formation of polyamory is related to the particular conditions of US society, my analysis does not claim that polyamory is an American-specific practice and thereby one that only pertains to Americans. Just as Chakrabarty noted that provincializing Europe does not call for a simplistic rejection of universal categories and ideas, the objective of this chapter is not to dismiss polyamory merely as an American-specific practice that is not applicable to other societies. Rather, though polyamory has grown in the US and spread to other countries, such as South Korea, I consider American polyamory culture as something that is "at once both indispensable and inadequate" in thinking about the transnational development of polyamory (Chakrabarty 2000, 16). By undertaking Chakrabarty's critical approach to European thought, I seek to contest the universal or normative idea of polyamory and explore ways to think about the development of polyamory culture in South Korea beyond the Euro-American-centric model of sexual modernity.

To provincialize American polyamory culture, this chapter focuses particularly on two aspects that have affected its formation. The first aspect is the racial and gender dynamics of the US. Given that the norm of monogamy was established and has operated in a racialized, gendered manner in American society, the particular racial and gender dynamics of the US are deeply rooted in the way polyamory culture developed. The second aspect is the moral, cultural belief about the self in American society. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, what defines polyamory is not just a particular form of non-monogamous relationship but, more importantly, the moral values of life, such as freedom, independence, honesty, and personal growth. The emergence of polyamory culture, in this sense, is essentially entwined with the liberal, individualistic tradition of American society. Ultimately, this chapter addresses how American polyamory culture has evolved through the interplay between the particular racial and gender dynamics of the US and its liberal, individualistic ideal of the self.

Specific questions that I aim to answer in this chapter include: In what historical and cultural traditions has polyamory emerged? Who played active roles in the development of polyamory culture in the US, and how do their positionalities inform the way they forged polyamory culture? What moral values or ideals about the self underpin the formation of polyamory culture? Finally, with respect to the

development of polyamory culture, how do we contemplate the relationship between intimacy, the self, and morality in contemporary American society?

Drawing on my analysis of polyamory self-help books and online polyamory resources including podcasts and blogs, all of which were produced by American polyamorists for the purpose of polyamory education, this chapter is comprised of three main sections. First, "Questioning Monogamy in the US" traces the racialized establishment of monogamy as a social norm in the US. It showcases that, as monogamy was constructed as the condition for being a free, self-governing, and democratic American citizen, monogamy was closely associated with whiteness, serving not only to regulate but also to delegitimize Black and Asian people's intimate experiences. Given the racialized meaning of monogamy, the second section, "'Ethical Sluts': American Pioneering Polyamorous Women," tells stories of individuals who played constitutive roles in the early formation of American polyamory culture. By looking at Americans who laid the foundation of polyamory culture—who they are and how they have approached and appraised polyamory—I demonstrated that polyamory has developed as a means by which white, middle-class women realize their sexual agency, autonomy, and freedom against the heteropatriarchal nuclear family. Last, by turning to polyamory self-help materials that were produced by American polyamorists, the section "American Polyamorous Credos" scrutinizes the way American polyamory culture has formulated the ideal self for polyamorists, one that is autonomous, free, and accountable. Lastly, I turn to polyamory self-help materials produced by American polyamorists in the section "American Polyamorous Credos," which scrutinizes the way in which American polyamory culture has formulated the ideal polyamorous self as a free, autonomous, and self-sufficient being. Altogether, by provincializing polyamory, this chapter elucidates how polyamory culture has been shaped by and through America's racialized history of monogamy, the gendered experience of patriarchal monogamy, and the dominant American belief of liberal individualism. It unfolds how the seemingly revolutionary sexual practice of polyamory inherently upholds the ideal of the liberal subject, who is a free, autonomous individual acting for itself using self-knowledge. In the conclusion, I gesture towards a postcolonial critique of polyamory to

showcase how the normativity of white, middle-class liberal individuality lies at the heart of polyamory culture.

Questioning Monogamy in the US

In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol 1* (1990), Foucault demonstrated that, as sexuality developed into a governmental mechanism in Western societies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, heterosexual monogamy was established as the norm; any desires, practices, and pleasures that deviated from it came under scrutiny as peripheral sexualities. Providing important insight into how sexuality functions to discipline bodies, sexual practices, and desires, Foucault, however, failed to address the way in which sexuality is inextricable from other modes of difference, such as race, gender, and class. In elaborating Foucault's analysis, many scholars have pointed out that the deployment of sexuality is, in fact, never uniform. They have argued that sexuality is essentially intersectional since sexual formations are differentiated by race, gender, class, ethnicity, and nationality (e.g., Stoler 1995, 2002; Eng 2001; Ferguson 2005; Shah 2012). That is, by operating as a regulatory apparatus to govern modern subjects, sexuality is both "constitutive of and constituted by racialized gender and class formations" (Ferguson 2005, 88). With respect to this, this section will discuss how the sexual norm of monogamy has been constructed in American society and how it operates. This section also establishes the racial underpinnings of the development of American polyamory culture in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

While monogamy was considered a religious doctrine in Western societies before the eighteenth century, it was established as an essential condition for civic morality in the nineteenth century (Cott 2000, 9). The prominence of monogamy changed significantly for two centuries in European societies in ways that are entangled with the history of European imperialism. In *Undoing Monogamy: The Politics of Science and the Possibilities of Biology* (2016), Angela Willey explored how monogamy was conceptualized as Europeans' natural yet superior way of living as compared to the colonial other. Willey demonstrated that, when colonial political interests created monogamy as an object of scientific observation, scientific (or

pseudoscientific) knowledge was used to construct racial difference, thereby justifying the superiority of Europeans and their colonial rule. For instance, in *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), the foundational text in the development of sexology, Richard von Krafft-Ebing described monogamy as a eugenic quality that proved the superiority of "Christian nations" over "polygamic races" (Willey 2016, 30-31). Although such a crude dichotomic distinction between monogamous whites and polygamous others disappeared with the advancement of science, Willey argued that the superiority of monogamy, which is established upon whiteness, Europeanness, and civilization, has continued to be investigated as a biological evolutionary attribute.

Entangled with colonial formations of racism, monogamy changed from a religious precept into a matter of civic integrity in European societies, and race has also played a critical role in the development of monogamy in the US. Particularly, the normative status of monogamy was built through America's history of slavery and immigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As sociologist Andrew Cherlin (2009) described, non-monogamy was often accepted in American society until the mid-nineteenth century, although monogamous marriage was legally stipulated from colonial times onward. For example, when a man moved to a state far away from his wife, he could marry another woman without worrying about legal consequences (Cherlin 2009, 46). However, social and legal tolerance for non-monogamy dramatically abated after the Civil War. With the enforcement of marriage licenses in almost every state, bigamy officially became a federal crime at the end of the nineteenth century (Cott 2002, 112).

As a matter of fact, after the Civil War, one of the most important missions of American society was to rebuild the civic value of intra-racial, monogamous marriage (Cott 2000, 104). In *The Western Case for Monogamy Over Polygamy* (2015), John Witte Jr. stated that two main concerns drove the American social campaign for monogamous marriage in the mid- and late-nineteenth century. The first concern was the deterioration of family life during the war. As the war devastated American family life, increasing marital fluidity and divorce rates as well as the growth of sexually radical communes emerged as social issues to be addressed. What was of more serious concern, however, was "the plight of newly emancipated African-Americans" (Witte 2015, 426). In the aftermath of the Civil War, there was great social anxiety

that former slaves would debase the American value of the family, and this anxiety grew into the important political task of preventing former slaves from carrying out "African" practices, such as informal marriage and polygamy, and regulating their marriages using the norm of monogamy. By forming the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (known as the Freedmen's Bureau), the US government performed monogamous marriages among formerly enslaved African Americans. As such, after the Civil War, monogamy was enforced as a type of civic morality that was used as a means by which the US could reaffirm its white, civilized, and Christian national identity.

In this respect, I point out that America's struggle against Mormon polygamy clearly exemplified the racial, political meaning of monogamy. After the Mormon church announced its belief in polygamy in 1852, the Mormons soon arose as the nation's shame (Witte 2015, 429). Subsequently, the US government enacted federal anti-polygamy regulations through the Poland Act in 1874, which led to a long legal battle between the government and the Mormon church throughout the nineteenth century. However, regarding the US government's fight against the Mormons, Martha Ertman (2008) indicated that the real threat to American society was *not* the Mormons' practice of polygamy per se *but* the racial and political implications of polygamy. Mormon polygamy implied a threat to the racial, political integrity of the US. For example, Francis Lieber—one of the nation's leading academics at the time—publicly denounced the Mormons by accusing them of committing a serious crime against civilization. If monogamy is a racial attribute that distinguishes white civilized men from Asian and African races, then, he believed, Mormon polygamy put American society at risk of retrogression from civilization (Ertman 2008, 333). Lieber was certainly not the only person who believed monogamy to be a pre-condition for white civilization. The same argument was made by the Supreme Court in the anti-polygamy case *Reynold v. United States* in 1879. Rejecting Mormonism's claim that the government's ban on polygamy is unconstitutional, the Court declared that polygamy is "odious among the northern and western nations of Europe," "almost exclusively a feature of the life of Asiatic and of African people," and ultimately "fetters the people in stationary despotism" (Ertman 2008, 289). Needless to say, monogamy signified everything opposite to polygamy.

Monogamy is also deeply entrenched in America's history of immigration policies. By identifying monogamous marriage as the fundamental basis of American civic morality, the US government utilized monogamy not only as a standard to determine which ethnic groups the US should (or should not) allow to immigrate but also as a measurement to scrutinize immigrants' ability to assimilate into American society. Particularly, monogamy was used as an important political measure to control Chinese immigrants. As Chinese immigrants were being blamed for the high unemployment rate and economic depression, an anti-Chinese movement emerged in the final quarter of the nineteenth century (Peffer 1986, 28). As the movement grew nationwide, the US Congress passed a bill in 1875, known as the Page Law, to restrict Chinese immigrants. Remarkably, in this legislative action, the protection of American civic morality, specifically monogamous marriage, was one aim of the government's regulation of Chinese immigrants. It was argued that Chinese people's practice of polygamy and prostitution, as well as their "slave-like" primitive mentality, made them unfit for American democratic citizenship (Abram 2005, 661). Targeting Chinese women who were identifiably second wives in polygamous marriages or prostitutes, the Page Law prohibited the immigration of Chinese women who came to the US for "lewd and immoral purposes" (Abram 2005, 643). The Page Law was effectively enacted to have long-term effects on Chinese-American communities; the gender imbalance among Chinese-Americans continued to exist until the Second World War, and many Chinese immigrants failed to build families in the US as a result (Abram 2005, 702-703).

In addition, the norm of monogamy was importantly employed in the US government's policies on indigenous peoples (Cott 2000). From the very beginning, Christian settlers condemned Native Americans for having multiple wives, lewd sexual acts, and lax family structures, and they tried to reform these customs using Christian monogamy. Later, the US government implemented monogamy as a yardstick by which to measure indigenous people's willingness or capability to integrate themselves into American society. As part of an educational program to "civilize" indigenous people, the government granted both land and citizenship to native tribes who successfully converted themselves into "faithful monogamous households" (Cott 2000, 120-121).

In this section, I have reviewed the way in which an aspect of civic morality, monogamy, was established in interaction with the racial dynamics in the US in the nineteenth century. Monogamy has continued to regulate Americans' intimate lives up to the present time, and the moral ideal of a white, civilized, and Christian American is ingrained within it. Given that, my analysis is directed towards the relationship between the racialized history of monogamy in America in the nineteenth century and the development of polyamory in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. What does the racialized history of monogamy imply about the development of polyamory in the US? How can we connect the white supremacy that is embedded in monogamy to American polyamory culture?

In "Of Our Normative Strivings: African American Studies and the Histories of Sexualities," Ferguson (2005) claimed that the production of African American sexual normativity in the nineteenth century played a critical part in transforming black subjects from "primitive" and "degenerate" former slaves into productive national citizens of the US. Sexuality operates as a mode of racialized governmentality, Ferguson indicated, and African Americans learned gendered and sexual regulation as racialized strategies to establish themselves as American citizen-subjects, embracing the white heteropatriarchal moral ideal. In light of Ferguson's illustration, we can conjecture that white Americans and African and Asian Americans have historically utilized different strategies to build the surrounding sexual normativity of monogamy. While white Americans are normalized by and governed through the norm of monogamy, they are already citizen-subjects who are assumed to naturally embody the norm. In contrast, the normativity of monogamy has operated simultaneously to demonize and discipline African and Asian American subjects, while championing the white national identity of the US. Monogamy, in other words, functions as an essential prerequisite for African and Asian Americans to be recognized as citizen-subjects. Ultimately, I suggest that polyamory culture has developed within the American history of monogamy in which different racial groups developed contrasting relationships to normativity of monogamy. Though a polyamory culture has emerged that resists the norm of monogamy in pursuit of individual sexual freedom and agency, polyamory is necessarily entangled in the racialized history of the formation of monogamy in the US. With that in mind, in the following section, I will explore how white,

middle-class women have played pioneering roles in building polyamory culture and how their particular positionalities have affected the shape of polyamory culture in the US.

"The Ethical Slut": American Pioneering Polyamorous Women

In one of the most popular, canonical polyamory books *The Ethical Slut* (2017), authors Janet W. Hardy and Dossie Easton pointed out that, unlike men, women are heavily stigmatized as sluts for their sexual promiscuity. Criticizing the sex-negative, sexist culture, they declared that they were reappropriating the derogatory term 'slut' to proudly describe the sexually active and pleasurable lifestyle they were taking part in: polyamory.

> In most of the world, slut is a highly offensive term used to describe a woman whose sexuality is voracious, indiscriminate, and shameful. It's interesting to note that the analogous words stud or player, used to describe a highly sexual man, are often terms of approval and envy. ... So we are proud to reclaim the word slut as a term of approval, even endearment. *To us, a slut is a person of any gender who celebrates sexuality according to the radical proposition that sex is nice and pleasure is good for you.* (Hardy and Easton 2017, 2 Emphasis Added)

Having discussed the racialized construction of monogamy as a component of civic morality in nineteenth-century American society, I now turn to how polyamory, in connection with such a history, has developed during the late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries. By focusing on pioneering polyamorous women who have played an important role in establishing American polyamory culture, this section scrutinizes in what conditions, for what purposes, and in what manner these women have developed their polyamorous lifestyles. How did these women take the lead in the growth of the polyamory culture that has challenged the existing civic, sexual norm of monogamy in the US? At the same time, how does their common positionality of being white, middle-class women affect the way they have experienced monogamy and formed polyamory culture against it?

I undertake this analysis by putting forward the gendered politics of monogamy. The predominant social narrative is that monogamy, in comparison to repressive, patriarchal polygamy, is progressive, democratic, and egalitarian (Rambukkana 2015, 78). There are, however, many critics of this notion who

claim that monogamous marriage is primarily a capitalistic patriarchal institution that reproduces and reinforces male supremacy. Above all, regarding monogamy as a family structure formulated on the development of private property, Engels (1884) stated that monogamy presupposes the subordination of women to men. Thus, Engels argued that the abolishment of the monogamous family as the basic economic unit is the very condition of women's liberation. Carole Pateman (1988) illustrated that a modern monogamous conjugal relationship does not suppose two individuals who are on an equal footing. She argued that, when civic individuals are born through the original social contract, they are already assumed to be masculine figures, and embedded in the original contract is the sexual contract, which naturalizes women's subordination to men. Given that, marriage is a means to affirm woman's subjection—that is, monogamy presupposes that "a woman lack[s] the capacities of an 'individual'" (Pateman 1988, 130). Lastly, gender and sexuality scholars have criticized monogamy as a normative model of intimate relationship that operates as an essential instrument to surveil and discipline women's sexual practices, desires, and pleasures. Monogamy, through ruses of romance, jealousy, and possessiveness, effectively regulates women's sexual agency, while consolidating the essentialist view of women as sexually passive and susceptible beings (Rosa 1994; Robinson, 1997; Overall, 1998; Jackson and Scott, 2004). Monogamy is also closely intertwined with the constitution of heteronormative femininity; since monogamy is believed to be natural and desirable, women who do not fit into monogamous marriage are demonized and pathologized (Willey 2015). These scholars, in short, asserted that monogamy is a fundamentally gendered experience organized by the heteropatriarchal order.

Considering these insights, in this section, I bring critical attention to the gendered politics of monogamy to analyze the experiences of American pioneering polyamorous women. But that notwithstanding, my analysis does not exclusively focus on the gendered position of these women. As gender is always constructed and experienced in intersection with race and class (e.g., Amos and Parmar, 2001), I take into account not only gender but also the classed and racial positions of these women. That is, by drawing from stories of three pioneering polyamorous women, I will demonstrate how white, middle-

class women's particular experiences of sex, love, and relationships are deeply embedded in the formation of American polyamory culture.

Running Away from the "Normal" Marital Life

The prominence of women's role in the early development of polyamory in the US is noticeable. Indeed, many women have paved the way for American polyamory culture, including Morning Glory Zell, who first coined the term polyamory; Ryam Nearing, who founded the first national polyamory organization, Loving More; Jennifer Wesp, who set up the first online polyamory forum, alt.polyamory; and Deborah Taj Anapol who published the first polyamory book, *Polyamory: The New Love Without Limits* (1997) (see Introductory Chapter). Among these pioneering women, however, Janet W. Hardy and Dossie Easton are unquestionably the most well-known women polyamory activists both nationally and internationally. While Hardy is a writer as well as sex educator and Easton works as a psychotherapist and writer, they are most famous for their co-authored book, *The Ethical Slut*, which is commonly referred to as the "poly[amory] bible".[5] After they initially published the book in 1997, the second edition was released in 2007 followed by the third edition in 2017. The book had also been translated into five different languages, including French, Spanish, and German, as of 2019. Providing practical guidelines for polyamorous relationships, *The Ethical Slut* is essentially derived from Hardy and Easton's life-long experience of sex, love, and relationships. Here, based upon the first edition of *The Ethical Slut* (1997) and their media interviews, I trace their early journey of developing a polyamorous lifestyle.

Hardy's journey to polyamory started with breaking away from what she called the "normal" suburban life. While she had played around during her young adulthood, she somehow still followed a "normal" life path. As many people do, she married her college sweetheart in her parents-in-law's church, had a couple of children, and bought a nice house in the suburbs. After thirteen years of an ordinary marital life, however, Hardy started to question everything she had taken for granted. She came to be interested in

[5] Jessica Bennet, "Polyamory: The Next Sexual Revolution?," *Newsweek*, July 28, 2009, https://www.newsweek.com/polyamory-next-sexual-revolution-82053

BDSM and other sexual experiences. "What if I got together with others but didn't have intercourse with them? What if I brought home a lover for both of us to share?" she wondered (Easton and Liszt 1997, 15). Nevertheless, Hardy could not freely explore her new sexual desires in her relationship with the husband. Feeling "more and more trapped" in her monogamous marriage, she ultimately separated from her husband in 1988.[6] After getting divorced, she soon discovered that women like herself who are interested in and open to sex are not at all uncommon. She also importantly realized that a monogamous relationship was no longer appealing to her. While she met a man whom she fell passionately in love with, she had no intention of being monogamous. Though she had an intimate partner, she continued to date others and have casual sexual encounters. After all, Hardy argued, polyamory was an easier and happier lifestyle for her, one which did not require her either to constrain her desires or to change her behaviors toward anyone.

Easton embarked on her polyamory journey in 1969 when she ended her first marriage. Before practicing polyamory, Easton described herself as a victim of an abusive patriarchal marriage. Her ex-husband, as she illustrated, was a very possessive person. In spite of the fact that she was faithful to her husband, he constantly suspected her of infidelity and could not even bear having other men look at her. Worse still, his suspicions often developed into physical violence against her. After being bruised by her husband while pregnant, she had to leave him for her own well-being as well as that of her unborn child. After finally escaping her husband's repeated emotional blackmail and death threats, Easton settled down in San Francisco to build a new kind of life for herself:

> When I decided to create my new way twenty-five years ago, I figured that I would never again take my security from my relationship, particularly not from the sexual exclusivity of my relationship. Joe [her ex-husband] had cheated on me, I knew that, it didn't even bother me very much. I sort of expected it. *I resented those cultural values that said that my sense of security and self-worth were contingent on the status of whatever man I managed to attract to me, as if I had no status of my own.* So, I vowed to discover a security in myself, the stable ground of my very own being, something to do I thought, with self-respect and self-acceptance (Easton and Liszt 1997:12).

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[6] Anna Fitzpatrick, "'Ethical Slut: Inside America's Growing Acceptance of Polyamory," *Rolling Stone*, September 16, 2017, https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/the-ethical-slut-inside-americas-growing-acceptance-of-polyamory-112319/

Easton stated that it was her ex-husband who made her a feminist. When her husband despised and insulted her by calling her a slut, Easton decided to be "a feminist slut," who does not rely on a man for her value but finds strength on her own (Easton and Liszt 1997, 10). Instead of being bound by an exclusive sexual relationship, Easton formed her own extended family, with whom she was connected through friendship, love, and sex. This kinship network not only provided her with support and security but also enabled her to explore her sexuality without constraints. At the same time, she also pursued her own career as a licensed therapist to help those who were going through the same issues with their intimate relationships and sexualities that she had in the past. Put briefly, as Easton claimed, it was polyamory that allowed her to run her own life rather than living as someone else's property.

Both Hardy and Easton began their journeys toward polyamory by breaking away from what society asked them to do—follow the "normal" path of a patriarchal heterosexual monogamous marriage. While they initially believed that heterosexual monogamous marriage was the right path for everyone and tried to follow it, that path did not work for them. It made their lives repressed, miserable, and helpless. Suffering in their unhappy marital lives, Hardy and Easton both realized that what society asked them to conform to was not right for them. That is, their polyamorous lifestyles were the result of an active awareness of what they wanted from sex, love, and relationships, regardless of social norms. Such awareness, as they described, did not come easily. Hardy remembered that she and her ex-husband, when starting their relationship, did not even ask each other whether they wanted to be monogamous. They just assumed monogamy was the only option. But, after more than a decade of marital life, Hardy began to question all the basic assumptions she had about it. To actualize her own sexual desires, she left her marriage and created a polyamorous life for herself instead. For Easton, it was a painful awareness indeed that led her away from her abusive marital relationship. She explained that, having grown up in a small mono-cultural town in New England, she used to have many culture-bound thoughts. Like most people, she used to believe that possessiveness was a sign of love. But it was her violent, possessive marital experience that finally allowed her to explore what she really wanted for herself away from the social norms of sex, love, and relationships.

Opening up Queer Feminist Relationships

Along with Easton and Hardy, another pioneering polyamorous woman important to the development of American polyamory culture is Tristan Taormino (Veaux and Rickert 2014, 433). Since she published a book titled *Opening Up: A Guide to Creating and Sustaining Open Relationships* in 2008, Taormino has been one of the most vocal polyamorists in the US. Not only through the book but also through lectures, interviews, and podcasts, she has been active in raising social awareness of polyamory and educating polyamorists. Regarded as one of the canonical texts for polyamorists, her book *Opening Up* is popular among those who have newly entered a polyamorous lifestyle. While Easton and Hardy's book provides polyamory lessons and wisdom that they learned from their own experiences, *Opening Up* is based on interviews that Taormino conducted with approximately 125 individuals practicing different types of non-monogamy. Taormino (2008) illustrated that, while closely working with non-monogamous people, she realized that there are many different versions of non-monogamy, and through her book, she sought to show various options for practicing non-monogamy and to give advice on polyamory derived from different perspectives.

To comprehend her approach to polyamory, it is important to note Taormino's career path. As a sex educator and feminist porn film maker, her own queer feminist understanding of sexuality is essentially ingrained in her practice of and activism for polyamory:

> I'm a sex-positive feminist who strongly believes that everyone deserves quality education, especially when it comes to sexuality. Abstinence-only sex education disempowers young people by withholding important information and safer sex resources from them, and studies show it is ineffective at reducing rates of teen sex, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections. … As a sex educator, I strive to create safe, nonjudgmental spaces where people can get honest, straightforward advice and answers to their questions.[7]

Before publishing *Opening up*, Taormino was already a well-known sex educator. Not only had she published several sex instruction books, including her most popular book *The Ultimate Guide to Anal Sex for Women* (1997), but she also had appeared as a sex expert on TV shows, such as HBO's *Real Sex* and the *Howard Stern Show*. Taormino is also an award-winning feminist pornographic film maker, having

[7] Tristan Taormino, "Bio," Tristan Taormino, Accessed May 25, 2019, http://tristantaormino.com/about-tristan/

received Feminist Porn Awards and AVN Awards several times. She produces feminist porn movies that "prioriti[ze] female desire, pleasure, [and] orgasm" against mainstream pornography that depicts sex as a male-dominated realm and reinforces stereotypical binary gender images.[8] By incorporating the concepts of "consent, communication, boundaries, and negotiation," she argues that pornography can help people learn positive sex values and pursue sexual desire and pleasure in an ethical manner (Voss 2014, 204). As a sex educator and feminist pornographer, Taormino, endeavors to dismantle repressive, negative perceptions of sexuality as well as social rules and stereotypes surrounding sex, and her advocacy for polyamory is in line with such endeavors. She believes that, by opposing the social norm of monogamy, polyamory is a way individuals can develop sexual and intimate relationships through mutual consent.

According to Taormino, the journey into a polyamorous lifestyle was a natural one. As Taormino described, her first experience of a non-monogamous relationship was in college; when her girlfriend moved away after graduation, they decided to explore relationships with others, while still maintaining their relationship.[9] Unlike Hardy and Easton who made a radical transition to polyamory after leaving their monogamous, patriarchal marriages, Taormino did not have a specific moment of conversion from monogamy to polyamory. Even after experiencing polyamorous relationships, Taormino has been in a few monogamous relationships from time to time. That is, while identifying herself as a polyamorist, Taormino tends to develop relationships according to her and her partner's situations, regardless of fixed relationship forms—be they monogamy or polyamory.

In fact, in a 2018 podcast interview about her book *Opening Up,* Taormino claimed that polyamory is just one way of practicing intimate relationships, which is neither better nor worse than monogamy:

> You need to custom-design it [the relationship] for you and any other people involved. And if you say to me, I've gone through all the exercises in this book and thought all these through, and you know what? I decided I want to be monogamous. Again, temporary choice, lifetime choice, or whatever. Then, who am I to be like, oh, that wasn't the choice

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[8] Trace Clark-Flory, "The feminist pornographer: Tristan Taormino, editor of a new book on X-rated activism, says it's time to find a middle ground in the porn wars," *Salon*, February 24, 2013, https://www.salon.com/2013/02/24/the_feminist_pornographer/

[9] Emma and Fin, December 26, 2018. Normalizing Non-Monogamy. Podcast Audio. Sex Out Loud (Tristan Taormino). Emma and Fin. Accessed December 4, 2020, https://www.normalizingnonmonogamy.com/post/episode41

> that you are supposed to pick or that's the less evolved choice, or that's the less cool choice. ... [But] people don't choose [monogamy]. It's chosen for them by default. They do it because it's what's expected of them.[10]

What's important, according to Taormino, is not polyamory *per se*, but that individuals develop intimate relationships in ways that fulfill their sexual desires and pleasures free from social restrictions and stereotypes.

Women Who CAN Practice Ethical Sluthood?

Based on the stories of three pioneering polyamorous women, Hardy, Easton, and Taormino, my argument is that the *ethos of sex-positive, liberal feminism* lies at the heart of the early development of polyamory in America. As a feminist camp that has grown out of what is known as the feminist sex wars—intense cultural, legal battles among feminists over the issue of sexuality, mainly including the regulation of pornography (e.g., Duggan and Hunter 2006)—in the 1970s and the 1980s, sex-positive feminism holds that "sexuality is a site of political resistance through which women can exercise their agency and achieve liberation" (Glick 2008, 22). Here, I indicate that Hardy, Easton, and Taormino, though following different trajectories to practice polyamory, share common ground in their development as polyamorists: their stance as sex-positive feminists. Primarily, they all agree that sexuality—especially, women's sexuality—is repressed, obscured, and negatively valued; central to this repressive, negative sex culture is the morality of patriarchal heterosexual monogamy. These women believe that, by dismantling the existing system of morality, individuals, regardless of their gender and sexual orientation, should be able to exercise sexual agency and freely pursue sexual pleasure with the consent of others. Hence, by espousing the "liberating aspects of pleasure between consenting partners" (Ferguson 1984, 106), these pioneering women, albeit differently, have established a polyamorous lifestyle in order to resist the sexual norm of monogamy. Furthermore, they suggest that other people can also actualize their sexual desires and pleasures by practicing polyamory. Therefore, my analysis of these pioneering polyamorists shows that, through the

[10] Cunning Minx, host, "From Tristan Taormino's Opens Up," *Polyamory Weekly* (podcast), June 16, 2008, accessed December 22, 2018, https://polyweekly.com/from-tristan-taorminos-opening-up/

tenets of sex-positive feminism, polyamory has developed as a means by which women can reclaim their sexual agency and achieve freedom and autonomy.

With respect to this analysis, one critical remaining question is who are the women that seek to (or are able to seek to) exercise their sexual agency and realize pleasure through polyamory. Given that a "woman" is not a universal concept but one that is constructed through a specific racial and class position, it is essential to notice the positionalities of women who are able to utilize polyamory as a way of exercising their sexual agency. Almost all pioneering polyamorous women—including Hardy, Easton, and Taormino—are white, middle-classed and well-educated, and I assert that their particular racial and classed position is inextricably connected to their development as polyamorists.

In "Interstices: A Small Drama of Words," which was presented at the 1982 Barnard Conference on Sexuality, Hortense J. Spillers (1984) critiqued the feminist discourses over sexuality by pointing out the absence of Black women as legitimate subjects of female sexuality. As Spiller illustrated through the history of chattel slavery, Black women have been relegated to "the principal point of passage between the human and non-human world" (Spiller 1984, 76). As the Black female body historically operates as a sign of what a human being is not, Black women's sexuality has been characterized not simply as inferior but as the state of non-being. In this sense, Spiller (1984, 74) has argued that, while the concept of sexuality can be a term of power belonging to white women, Black women factor into the discourse of sexuality only as illegitimate sexual subjects who are "unvoiced, misseen, not doing, awaiting their verb." And most importantly, silence characterizes Black women's sexuality. Not only are Black women, as unacknowledged sexual subjects, deprived of the voice to express their own experience, but also they have developed "a culture of dissemblance" as a political strategy to resist their pathologized image and to demonstrate their position as moral sexual subjects (Hammonds 2002, 306). Ultimately, Spiller (1984) contended that, when feminists try to retrieve women's sexuality from the patriarchal force that objectifies and dismisses women, they have done so for certain women only, leaving others without the voice to speak out for their sexuality.

In light of Spillers' critique, I argue that the development of polyamory culture essentially rests on white, middle-class American women's particular experience and understanding of sexuality. These

pioneering polyamorous women, as Pateman (1988) noted, do not have the full rights of civic individuality that their white male counterparts have, given that a civic individual is a patriarchal category that embodies masculinity. Their autonomy and freedom are limited by patriarchal civic society. Nevertheless, as white, middle-class women, they are still regarded as legitimate sexual subjects who may speak. By seeking to reclaim their sexual freedom and autonomy, these women were able to try to reappropriate "immoral" non-monogamy as a part of their lifestyle as "ethical sluts" (Hardy and Easton, 2017). In this manner, their white, middle-class position was indispensable for their development as polyamorists. To put it differently, Hardy did break away from a "normal" life as a married suburban woman, but a "normal" life is not the same for everyone. As shown in the previous section, monogamous life has historically been associated with white, civilized, and Christian American identity, and monogamy has operated as a crucial social standard that African, Asian, and indigenous Americans have had to strive to meet to be recognized as full-citizen subjects. With that being said, both the "normal" life that Hardy once had and her ability to break free from that "normal" life are closely tied to her racial and classed positionality. As a pioneer for American polyamory culture and emblematic of the subset of women who can more readily participate in it, Hardy is both an individual asserting her sexual agency and an example of how the normativity of sexual life experienced by white middle-class women was instilled in the establishment of American polyamory culture.

Lastly, given that polyamory has grown mainly as a way for white and middle-class women to exercise their sexual agency and pleasure by resisting patriarchal heterosexual monogamy, another basis for American polyamory culture is the *liberalist understanding of the individual*. The principal premise entrenched in the way that pioneering polyamorous women have developed and advocated polyamory is that the individual is an autonomous, free, and self-regulating being. These pioneering women, as sex-positive feminists, suppose that individuals have a right to realize sexual desires and pleasures according to their own wills insofar as they do not violate others' rights. Based on this belief, these women promote polyamory as an ideal, ethical intimate relationship, which enables individuals to pursue their pleasure freely through consent and negotiations with their partner(s). In the following section, I will continue discussing

the ethos of liberal individualism that is embedded in the development of American polyamory culture by examining polyamory texts.

Polyamory Credos

In this section, I scrutinize polyamory texts produced by American polyamorists to discuss how the development of polyamory embodies the dominant American ethos of liberal individualism. While liberalism is not a single coherent philosophy that operates in an ahistorical, universal manner, the fundamental premise of liberalism, as many liberalists would agree, is the primacy of individual liberty as a political value (e.g., Locke 1988[1689]; Mill 1998[1859]; Rawl 1993). Within liberalism, all individuals are assumed to be born naturally in "a State of perfect Freedom to order their Actions, and dispose of their Possessions, and Persons as they think fit ... without asking leave, or depending upon the Will of any other Man" (Locke, 1988[1689], 269). As individuals enter into civil society and become members of the state through the social contract, their perfect freedom is compromised for the sake of better security and preservation. Yet, individuals, as subjects of the state, are granted rights and liberties that they can exercise "against each other in civil society (civil rights) and against excess arrogation of power by the state (political rights)" (Brown 1995, 145). According to liberalism, individuals are, in essence, presumed to act according to their own will unless the state can justify placing restrictions on individual liberty.

Considering that liberalism serves as the dominant discourse that constitutes social order and citizenship in the US, this section analyzes how the narrative of the liberal individual lays the foundation for American polyamory culture—not only the ground rules to create and manage polyamorous relationships but also the ethical values of polyamory. In my analysis, however, I do not consider the liberal individual as a generic notion. While liberalism accounts for liberal subjects as self-governing and free individuals who are equally subject to the law, feminist and postcolonial scholars have pointed out that the term liberal individual is gendered, raced, and classed—that is, citizenship status in the liberal state is historically embroiled in one's possession of masculinity, whiteness, and property ownership (e.g., Brown 1995; Glenn

2002; Reddy 2011). By paying critical attention to the gendered, racialized, and classed nature of liberal individualism, I showcase how American polyamory culture has developed in a way that encourages individuals to accomplish the moral imperative of liberal individualism.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, American polyamorists, drawing from their own or others' experiences, have produced offline and online polyamory texts—books, blogs, and podcasts—since the late 1990s. With the aim of promoting polyamory, these polyamory texts tend to provide a brief history of polyamory, a description of different forms of polyamorous relationships, and instructions and advice on how to better practice polyamory. Using these polyamory texts, I analyze how polyamorists define polyamory in opposition to monogamy as well as other types of non-monogamy and how they explain the rules, ethics, and values of polyamory. Based upon this analysis, in what follows, I illustrate the three main polyamory credos that American polyamory texts commonly suggest are the basis of a polyamorous lifestyle: 1) demystify monogamy, 2) know yourself, and 3) own yourself. By describing how each credo guides individuals' practice of polyamory, I ultimately argue that American polyamory culture is established through the moral values of liberal individualism—autonomy and individual freedom—while upholding the normativity of the masculine, white, and middle-class American individual.

Credo 1: Demystify Monogamy

In the episode "Conscious Monogamy" of the popular polyamory podcast *Multiamory*, hosts Matlack, Winston, and Lindgren criticized the fact that many people practice monogamy by default rather than by choice. They mentioned that, since monogamy is set as a social expectation for everyone, many people are not even aware that there are different types of intimate relationships that they can try out:

> **Matlack**: Default monogamy, which we touched on before, but again this idea that it's just the way that it's done. It's tradition, this is the only way that works. Anything else's not going to be a real relationship or it doesn't mean as much. But just that people kind of view monogamy as the way that it's been done for thousands of years and the way that it should be done and so that's what I have to do.
> **Winston**: Yes. This one feels like, I feel like this is the perfect definition of unconscious monogamy because it's monogamy that is not practically or consciously chosen. It's just this is the way everybody does it and this is what's been expected of me from the moment

> that I was born and this is what I'm going to do. And, I think for all three of us that's very much the way that we were raised, was in this context of like monogamy's the default.
> **Lindgren**: That's just what you do.[11]

As shown in the above *Multiamory* episode, "demystifying monogamy" is a crucial concern in discussions of polyamory, making it the first polyamory credo taught by American polyamory texts. Many polyamory texts have stated that, since monogamy is the culturally prescribed model for intimate relationships, we have unknowingly developed the belief that monogamy is the only ideal way of practicing love, sex, and relationships. Thus, these texts demonstrate that, to begin the journey of a polyamorous lifestyle, individuals should deconstruct the cultural myth of monogamy and thereby liberate themselves from the mononormative understanding of love, sex, and relationships. By looking at the first credo, "demystify monogamy," I will showcase how polyamory culture fundamentally embodies the liberal value of individual liberty.

Many polyamory texts assert, above all else, that we live in a society where monogamy is glorified and naturalized. In *The Ethical Slut*, Hardy and Easton (2017, 10-11) mentioned that, as the Industrial Revolution launched a whole new form of sexual morality that represses sex as a sinful, shameful and degrading act, monogamy was established as a sexual moral code to control people's sexuality; since then, monogamy has been idealized in Western modern societies.

Likewise, Amy Gahran—who is a polyamory blogger and the author of the polyamory book *Stepping Off the Relationship Escalator: Uncommon Love and Life* (2017)—also indicated that the norm of monogamy essentially shapes and enforces social structures in the interest of the monogamous couple. Gahran pointed out that, just like male privilege or white privilege, an invisible "couple privilege" exists in society. That is, based upon "the presumption that socially sanctioned pair-bond relationships involving only two people are inherently more important, 'real' and valid than other types of intimate, romantic or

[11] Dedeker Winston, Jase Lindgren, and Emily Matlack, hosts, "Conscious Monogamy" *Multiamory* (podcast), September 26, 2017, accessed January 08, 2019, https://www.multiamory.com/podcast/138-conscious-monogamy?rq=conscious%20monogamy

sexual relationships," Gahran illustrated that couples are granted more social recognition and support.[12] Not only does the monogamous couple function as a basic social unit for tax benefits, health insurance, the legal protection of finances, and housing, but coupledom is also prevalent in our trivial, everyday practices, such as booking hotels and attending weddings or family events. On the contrary, people who are either single or in non-monogamous relationships tend to face social discriminations and disadvantages while being stigmatized as "inferior, difficult, flawed, less important, less stable or valid."[13]

By elucidating how monogamy is naturalized and glorified in American society, polyamory texts not only claim that monogamy functions to discriminate against or exclude non-monogamous people, but more critically, that people unwittingly embody the ideal of monogamy. Many American polyamory texts, in other words, criticize the cultural myth of monogamy that inherently underlies the way we conceptualize desire, pleasure, and intimate relationships. In her book *Opening Up*, Taormino (2008, 30), for instance, mentioned that even though the statistics about divorce and infidelity tell us that monogamy is not a successful model, many people uncritically follow monogamy, thinking that "monogamy is what everyone else is doing, what is expected, and how an intimate relationship [is] supposed to be." That is, polyamory texts suggest that, in order to practice polyamory, one has to unmask the ideal of monogamy, which constitutes the very basic assumptions about what an intimate relationship should look like.

In this respect, many polyamory texts underscore that the norm of monogamy signifies not just sexual and emotional exclusivity but a whole set of understandings, values, and expectations regarding love, sex, and relationships. Particularly, in their book *Designer Relationships: A Guide to Happy Monogamy, Positive Polyamory, and Optimistic Open Relationships* (2015), Mark A. Michaels and Patricia Johnson argued that monogamy is embedded in the prevailing way that we imagine our intimate lives. By presenting six common myths of monogamy (see **Figure 1.1**), these authors showcased how the ideal of lifelong monogamy serves to shape our elementary premises about love, sex, and relationships—such as the

[12] Gahran, Amy. "Couple Privilege: Having it doesn't necessarily make you an asshole [but it might]," *Solo Poly* (blog), 3 February, 2013. https://solopoly.net/2013/02/05/couple-privilege-having-it-doesnt-necessarily-make-you-an-asshole-but-it-can/
[13] Gahran, Amy. Ibid.

endorsement of jealousy in an intimate relationship, the high value of a stable, long-term relationship, and the fantasy of the soul mate. According to these authors, insofar as we believe in these monogamous myths, our intimate lives are substantially controlled by the norm of monogamy, even if we are single or if we are trying to build a non-monogamous relationship. Michaels and Johnson (2015), therefore, urged us to debunk how the ideal of monogamy has shaped our fundamental expectations of intimate life and to liberate ourselves from the norm of monogamy when designing intimate relationships.

- **Myth #1**: Romantic Love is the Only Foundation for an Enduring Relationship
- **Myth #2**: You Need to Find a Soul Mate
- **Myth #3**: They Lived Happily Ever After
- **Myth #4**: Desiring Someone Else is a Form of Infidelity
- **Myth #5**: Monogamy is Natural, Evolutionary Determined, Optimal, or Divinely Ordained
- **Myth #6**: There is a Right Way to be Sexual

Figure 1.1 The Myths of Monogamy (Michaels and Johnson 2015, 41-53)

Though polyamory texts insist that an individual has to demystify and dismiss the cultural belief of monogamy, it is important to note that they do not reject monogamous relationships. As a matter of fact, most American polyamory texts support monogamous relationships as healthy and valid when they are consciously chosen by individuals. Michaels and Johnson (2014, 9) also did not disdain monogamy as either a wrong or bad choice. A monogamous relationship, they said, can be truly fulfilling when both parties make an informed, conscious decision about it. As such, what polyamory texts argue against is not monogamy itself but *the culture of monogamy*, in which monogamy operates as the single ideal model of intimate relationship to control individuals' intimate lives both consciously and unconsciously, as Hardy and Easton illustrate below:

> One of the most valuable things we learn from open sexual lifestyles is that our programming about love, intimacy, and sex can be rewritten. When we begin to question all the ways we have been told we ought to be, we can begin to edit and rewrite our old tapes. *By breaking the rules, we both free and empower ourselves*. (Hardy and Easton 2017, 5 Emphasis Added)

Consequently, I contend that by emphasizing the imperative of deconstructing the cultural myth of monogamy, American polyamory texts are fundamentally upholding the value of individual liberty: an individual should be free to develop their own intimate relationships liberated from social rules. That is, individual freedom is the foundation of American polyamory culture.

How, then, can we understand the value of freedom that is so marked in American polyamory texts? In *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, Wendy Brown (1995, 154) illustrated that the liberal concept of freedom has a specific understanding, which signifies "the freedom to do what one desires, the freedom to discover and pursue one's interests where the law does not interfere." The freedom that the liberal subject enjoys is not the opposite of slavery, but the state of acting on one's own will without encumbrances or constraints. With respect to this, I claim that the value of freedom elaborated and advocated in polyamory culture is precisely the liberal notion of freedom. As American polyamory texts described, the practice of polyamory fundamentally entails an individual's exercise of free will. In other words, when polyamory texts oppose people who practice monogamy, it is not monogamy itself that they object to, but practicing monogamy merely to follow social expectations and failing to exercise free will by making a "conscious" choice. In such a manner, American polyamory texts emphasize the liberal notion of freedom: the state in which one can think through what they want for their intimate life and choose their own form of intimate relationship regardless of social expectations.

Given that the liberal notion of freedom is embedded in American polyamory culture, it is important to understand that freedom is essentially a gendered, racialized, and classed notion. To return to Brown (1995, 155)'s illustration, she mentioned that the liberal formulation of freedom is "notoriously bourgeois" and "evidently gendered" since the state of freedom is opposed to immanence, necessity, and encumbrance. Freedom presumes the condition in which individuals can act on their free will without encumbrance; by necessity, individuals who enjoy such freedom are white bourgeois men. It is socially privileged individuals who can deliberate, make decisions, and act on their decisions without barriers. With this in mind, when polyamory texts describe polyamory as a practice of freedom, it is crucial to consider the condition in which one can practice polyamory. Who can live without relying on a monogamy-based family in a monogamous

society? Who are the individuals that can envision themselves as free from the social norm of monogamy without significant risks? As Chandan Reddy (2011) noted, in US history, the racial, patriarchal, capitalist, and slave-holding rights of enjoyment are predicated upon freedom. That is, the notion of freedom that American polyamory culture upholds cannot help but be a gendered, racialized, and classed practice.

Credo 2: Know Yourself

In one of the most popular American polyamory guidebooks, *More Than Two: A Practical Guide to Ethical Polyamory* (2014), authors Franklin Veaux and Eve Rickert presented the maxim "know yourself" as the most basic responsibility for individuals practicing polyamory. Veaux and Rickert illustrated that, without knowing one's true needs and desires, one cannot develop a satisfying intimate relationship but will be merely following what society and other people expect:

> "Know thyself." You can't have what you want if you don't know what you want. You can't build a relationship that's satisfying without first understanding yourself and your needs. A willingness to question yourself, to challenge yourself, and to explore without fear the hidden parts of you are the best tools to gain that self-knowledge. A quote often attributed to Francis Bacon reads, "Your true self can be known only by systematic experimentation, and controlled only by being known." Understanding and programming your own mind is your responsibility; if you fail to do this, the world will program it for you, and you'll end up in the relationship other people think you should have, not the relationship you want. (Veaux and Rickert 2014, 53)

Here, I demonstrate that "know yourself" is the second polyamory credo promoted in American polyamory texts. Arguing that being free from the mononormative understanding of love, sex, and relationships is necessary for individuals to begin their journey of polyamory, many polyamory texts, at the same time, have pointed out that the demystification of monogamy is not sufficient for building a fulfilling polyamorous life. As shown in the above, without knowing oneself, it is impossible for individuals to build a satisfying polyamorous relationship. In what follows, I will focus on the second polyamory credo, "know yourself," by reviewing how polyamory texts describe self-knowledge in relation to the practice of polyamory and guide readers in the practice of self-awareness. By doing so, I ultimately claim that the liberal belief of the enlightened individual—the free, rational individual who can act for themself using their own self-understanding—is fundamentally ingrained in polyamory culture.

Highlighting the importance of knowing yourself, almost all polyamory texts acknowledge that self-awareness is not at all easy. They indicate that self-knowledge cannot be achieved through a one-time activity, but it requires continuous, everyday practice of self-awareness. So then, what kind of self-knowledge do polyamory texts emphasize for the practice of polyamory? In *The Smart Girl's Guide to Polyamory* (2017, 49), Dedeker Winston illustrated that polyamory demands not just surface-level self-knowledge, but an in-depth understanding of the self: "why we are the way [we are] or how we come to be what we are." For example, Winston explained that being aware that "I am a jealous person" is not enough. Rather, individuals need to ask in-depth questions about the self based on that awareness, such as "When do I feel jealous?", "What usually triggers my jealousy?", and "What are the root causes of my jealousy?" Through such deeper-level questions, individuals can figure out what they really want for their intimate lives. Winston, in this sense, identified the practice of self-awareness as a "process of deconstruction," which asks individuals to inspect the building blocks that compose themselves and to map out how those blocks operate in their intimate relationships.

In her book, Winston (2017, 53-62) provided a set of questions that individuals can utilize for their practice of self-awareness (see **Figure 1.2**). Consisting of a total of six categories—love, relationship, communication, sex and sexuality, fear and insecurities, and relationship visions— Winston stated that these questions would help individuals have better understandings of the self before starting their journey into a polyamorous lifestyle. What's interesting here is that Winston's questions are not merely limited to inquiries into one's perceptions on sex, love, and relationships. More importantly, they also address one's emotional and psychological condition, such as "How do you handle honesty?", "What parts of yourself and your life are you most insecure about?", and "When you are jealous of a coworker, family member, or friend, how do you cope with it?" By offering these questions, Winston (2017, 50) is suggesting that individuals should be aware of their "deep-seated desires, insecurities, beliefs, vulnerabilities, strengths, weaknesses, and triggers" to have better, happier intimate relationships.

From Winston's questions, I claim that the self-knowledge that polyamory texts emphasize signifies a comprehensive understanding of the inner, emotional self. When polyamorous texts assert that

self-knowledge is essential for an individual to write their own script for a fulfilling polyamorous relationship, "knowing yourself" does not simply mean that individuals need to know how many intimate partners they want, what form of relationship they prefer, or what relationship goals they have. Rather, it is suggested that one has to have an understanding of the complex inner dynamics of the self—what emotional and psychological logics constitute the self and how they function in the individual's intimate life—in order to design a happy, fulfilling polyamorous lifestyle.

Many American polyamory texts propose that, for better self-knowledge, individuals need to constantly focus on their own emotional states, as can be seen in the following: "When you're in the middle of an angry blowup, or a crying jag, or a fit of laughter, or a puddle of depression, step outside of yourself for a just a second and get curious about the intricate universe that is in motion within you" (Winston 2017, 64). Polyamory texts suggest that individuals examine and comprehend their own feelings by utilizing psychological or psychotherapeutic techniques. For instance, arguing that self-knowledge is an essential requirement for a polyamorous lifestyle, Veaux and Rickert (2014, 53) illustrated that self-knowledge starts from "the simple act of looking inward, of questioning ourselves." According to them, while people are good at noticing and reacting to their feelings, they rarely look into what is underneath those feelings. Yet, they indicated that feelings oftentimes contain unknown information or buried truth about the self, including one's insecurities, fears, or inner wounds. Thus, they recommended that when people feel strong emotions, such as anger, jealousy, or sadness, it is better to face and decipher those emotions rather than expressing them immediately. As such, Veaux and Rickert demonstrated that, by building a habit of looking inward and disassembling emotions, individuals can access the truth about themselves, and thereby create happier and healthier intimate relationships based on that truth.

In this subsection, I have discussed the second polyamory credo, "know yourself". While the first credo "demystify monogamy" suggests that polyamory is a practice of freedom, the second credo indicates that self-knowledge underlies the practice of freedom. Polyamory texts underscore that, if one seeks to develop an intimate relationship liberated from social norms, it is necessary to utilize self-knowledge—a comprehensive, in-depth understanding of the inner self. In this respect, I claim that the practice of

polyamory, as polyamory texts described it, is fundamentally the practice of polyamory is fundamentally a process of becoming the liberal subject—a free, autonomous individual acting for oneself by using self-knowledge:

> In many ways, learning about polyamory is a radical awakening into a whole new paradigm. Like seeing the Matrix. Often there is no going back, which, for some, means a future of only polyamorous relationships, and which, for others, means a very clear decision to consciously embrace monogamy. This new awareness surrounding relationships and sex need not be conflated with an intellectual enlightenment or spiritual awakening (though frequently it is). Becoming conscious of your relationships means also becoming conscious of your needs, your fears, your desires, what you want for your future, and ultimately what makes you tick and makes you 'you'. *Call it seeing the Matrix, call it enlightenment, call it turning over a new leaf.* (Winston 2017, 16 Emphasis added)

Explaining the practice of polyamory as a process of radical self-awakening, Winston (2017) drew a parallel between polyamory and enlightenment. Her enlightenment analogy is telling as it shows how polyamory culture presumes the liberal individual. Given that the eighteenth-century Enlightenment is considered to be the root of the political philosophy of liberalism, Immanuel Kant (1784) famously defined the spirit of enlightenment as the human's release from self-imposed immaturity. According to Kant (1784, 1), while immaturity is "the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another," enlightenment is the process through which humans throw off the yoke of immaturity, cultivate their own mind, and employ their own understanding in determining what they do and how they do it. In light of this, I argue that enlightenment is indeed what many polyamory texts are describing as the practice of polyamory; to begin a journey to a polyamorous lifestyle, individuals have to work themselves out of the social myth of monogamy, determine what intimate relationship they want to create, and decide how to create it by relying on their own self-understanding. As such, the fundamental motto of American polyamory culture is that, in order to have a better intimate life, you must "Have courage to use your understanding!" (Kant 1784, 1).

My last question, then, is since polyamory is claimed to be an enlightened intimate lifestyle that one can develop by employing their self-knowledge, *who* has or can have the ability to practice it. As a matter of fact, when Kant (1784) argued for enlightenment among humankind, humankind signified nothing more than European white men. Through "mistakenly" reading Kant's works, Gayatri Spivak (1999)

eloquently critiqued how Kant created the notion of universal humankind equipped with rational will based on European men by foreclosing non-Western, colonial subjects. In a similar vein, when polyamory texts endorse one's capacity to understand the self and to build intimate relationships based on that understanding, that capacity is not equal to everyone, but contingent on one's class, gender, and race. Given that polyamory requires an individual to continuously practice self-awareness, who can afford it? What is the material, intellectual, or psychological condition in which one can have self-knowledge, including an understanding of the complex, inner dynamics of the self? And importantly, who can actually create their own kind of intimate relationship by employing their self-knowledge? With that said, I assert that when polyamory texts discuss polyamory as an intimate lifestyle that the enlightened individual can enjoy, they are dismissing or concealing specific racial, classed, and gendered conditions for becoming the enlightened individual.

Love	▪ How do you know when you have fallen in love? How do you know when it's time to say "I love you" to your partner? ▪ What is it that you like about falling in love? What are the physical sensations you experience when you're in love? ▪ How do you know when someone loves you? What do you need to see/hear/feel in order to believe that someone loves you? ▪ Have you made any life decisions while falling in love? When those feelings faded, which decisions did you regret? Which decisions were you still happy with? ▪ How do you feel about the idea of finding a soul mate? Which do you find more romantic: having one soul mate, or multiple soul mates? ▪ Do you rarely experience romantic feelings or sexual attraction for other people?
Relationships	▪ What do you like about romantic relationships? What do you expect to happen when you start a new relationship? ▪ What do you dislike about romantic relationships? What are the things that you're afraid of when you start a new relationship? ▪ How do your relationships usually begin? Do you tend to go for a slow burn or do you engage very quickly and passionately? ▪ How do your relationships usually end? Is there any kind of recurring pattern in your relationships? ▪ What are the best personal qualities that you bring to a relationship? ▪ Which parts of the relationship escalator do you want in your life? ▪ What is your history with monogamy? Has it been a struggle, or has it been easy for you?

Figure 1.2 Questionnaire for Self-Inquiry (Winston 2017, 53-62) (Continued)

Communication	▪ What patterns for communication and conflict resolution did you see growing up? Have you seen those patterns mirrored in your romantic relationships? ▪ Are you a chewer or spewer? Are there certain topics where you're more comfortable being a chewer or a spewer? ▪ How do you handle honesty? Are you an open book, or do you prefer to keep things to yourself? ▪ How do you express love to your romantic partners? What kind of love language do you prefer to receive from your partners? ▪ What is your communication style in arguments? What strategies do you employ to make yourself right and the other wrong? ▪ When you're getting emotional in an argument, how do you manage it? Is it easy for you to walk away to cool off, or do you need to hash it all out right in the moment?
Sex and Sexuality	▪ What role has sex played in your life and in your past relationships? ▪ Which kinds of sex do you enjoy and fantasize about? Which kinds of sex scare you or intimidate you? ▪ Do you ever feel ashamed about your sex drive being too low or too high? ▪ Do you require sex in every romantic relationship? ▪ Is there a particular type of sex/frequency of sex you've always wanted but have never gotten in your past relationships? ▪ Is there a type of sex that you want, but are too ashamed or embarrassed to ask anybody? ▪ Is it difficult for you to share sexual fantasies or desires with a partner? What about talking about sexual history? ▪ What has been your primary source of knowledge about STIs and safe sex? ▪ What are your boundaries when it comes to participating in safe sex? What level of risk are you comfortable with?
Fears and Insecurities	▪ What is your deepest fear regarding love and sex? ▪ If you're new to polyamory or non-monogamy, what scares you about it? ▪ What parts of yourself and your life are you most insecure about? ▪ What parts of yourself and your life are you most proud of? ▪ What does jealousy feel like to you? What are the physical sensations that you feel when you're jealous? ▪ When you are jealous of a coworker, family member, or friend, how do you cope with it? ▪ When are you jealous within a romantic relationship, how do you cope with it?

Figure 1.2 Questionnaire for Self-Inquiry (Winston 2017, 53-62) (Continued)

Relationship Vision	▪ If you were to close your eyes and wave a magic wand, what would your romantic life look like? Be bold, be vulnerable, be silly, be honest! ▪ If you were to have exactly what you wanted for your love life and sex life, how would it make you feel? How would the people involved with you feel? ▪ What kind of person do you have to be in order to get the love life that you want? ▪ What kind of people do you want to be romantically and sexually involved with? ▪ When you're considering beginning a relationship with someone, what is a deal breaker? ▪ How do you personally define commitment? How do you know if someone is in a committed relationship with you? ▪ If you're interested in monogamy, why is that? What are your reasons for pursuing it? ▪ What are your thoughts on raising children within your romantic relationships? Would you want just one partner to act as coparent, or could you envision multiple partners raising your children? Would you feel happy being part of the child-rearing process for a child who was not biologically yours?

Figure 1.2 Questionnaire for Self-Inquiry (Winston 2017, 53-62)

Credo 3: Own Yourself

I have now discussed two polyamory credos: "demystify monogamy" and "know yourself." Here, I address the final, yet the most important, polyamory credo, "own yourself." While the first two credos have suggested that polyamory is the intimate practice of the liberal individual who acts on their own free will using self-knowledge, the last credo indicates the notion of individual ownership and accountability in the practice of polyamory—that is, you are the only one who can take control over, and be responsible for, your life, and thus, you own yourself. By detailing how polyamory texts account for the importance of personal boundaries and emotion management, I will showcase how the culture of polyamory fundamentally relies on the white, middle-classed, liberalist value of autonomy and independence.

In *The Ethical Slut* (2017), Easton and Hardy discussed how to practice ethical sluthood based on their belief about the individual being a complete unit:

> We believe the fundamental sexual unit is one person; adding more people to that unit may be intimate, fun, and companionable, but does not complete anybody. The only thing in the world that you can control is yourself—your own reactions, desires, and behaviors. *Thus, a fundamental step in ethical sluthood is to bring your locus of control into yourself, to*

> *recognize the difference between what is yours to control and what belongs to other people*. With practice, you can become able to complete yourself—that's why we call this "integrity." When you have built a satisfying relationship with yourself, then you have something of great worth to share with others. (Easton and Hardy 2017, 27 Emphasis added)

Considering that the individual is already a complete unit, Easton and Hardy (2017) demonstrated that intimate partners are not people who complete us, but people with whom we can share intimacy, fun, and companionship in our lives. For them, this importantly implies that, even when we are in an intimate relationship, the only part (of the relationship) that we can control is ourselves, not our partners. For the sake of a healthy intimate relationship, they claimed that it is important to have clear boundaries between what is ours to control and what is controlled by others and to concentrate on what belongs to us—that is, they stressed the importance of personal boundaries in polyamorous relationships. Nor are Easton and Hardy alone in this claim. Many other polyamory educators also contend that setting personal boundaries is an essential task for engaging in healthy, secure intimate relationships. Veaux and Rickert (2014, 147), for instance, similarly stated that setting personal boundaries helps people not only "create safety and security" for themselves, but also "respect [for the] autonomy" of their intimate partners.

While each polyamory educator explains personal boundaries slightly differently, the bottom line is that personal boundaries focus on *you* and only you. Anita Wagner, who is a famous polyamory blogger and educator, defined personal boundaries as "the limits that you create for yourself to identify what are the ways in which others behave around you that make you feel safe, reasonable, or permissible and how you will respond when someone steps outside of those limits."[14] Although personal boundaries might affect your relationship with your partners and their behaviors too you, Wagner insisted that they are not about other people, but about yourself. For this reason, polyamory educator Jesse Dagger illustrated that, far from being directed towards others, personal boundaries almost always start with "I": what I want, what is

[14] Anita Wagner, "Safe Enough and Free Enough: Communication and Boundaries in Alternative Relationshipland," *Practical Polyamory* (website), 2011, accessed August 18, http://www.practicalpolyamory.com/images/Safe_Enough_and_Free_Enough.pdf

important to me, or what I am (un)comfortable with (see **Figure 1.3**).[15] In this way, polyamory texts insist that, as a crucial means of owning oneself in an intimate relationship, personal boundaries are the protections that one sets for oneself from others.

But what if one fails to implement personal boundaries in an intimate relationship? What problems arise when individuals have blurred personal boundaries? Interestingly, many polyamory texts problematize the absence, or obscurity, of personal boundaries as *a condition of codependence*. Initially developed as a clinical concept indicating a type of dysfunctional relationship between an alcoholic and their family members, codependency has become a popular psychological term in the late twentieth century (Krestan at el. 1990; Morgan 1991). The term now commonly signifies a psychological behavioral pattern or condition in which one is excessively dependent on another person or a relationship with the loss of personal identity, the lack of expression of feelings, and personal meaning derived from the relationship (Fisher and Spann 1991). Often appearing in women's interpersonal behaviors or characteristics of familial or intimate relationships, codependency is generally associated with or regarded as a symptom of low self-esteem, psychological immaturity, or victimhood (Krestan at el. 1990; Anderson 1994). With that said, polyamory texts, by utilizing the concept of codependency, argue that when one does not maintain their personal boundaries, they ultimately lose their sense of self. For example, Veaux and Rickert (2014, 150) stated that fuzzy boundaries can lead to a state of codependency in which you put a higher priority on your partner than yourself and find your self-worth from a relationship. Additionally, they illustrate that, without recognizing where your territory ends and where your partner's territory begins, both you and your partner are easily subject to manipulation or emotional abuse.

In this manner, I demonstrate that central to American polyamory texts' discussions of personal boundaries is the liberalistic belief of the autonomous, independent individual. Cherishing the individual as a complete, autonomous being, polyamory texts claim that with clear boundaries between themselves and

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[15] Jesse Dagger, "The Difference Between "I Will" and "You Won't": Healthy Boundaries in Polyamory," *Polyamory For Us* (blog), June 28, 2015, accessed February 4, 2019, https://www.polyfor.us/the-difference-between-i-will-and-you-wont-healthy-boundaries-in-polyamory/

their partners, individuals should not lose control over themselves in intimate relationships; otherwise, they are considered to be in troublesome, harmful, or unhealthy relationships that need to be intervened with, fixed, or ended.

- I will not be involved with someone who is not open and honest with all other partners about dating me.
- I will not have un-barriered sex with partners whose sexual behavior does not fall within my level of acceptable sexual health risk.
- I will not become involved with someone who is not already committed to polyamory.
- I will not remain in a relationship with a partner who threatens me or uses violence.
- I will choose the level of closeness I want with my partners' other partners, subject to their consent.

Figure 1.3 Examples of Personal Boundaries (Veaux and Rickert 2014, 149)

Meanwhile, with regard to the polyamory credo of "owning yourself", there is another important topic in American polyamory texts: emotion management. The phrase, "own your shit" is famous among polyamorists. In fact, it clearly indicates how polyamory texts emphasize personal accountability in an individual's management of emotion. In one of the most popular polyamory podcasts, *Polyamory Weekly,* hosts Cunning Minx and Lusty Guy defined "owning your shit" as follows: "the idea of taking personal responsibility for understanding, diagnosing, analyzing and stating up front your emotions, whatever emotional reaction you might be having."[16] With the fundamental premise that "your emotions happen inside of you, because of you," the phrase "own your shit," they claimed, fundamentally implies that you are the one who is responsible for your own emotions, so you should neither blame others for your emotions nor project your negative feelings onto them. While indicating an individual's responsibility for their own emotional state, Cunning Minx and Lusty Guy asserted that "owning your shit" also signifies an act of empowerment because it assumes the individual's inalienable ownership of the self—including one's

[16] Cunning Minx and Lusty Guy, host, "Owning your shit," *Polyamory Weekly* (podcast), December 30, 2013, accessed January 15, 2019, https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/polyamory-weekly/id74071760?i=1000222575546

emotional, inner state. They illustrated that, by recognizing that your emotions are not caused by others and that you are the only one who can control your emotions, you feel a sense of power in your life.

The phrase "own your shit" underscores one's ownership of and responsibility for their emotional state, and it can be applied to various emotions—not only negative feelings such as anger, sadness, and jealousy, but also positive emotions like happiness, joy, and excitement—that polyamorists experience in their intimate relationships. Among them, jealousy is the most frequently discussed emotion in polyamory texts as the management of jealousy is something many polyamorists struggle with. According to Kitty Chambliss (2017), jealousy is a complex emotion combined with multiple feelings, such as anger, sadness, fear, and doubt; moreover, it is not easy to identify jealousy at first glance, and it is usually experienced as mixed feelings in a versatile manner. She nevertheless mentioned that, even though it can appear differently, the bottom line of all jealousy is fear. As a fear of losing what you have, jealousy essentially originates from unresolved insecurities about the self. Chambliss (2017) hence argued that jealousy cannot be managed by anyone but the individual experiencing it, as illustrated in her power statements for jealousy management (see **Figure 1.4**). Likewise, in *Polyamory and Jealousy* (2016), Veaux and Rickert also claimed that the only way to truly deal with jealousy is to figure out the internal truths that are causing jealousy and to practice self-care. Unless one confronts their own inner fears, they illustrate, the root causes of jealousy will remain intact, and jealousy can be triggered at any point, even by partners' minor actions. In short, Rickert and Veaux highlighted that, since jealousy is "the first and purest expression of the ego," you cannot "outsource the taming of your own ego."[17]

[17] Eva Rickert and Franklin Veaux, "Emotional Outsourcing: Why structural approaches to jealousy management fails," *More Than Tow* (blog), https://www.morethantwo.com/blog/category/information/jealousy-insecurity

- I take responsibility for my feelings, calm myself down before speaking to loved ones, and make requests (not demands).
- I ask for what I want, even when it's uncomfortable or makes me feel vulnerable**.**
- I CAN and WILL let go of the outcome of a situation.
- I know and recognize that I don't "own" my partner—I am responsible for me, my health, and my happiness only.
- I control how and what I feel.
- I can accomplish anything I set my mind to, and I CAN stand experiencing the feeling of jealousy. I can realize it is a normal, human emotion.

Figure 1.4 Chambliss's Power Statements for Jealousy Management (Chambliss 2017, 32)

Ultimately, along with individual freedom, I claim that autonomy constitutes the basis of American polyamory culture. Polyamory is essentially a practice of freedom that enables individuals to build their own intimate relationships by utilizing self-knowledge, and the main principle for developing and managing polyamorous relationships is autonomy. Brown (1995, 156-157) noted that the autonomy of the liberal subject has three aspects. First, the liberal subject has no constraints in entering into and moving within civil society. He can move freely without being encumbered by responsibilities or demands. Second, the liberal subject is a self-sufficient being in that he is not dependent on others for survival or protection. Lastly, self-orientation or self-interest is expected of the liberal, autonomous subject. Having discussed these three aspects, Brown (1995, 158) criticized the autonomous liberal subject as merely a "fantasy figure" that disavows women's activities, responsibilities, and experiences in society. That is, Brown contended that not only does the liberal subject's autonomy conceal the fact that there is no individual who is self-sufficient from birth to death, but it also effectively debases the dependencies that are necessary to uphold and nourish human life.

Polyamory texts' discussions about the last credo, "own yourself," are well-aligned with the three aspects of the liberal subject's autonomy illustrated by Brown. Above all, in a polyamorous relationship, individuals are expected to focus on themselves rather than their intimate partners. Instead of compromising their desires or needs for their partners, polyamory texts urge individuals to attend to what they need, what they desire, and what is important to them by setting personal boundaries. Also, polyamory presumes a self-sufficient being who can self-regulate their emotions. Aware that individuals will face complex, negative

feelings in their intimate relationships, polyamory texts require individuals to be accountable of their own emotions without relying on their partners. In this way, polyamory texts describe polyamory as an intimate relationship that free, autonomous individuals can develop without being encumbered by responsibilities or necessities. Put another way, polyamorous relationships are presumed to be those into which individuals can freely enter or terminate according to their and their partners' changing desires and situations. While polyamory is by definition an intimate relationship with multiple partners, I argue that individual autonomy is a top priority in a polyamorous relationship. And, as Brown (1995) has importantly noted, polyamory culture fundamentally relies on an autonomy that is more or less fantastical, one that is only available to particular individuals—mainly, white, middle-class individuals—who are attempting to freely pursue their own desires in their intimate lives.

Conclusion: The White, Middle-Classed, Liberal Polyamorous Self?

I began this chapter by introducing Chakrabarty (2000)'s notion of "provincializing Europe," contending that polyamory culture has drawn from particular cultural beliefs of the self as well as the gender and racial dynamics specific to the US. With an understanding of the US's racialized history in constituting monogamy as a civic norm, I explored how polyamory primarily emerged as a means by which American white, middle-class women could exercise their sexual agency and individual freedom. I illustrated that, as American white, middle-class women's normative experience of sexuality and individuality are rooted in the development of polyamory, the prevalent cultural ethos that informs that individuality, liberal individualism, has laid the foundation for polyamory culture. Ultimately, in this chapter, I argued that, while polyamory has developed as a non-normative intimate practice that subverts the civic norm of monogamy, polyamory also essentially upholds the liberal individualistic belief of the self—the free, autonomous self who acts for itself by utilizing self-understanding.

Basically, liberalism presupposes the division of human life into two spheres: the public and the private. While the public sphere is characterized as the realm of liberty, rationality, self-interest, and

autonomy, the private sphere is considered the domain of necessity, affection, care, and dependence. Critically, this distinction between the public and the private operates in conjunction with the basic premise of sexual difference. That is, under the dual system of the public-private spheres, liberalism not only naturalizes the sexual division of labor and activities but also constitutes the liberal subject as a gendered masculine being (Brown 1995). Many feminists, for this reason, have long castigated the dualism of liberalism. On the one hand, feminists have strived for women's entry into the public sphere by challenging the sexual division of labor, and on the other hand, feminists have tried to rediscover women's activities in the private sphere, which has been undermined as feminine. In regard to this, I claim that polyamory is essentially women's feminist attempt to reorganize their private, intimate lives according to the principles of freedom, autonomy, and independence, which are seen as the values of the public sphere. Put another way, by developing polyamory, which is a form of intimate relationship that highlights the exercise of individual freedom and autonomy, women seek to constitute and manage themselves as free, autonomous, liberal individuals.

However, masculinity is not the only aspect that defines the liberal subject. For much of American history, the normative state of liberal citizenship has been identified not just with masculinity but also with being middle-class and white (Glenn 2002). That is to say, since polyamory has been mainly developed by American white, middle-classed women in a way that allows them to reconstruct their private, intimate lives according to the ideal of the liberal individual, I argue that the white, middle-classed norm of the liberal individual is fundamentally ingrained in polyamory culture. In other words, as polyamory has emerged as an intimate relationship that allows individuals to pursue the liberal individualistic values of freedom and autonomy, polyamory culture primarily promotes the ideal of white, middle-classed, liberal individuality, which is a free, autonomous, and self-sufficient individual who uses one's own self-knowledge in determining how to practice intimate relationships. With that in mind, the next chapter draws from my ethnographic fieldwork in Southern California to describe individuals' practice of polyamory in their everyday lives and examine how individuals govern and manage their selfhood in their practice of polyamory.

Chapter 2: Practicing Polyamory, Realizing the Authentic Self
: An analysis of Southern Californian polyamorists' experiences of polyamory

Since the late 1990s, there has been increasing scholarly interest in people's experiences of polyamory in recent decades. Scholars have thus far studied polyamory mainly from two different aspects. On the one hand, by focusing on polyamory as a sexual identity, studies have revealed how individuals build and negotiate their polyamorous identity against the norm of monogamy (e.g., Wosick-Correa 2010; Robinson 2013; Aguilar 2014); on the other hand, scholarly works have also shed light on the possibility of polyamory disrupting the heteronormative sexual system by analyzing how individuals reshape their gender and sexual relations through the practice of polyamory (e.g., Sheff 2005, 2006; Ritchie and Barker 2007; Schippers 2016). By shifting focus away from sexual identity or the politics of gender and sexuality, my dissertation examines polyamory as a practice of constructing and governing selfhood based on Foucault's theory of moral subjectivation (see Introduction). This chapter explores how polyamorists understand, practice, and value polyamory within the process of subjectivation—the process in which individuals form themselves as ethical beings.

To analyze individuals' experiences of polyamory in the US, this chapter draws from the ethnographic fieldwork and one-on-one interviews that I conducted in Southern Californian from 2017 to 2018. Specific questions that this chapter asks include: how do individuals understand their choice to practice polyamory? How do polyamorists create and maintain polyamorous relationships? What specific procedures, techniques, and maneuvers do they utilize to deal with various issues in their practice of polyamory? How do they value polyamory as a way to construct and govern themselves as ethical beings? Finally, what do individual practices of polyamory tell us about the moral imperative of the liberal individual and its racialized, classed nature in US society?

As I seek to answer these questions in this chapter, the ethos of liberal individualism is at the center of my analysis. In the previous chapter, I showcased how polyamory culture has developed on the basis of the dominant cultural ideal of the liberal individual, which is also the white, middle-classed norm of individuality; as polyamory has come to signify an intimate relationship that an individual develops using

self-knowledge of their own free will, American polyamory culture gestures towards the making of a liberal individual who exercises freedom and autonomy. During my fieldwork in Southern California, I discovered that many polyamorists highlighted the liberal individualistic values of their polyamorous relationships. With respect to this, I examine how polyamorists argue for the values of freedom and autonomy and what specific efforts and labors they make to exercise freedom and autonomy in their polyamorous relationships.

Particularly, this chapter focuses on how polyamorists employ psychotherapeutic knowledge and techniques to manage themselves as free, autonomous individuals in their polyamorous relationships. As many scholars have pointed out, therapeutic culture based on the Freudian psychoanalytic perspective has arisen in American society since the mid-twentieth century (Reiff 1998; Nolan 1998; Moskowitz 2001; Illouz 2008). They illustrated that therapeutic culture, while providing language and tools to interpret and manage the self, compels American individuals to attend to the emotional, inner self by prioritizing their psychological well-being. In this regard, I indicate that psychotherapeutic culture serves as an important tool for individuals' practice of polyamory in the US; when polyamory is understood as an intimate practice that upholds the values of individual freedom and autonomy, psychotherapeutic knowledge and skills allow individuals to embody those values in their polyamorous relationships. Given this, I analyze how polyamory operates as a practice through which individuals manage their inner selves and transform into free, autonomous selves by using psychotherapeutic techniques. Specifically, this chapter showcases how individuals, according to the liberal moral values of freedom and autonomy, discover and actualize the authentic self—the true essence of the self that is unshackled by social, institutional controls and others' influences—in their practice of polyamory.

While the ethos of liberal individualism is central to my analysis of individuals' practice of polyamory, my analysis also brings forth race as an important consideration. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the ideal of the liberal individual inherently conforms to the norm of white, middle-class individuality. For polyamory to embody the ethos of liberal individualism, the ideal of white, middle-class individuality is necessarily ingrained in American polyamory culture. Indeed, many scholars have pointed out that polyamory communities in the US mainly consist of white, middle-class, and well-educated

individuals (Sheff 2013, 2015). My project similarly found that the majority of polyamorists had these characteristics. Almost 80 to 90 percent of the polyamorists that I met in Southern California were white, making it difficult to meet polyamorists of color during my fieldwork. In line with this, I carefully considered racial evenness among polyamorists in my analysis of individuals' experiences of polyamory in the US. Put another way, this chapter examines how an individual's practice of polyamory is entangled with their particular racial, classed positionality.

This chapter is comprised of four sections. First, "Polyamorists in Southern California" gives a brief illustration of my fieldwork in Southern California—of the three polyamory communities I observed and the polyamorists that I met and interviewed—as contextual information before analyzing individuals' practice of polyamory. Second, "Breaking with Monogamy, Entering into Polyamory" discusses individuals' transition to a polyamorous life, showing how they articulate the exercise of autonomy and freedom as a crucial aspect of their choice to live a polyamorous life. Third, "How to Own a Polyamorous Life" examines how individuals develop and maintain polyamorous relationships. By describing how polyamorists cope with various relationship issues and situations in their everyday lives, this section elaborates how the practice of polyamory operates as a self-activity for examining, regulating, and governing the self according to the principle of autonomy and individual freedom. At last, "A Journey to the Authentic Self" addresses the meaning of polyamory with regard to the way polyamorists manage their selfhood. It elucidates how polyamory helps individuals search for and attain an authentic self through the constant practice of self-awareness and self-discipline. Altogether, this chapter illuminates how polyamory serves as a means by which individuals can actualize their authentic selves, while requiring them to constitute and manage themselves in accordance with the popular ethical ideal of an authentic individual in the US. It concludes by arguing that individual's practice of polyamory, albeit seemingly perverse or immoral, foregrounds the ethical ideal of an authentic self, which is commonly praised in contemporary American society.

Polyamorists in Southern California

To scrutinize how individuals practice polyamory in their everyday lives, this chapter is built on ethnographic data that I collected from interviews and participant observations of polyamory communities in Southern California. Before presenting my analysis, in this section, I introduce the field site where I gathered my ethnographic data. I illustrate who the polyamorists are that I met during my fieldwork in Southern California as well as how I came to know them. As the polyamorists I met at my field site by no means represent the experiences of all polyamorists in the US, the description of my field site will help to clarify the circumscribed basis of my analysis of individuals' experiences of polyamory.

My fieldwork in the US centered on polyamory communities in Southern California. Southern California encompasses Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, Orange County, and San Diego, and there are more than seven polyamory communities in Southern California. Among those, I participated in three distinct communities—which I here refer to as Community Purple, Black, and Green—to conduct fieldwork on Southern Californian polyamorists' lives. By attending their monthly offline meetings, social events, and online discussions from 2017 to 2018, I built rapport with members of these communities and conducted interviews with some of the members (43 polyamorists).

To briefly introduce the polyamory communities that I took part in, Community Purple, Black, and Green are significantly different in their organizational styles and the demographics of their members. First of all, Purple is a polyamory community that was established in 2015 by Andy and Sage.[18] Organized as a private group on Facebook, Community Purple holds monthly meetings and sends meeting invitations to its members. Yet, the meetings are not exclusive only to members; anyone who is polyamorous (or curious about polyamory) can come to the meetings. Andy and Sage serve as hosts of the meetings to welcome and guide participants, and the meetings are usually held at a local bar in a casual and friendly atmosphere. At the meetings, participants hang out with other polyamorists and enjoy drinking; while some share their polyamorous issues, people do not necessarily discuss polyamory but freely talk about various subjects,

[18] I use a pseudonym for all of my interviewees.

including politics, music, TV shows, and other personal matters. In short, without any rules or formalities, Community Purple's meetings operate as a polyamorous social space in which polyamorists can comfortably get together and socialize with other polyamorists. Given that Community Purple's Facebook group has approximately 600 members, the number of monthly meeting participants varies every month, usually from 30 to 50 or 60.

The most distinctive characteristic that marks Community Purple is that it is a more queer-friendly polyamory community compared to Community Black and Green. Many members of Community Purple, including its organizers, Andy and Sage, claim to be not only polyamorous but also queer, identifying themselves as asexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, pansexual, or transgender. And some members appear to be actively involved in local queer and trans communities. With members of diverse gender and sexual identities, Community Purple provides an inclusive atmosphere for queer polyamorists. In terms of its age group, Community Purple primarily consists of young adults in their 20s, 30s, or 40s.

While Community Purple mainly serves to provide polyamorists with casual social gathering opportunities, Community Black operates as a polyamory support group, through which polyamorists share their personal experiences, discuss their issues and thoughts, and seek out healthier ways of practicing polyamory. Community Black, as I found out, was initially established by a BDSM club. Since people who engage in BDSM often build non-monogamous sexual relationships, the club formed a monthly non-monogamy discussion meeting for its members, which has come to function as a polyamory support group. In particular, it appears that the meeting developed into a stable polyamory community when Jodie—one of the BDSM club members who has more than ten years of experience practicing polyamory—started to take charge of managing the meetings in 2017. By facilitating monthly discussion meetings and administering an online website for the meetings' participants, Jodie apparently has played an important role in organizing Community Black.

The way Jodie arranges Community Black's monthly meetings is different from how Andy and Sage host meetings for Community Purple. Community Black's meetings have a specific topic each month. While topics cover diverse polyamory issues such as jealousy, communication, safer sex, and how to

prepare to practice polyamory, Jodie chooses a topic in advance and prepares for meetings according to the topic. At each meeting, after introducing the subject of the meeting, she presents information that she has researched on the topic as well as her personal experiences, and then she opens up the discussion to participants. During the discussion, participants share their relationship issues related to that month's topic and exchange thoughts on how to cope with these issues. The discussion is usually intense, yet the meeting is held for only two hours. The number of meeting participants, though varying from month to month, is on average between 10 and 25. In addition to monthly meetings, members of Community Black have active online discussions through a Slack group. By using the Slack group, members can post questions or ask for advice when they have relationship problems. Additionally, Jodie posts daily questions (i.e., What are your relationship expectations?), and members reply to the questions.

Concerning its members' sociological and demographic characteristics, Community Black also differs from Community Purple. Unsurprisingly, most members of Community Black have a BDSM lifestyle. Since Community Black's monthly meetings are hosted at a BDSM club, the majority of its members appear to be affiliated with the BDSM club in spite of the fact that Community Black is open to all polyamorists, regardless of their practice of BDSM.[19] I observed that it was more or less common for BDSM partners in polyamorous relationships to attend Community Black's meetings together. When it comes to gender and sexual identity, most of the members, unlike members of Community Purple, appear to be heterosexual and cisgender.

The last community which I participated in is Community Green, established by Laura in 2014. Among the three Southern Californian communities which I conducted fieldwork in, Community Green was the liveliest community with the largest number of members. Like Community Purple and Black, Community Green not only holds official monthly meetings, but it also often hosts social events, such as picnics, movie nights, and date nights. To attend these events or official meetings, one needs to join Community Green through Meetup (meetup.com), and then they can see detailed information (time and

[19] While an individual needs to pay a fee ($10) to attend one of Community Black's monthly discussion meetings, members of the BDSM club are exempt from the fee.

place) for its meetings. While the total number of Community Green's members on Meetup is roughly 1,500, the average number of members who participate in its monthly meetings is between 30 to 70.

While Community Purple and Black focus on polyamorists' casual gatherings and discussion meetings, respectively, Community Green's official meetings have both socializing and discussion functions. Each meeting is mainly composed of two parts. The first part is a discussion session, which is run by Laura. Similar to Community Black, there is a specific topic for each month, and given the topic, participants talk about their experiences and difficulties and seek advice from others. Topics range from polyamory-specific problems—such as where and how to find polyamorous partners, the practicality of polyamory, and emotional processing—to general relationship issues, including safer sex and love language. And Laura, depending on the topic, prepares materials (i.e., news articles, video clips, or films) and shares them with members. After the discussion session is over, the second part of the meeting is a time for socialization among members. Enjoying drinks and food, members freely mingle with other members and chat about various personal matters. With both the first and second parts, Community Green's official meetings normally last longer than three hours.

With the largest community size among the three communities, Community Green's members show a diverse mix of all age groups. While there are many young polyamorists in their 20s, 30s, and 40s, there are also many older polyamorists over 60. Another noticeable point of Community Green is that, compared to Community Purple and Black, many members are married couples practicing polyamory. These couples participate in Community Green's meetings together, and sometimes they also bring their other polyamorous partners to the meetings.

By participating in three Southern Californian polyamory communities—Purple, Black, and Green—that have distinctively different characteristics, I met many polyamorists from different demographic backgrounds. The polyamorists that I interviewed, in other words, displayed a diverse range of ages, genders and sexual identities, marital status, and occupations. My interviewees include polyamorists from varied age groups, ranging from their 20s to 70s; the oldest interviewee was George, who is in his 70s, whereas the youngest polyamorist that I interviewed is a polyamorous transwoman named

Lucy, who is in her late 20s. My interviewees also represent diverse gender and sexual identities. Far from normalizing the cisgender and heterosexual experience of polyamory, my interviewees describe how their experience of polyamory intersects with different gender and sexual identities. With regard to marital status, almost half of the polyamorists that I interviewed were married, and the other half were single or divorced. And some of the polyamorists appeared to have kids. Lastly, my interviewees tended to have various occupations, including an attorney, professor, engineer, counselor, navy member, graduate student, bar manager, housewife, and Uber driver. On this account, while many of interviewees would be considered as well-educated and middle-class, there are a few who were from the working class.

Although I met and interviewed Southern Californian polyamorists from various backgrounds by participating in Community Purple, Black, and Green, their various backgrounds did not include racial or ethnic diversity. As I mentioned earlier, almost 90% of the polyamorists that I encountered during my fieldwork in Southern California were white. I attended the meetings of the three polyamory communities for a year and half, and it was not uncommon for me to be the only person of color present. Community Purple, Black, and Green, as I observed, are all predominantly white communities. Having said that, the lack of racial diversity is not a unique feature of these three communities. As Elisabeth Sheff's longitudinal study on polyamorists has shown, polyamory communities are mostly white-centered; and, because of racial homogeneity in polyamory communities, previous studies on polyamory have often faced criticism for universalizing white polyamorists' experience (Sheff and Hammer 2011, 203). In light of this, my analysis, rather than disregarding the racial homogeneity of my ethnographic data, critically takes the racial unevenness of polyamory communities into account as it illustrates Southern Californian polyamorists' lives. As a matter of fact, the lack of racial diversity in polyamory communities does not mean that people of color do not practice polyamory. Rather, it suggests that there are different ways in which individuals understand and practice polyamory according to their racial and ethnic identities. That is, polyamory is a racialized experience. Therefore, by avoiding a color-blind approach that naturalizes white polyamorists' experiences, I pay attention to how race plays out in the ways in which individuals practice polyamory.

In addition to racial homogeneity, all of the polyamorists that I met during my fieldwork shared the same regional background of Southern California. Along with New York and Oregon, California is known to be one of the states where polyamory communities are flourishing. Indeed, most of the polyamory pioneers that I have discussed in the previous chapter developed their polyamorous lifestyles and activism in California. Also, according to the Polyamory-Friendly Professionals Directory (https://www.polyfriendly.org/), California has the largest number of registered polyamory-friendly psychotherapists among the states of the US. For this reason, California is a good site for conducting fieldwork in order to examine individuals' experience of polyamory. But, that notwithstanding, individuals' polyamorous experiences in California may be different from those of individuals in other regions; polyamorists living in regions where polyamory communities are inactive or do not exist would have different or more difficult problems than polyamorists in California. In this regard, I clarify that the scope of my analysis in this chapter is limited to Southern Californian. And, in my analysis of polyamorists' lives, I take the specific regional context of Southern California into consideration.

During the process of doing fieldwork, I conducted interviews after I developed close relationships with polyamorists by getting to know them at meetings and social events. I asked community members to participate in my project, and most of them unhesitatingly agreed to be interviewed. Including a set of questions regarding the practice of polyamory, interviews were conducted in the form of casual conversation. An individual interview usually took two to three hours. Given the private and intimate topics, I asked interviewees to choose an interview location where they would feel secure and comfortable enough to talk. Thus, depending on the interviewee, interview locations varied, including a coffee shop, restaurant, pub, park, and interviewee's house. Using my ethnographic data, in the following section, I will tell stories of how polyamorists embark on the journey of practicing polyamory.

Breaking with Monogamy, Entering into Polyamory

In this section, I discuss how individuals come to practice polyamory. What compels them to break away from monogamy and practice polyamory? Drawing from my ethnographic data, this section aims to answer these questions. While this chapter addresses individuals' experience of polyamory as a process through which individuals constitute themselves as ethical subjects, this section focuses on how polyamorists signify their transition from monogamy to polyamory within the process of self-formation as subjects. That is, rather than detailing situations in which individuals decided to practice polyamory, my goal in this section is to analyze how individuals connected crucial aspects of their lives—particular values and meanings of their lives—with their decision to practice polyamory.

To that end, in what follows, I describe the transformation of three polyamorists, Andy, Logan, and Chloe, from monogamists into polyamorists. While the three of them followed different journeys in developing a polyamorous lifestyle, their stories represent how most Southern Californian polyamorists perceive and articulate their transition to polyamory. Ultimately, through these stories, my claim is that at the center of the way polyamorists narrate their practice of polyamory is *their quest for autonomy and individual freedom* in their intimate lives. When there is tension between the desire for intimate connections and the desire to be autonomous and free, polyamorists consider polyamory as a way to exercise autonomy and freedom within their intimate relationships, reconciling that tension.

Andy is a queer, non-binary transperson, who is in their late thirties. Forming a huge polycule (a connected network of people who are in polyamorous relationships), Andy has multiple intimate partners, including their live-in partner. According to Andy, they became interested in polyamory when they started to date a polyamorous man, M. While their relationship initially started as casual dating, Andy began to see the potential benefits of polyamory because of M, and thereby began their own polyamorous journey. Now, as a co-organizer of local polyamory community, Community Purple, Andy claims that polyamory is an important part of their identity.

Before identifying themself as a polyamorist, Andy mentioned that they had been "either single or monogamous." Particularly, in their twenties, Andy was in a five-year monogamous relationship, which they defined as a "very unhealthy" relationship. As the first serious relationship that they had in college, the experience of the five-year monogamous relationship appeared to be critical to the way in which Andy shaped their understanding of monogamy and decided on practicing polyamory:

> *I really lost my sense of self in that [relationship]. I wasn't taking care of myself.* I still maintained my friendship[s]. I still maintained friends. We didn't share [our] social life that much. *But my whole life was so codependent. It was so connected. When he stayed out drinking, I was staying home worrying about him. It was very unhealthy.* … If my boyfriend was out, by the way it was before cell phone[s] and I couldn't reach him, and he was drinking, I was worried that he might be in danger. I was sleepless. And you know, if he was having any emotional problem, I dropped everything to take care of him. And so, my life ceased and [I] took priority of his needs, not in a selfless way. It wasn't like I need[ed] to help him. I didn't even notice. When I look back, I can see [that] I was prioritizing his feelings.[20] (Emphasis Added)

Describing it as an unhealthy codependent relationship, Andy stated that the relationship ultimately made them lose control over their life. Andy's life, in other words, came to be organized not by their own needs and feelings, but by their boyfriend's. Yet, while in that relationship, Andy did not even notice that they were compromising their autonomy. It was almost two years after the breakup that they started to see how unhealthy the relationship had been—that is, how detrimental it was to their autonomy. And with that realization, it appears that Andy became frightened to commit to another relationship. Andy mentioned that, since being in a committed relationship means "giving up [their] autonomy to a degree and asking another person to give up their autonomy," they did not want to lose their autonomy again in an intimate relationship. It was at that time that Andy met a polyamorous married man, M:

> In my early thirties, I was avoiding relationships, and then I met a man who was polyamorous. I thought this was great that he was polyamorous, and he was married and has a classical hierarchy structure. So, I knew, "Okay, there is only so far this can go. He won't want me to compromise my life, [and] he won't want me to insert him into my life, [and] for me to be inserted into his life." A little bit of [a] fling [is] great to do before I was leaving. … And what end[ed] up happening is that very quickly I shifted from thinking, "Oh, this is [a] polyamorous man that I'm dating" into "This is a lifestyle that I actually feel comfortable with," and I took it that one [point of view].[21]

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[20] Andy, interview by author, San Diego, November 29, 2018.
[21] Andy, interview by author, San Diego, November 29, 2018.

Initially, Andy did not expect that they would develop a committed, long-term relationship with M. In fact, it was because of that that Andy started to date M in the first place. Since M was a polyamorous man with a primary partner, Andy thought that M would be just a casual date, which meant that they did not have to worry about losing their autonomy. However, contrary to Andy's expectations, Andy came to identify themself as a polyamorist through the relationship. While observing M's polyamorous lifestyle, Andy started to feel attracted to polyamory; they thought that polyamory would enable them to have committed intimate relationships without giving up their own autonomy. Struggling with the conflict between intimacy and autonomy, Andy found polyamory to be a healthy way to solve the dilemma.

In this regard, what a polyamorous life signifies to Andy, I demonstrate, is the exercise of autonomy in their private life. When they suffered from losing their sense of self in a monogamous relationship, Andy sought to secure their autonomy by transitioning to polyamory. In short, although polyamory does not automatically guarantee personal agency, Andy maintained that polyamory has allowed them to "develop relationships, meaningful relationships, while respecting [their] own autonomy and other people's."

Along with Andy, the second polyamorist that I introduce here is Logan. Logan is a heterosexual polyamorous man in his early forties. With three polyamorous partners, Logan has been practicing polyamory for about a year. I remember the first time that I met Logan at a monthly discussion meeting of Community Black. It was his first time to attend the meeting with his partner. Although he was new to the community, he was very open and friendly about approaching other members. And soon after, he became one of the most active members of Community Black. However, Logan, as he stated, only came to embrace his gregarious, cheerful nature after he started his new life of polyamory in California.

When it comes to the journey of polyamory, Logan, compared to Andy, began his transformation by making a drastic change in his life. After his six-year monogamous relationship ended, he decided not to pursue monogamous relationships anymore. Logan no longer wanted to put himself in "the box" that society and other people asked him to fit into. He then looked for a new place where he could freely build his own lifestyle without constraint. One of the main reasons that he moved to California was that he watched a TV documentary about polyamory communities in Southern California. And after moving from

the East Coast to California, Logan, as he had planned, actively searched for BDSM and polyamory communities and started his new life as a polyamorist.

Why did he make such a radical change to have a polyamorous lifestyle? Logan, as he recollected, was sexually free and explorative in college, so much so that, at one point, he dated five women simultaneously. Although they were not serious relationships, Logan was open enough to tell these women about the existence of the others. Yet, as he developed a serious relationship with one woman, he settled in that relationship monogamously. Since then, he practiced monogamy throughout his twenties and thirties. And during that time, Logan mentioned that, like many people, he imagined building his life by finding a stable job, getting married, and having kids. He was, in fact, dreaming of such a conventional married life until he terminated his last monogamous relationship. Although he desired a normal monogamous married life, Logan was nevertheless not content with his monogamous relationships: "When I was in those monogamous relationships, getting a career, and trying to put myself in the box that everybody said I should be in, it became less me."[22]

Being in a monogamous relationship, Logan felt like he was losing himself. As he was trying to become the person that his girlfriends asked him to be, he constantly compromised himself—what he wanted and who he was. In other words, Logan felt that his previous girlfriends did not accept who he was; instead, they were "trying to put himself in the box" that they wanted. And in those relationships, he could not help but feel unhappy with himself. That being said, it was not until the breakup of his last monogamous relationship that Logan realized that he could not make other people happy by changing himself. Put another way, by coming out of his six-year relationship, Logan finally decided to live for his own happiness and to exercise his free will.

On account of this, developing a polyamorous life for Logan did not merely mean changing the form of intimate relationship he practiced. But it rather signified a fundamental change in the way he lived his life. That is to say, polyamory is a lifestyle which allows Logan to liberate himself from societal and

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[22] Logan, interview by author, San Diego, October 6, 2018.

others' control and realize who he is, as he himself articulated: "it [polyamory] means I have a chance of actually following the path I intended to try before anybody started putting their thoughts in my ears. It's my continuation of myself."[23]

The last polyamorist who I introduce in this section is Chloe. I first met Chloe when she attended a monthly meeting of Community Green with her wife. A certified relationship coach who works mainly with non-monogamous people, Chloe has been in a polyamorous marital relationship for about three years. In opposition to Andy and Logan, Chloe is practicing hierarchical polyamory, which means that she prioritizes her relationship with her wife and is not seeking for strong emotional or romantic bonds from her other partners. Much like the way Chloe's practice of polyamory is different from the other two polyamorists discussed above, Chloe also followed quite a different journey to develop her polyamorous lifestyle compared to them.

Chloe recollected that she constantly failed at practicing monogamy since she was young. While finding herself repeatedly being unfaithful and dishonest in monogamous relationships, Chloe could not help but blame herself for hurting the people she loved:

> I would say from like a younger adult age, I knew that sexual monogamy wasn't something that I personally was capable of and was something where I had to go through partners to realize that. And I noticed that I was hurting other people because I couldn't stay faithful in a relationship, so that … was really hard for me. And so, I kept questioning myself and doing a lot of self-reflection on [it]. Why can't I stay monogamous? What is going on? Where [did that] come to that? (Author: When did you realize that [you couldn't be monogamous]?) I would say from the beginning of [my] dating year[s]. I was probably 18 in my first real relationship. And even then, after the relationship, the sexual part of the relationship, started to get into its pattern. I would get bored and I would stray. And instead of doing the right thing, which would be communicating with my partner about what I was going through, I would just, I would have an affair, or I would cheat, and so I realized that's not the way I want to personally live my life. I want to have [an] open dialogue between my partner and I.[24]

Realizing her incapability to maintain a monogamous relationship, Chloe wanted to break away from her own failed pattern of practicing intimacy. And importantly, what she thought of as a way of departing from her old pattern was to build an intimate relationship where she could be free and open about

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[23] Logan, interview by author, San Diego, October 6, 2018.
[24] Chloe, interview by author, San Diego, October 24, 2018.

her desires and feelings. Rather than hiding her desires or deceiving herself, Chloe sought to build a relationship in which she could be who she genuinely is.

As a matter of fact, Chloe said that, when she first developed a relationship with her wife six years ago, she and her wife had "open communications about literally every aspect of their life," including what desires they had for the relationship and what kind of relationship they want[ed] to form together. Then, knowing that both of them were not satisfied with a monogamous relationship and craved other intimate connections, they decided not to hide or suppress such desires. After they agreed to pursue their desires for other people, Chloe and her wife, however, did not immediately start practicing polyamory. They waited until they both felt ready for the transition to polyamory. And it was about three years ago that they started to date other people. Since they had enough time to get prepared, Chloe said that "it was a pretty easy transition." There were, nevertheless, still small troubles that they encountered during the process of the transition. Chloe, for example, initially felt guilty and awkward with her wife after having a good time with a date. But Chloe said that, by frankly communicating about those feelings with her wife, she overcame the issue and confirmed their bond even more strongly. Chloe hence emphasized that, unlike her previous relationships, she can be free and open about who she is in her current polyamorous relationship:

> She [Chloe's wife] can come to me for literally everything. It could be a work situation. It could be, you know, a family situation. It can be any kind of situation. The type of communication we have makes it so much easier to talk about everything in our relationship. So, for me, that is the value that it [polyamory] holds, I mean it's just everything. It's not always easy to talk about. But I'm not afraid to tell her anything. And that's a free feeling in a relationship.[25]

Some might think that for Chloe, who repeatedly failed to stay faithful in monogamous relationships, polyamory was an inevitable choice. Monogamous relationships apparently did not satisfy her sexual desires. Having said that, Chloe illustrated that having multiple sexual connections was not the reason that she decided to develop a polyamorous life with her wife; instead, she wanted to build a relationship where she did not need to disguise or repress her thoughts, feelings, or desires. As such, Chloe believes that polyamory is the lifestyle that enables her to "be herself authentically."

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[25] Chloe, interview by author, San Diego, October 24, 2018.

Based in part upon these three stories, my argument is that *the realization of autonomy and individual freedom* is critical to the way in which polyamorists perceive the development of their polyamorous lifestyle. For Andy, polyamory signifies intimate relationships that enable them to exercise their autonomy without losing their sense of self. In the case of Logan, polyamory is a way of living that allows him to live for his own happiness while being liberated from the control of society and other people. Lastly, Chloe decided to practice polyamory because she wanted to express and share herself with her intimate partners freely. Albeit differently, Andy, Logan, and Chloe all underscore that the realization of an autonomous, free-willed self is the essence of polyamory. Considering that the ethos of liberal individualism is deeply ingrained in the development of American polyamory culture (as discussed in Chapter 1), these polyamorists' emphasis on being autonomous, free-willed individuals is not surprising. Indeed, the value of being an autonomous, free-willed individual appeared essentially and repeatedly not just in these polyamorists' stories, but in the narratives of almost all of the polyamorists I interviewed. Through making the transition to polyamory, Southern Californian polyamorists sought to exercise autonomy and freedom in their intimate lives.

Though these polyamorists highlighted the values of individual freedom and autonomy as their main reasons for practicing polyamory, I indicate that the pursuit of autonomy and freedom in intimate life is not at all unique to polyamorists. Put another way, when Andy, Logan, and Chloe illustrated how they struggled with the conflict between having an intimate relationship and a sense of the free, autonomous self, the conflict they described is an extremely common one that many Americans encounter in their intimate lives. In *Talk of Love*, Ann Swidler (2001:167) stated that, as the autonomous self operates as the dominant cultural code in the US, many Americans believe that "dependence is a sign of personal inadequacy," and loving someone "should not be a matter of sacrifice or obligation." She noted that it is a cultural phenomenon for individuals to be afraid of not being able to act autonomously and being dependent in their intimate relationships. In a similar fashion, in *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation* (2012), Eva Illouz maintained that, with the dilemma between being a self-interested, free actor and wanting to be connected with and recognized by an intimate other, love has evolved into a social pain that contemporary

individuals are bound to suffer. As a further elaboration, in her recent study, Illouz (2020) claimed that, with the growing emphasis on individual freedom in romantic relationships, individuals increasingly choose to withdraw themselves from developing serious romantic relationships, which she calls the practice of non-choice.

Therefore, I argue that, since the conflict between intimate connections and being a free, autonomous individual is common among Americans due to the dominant cultural ethos of liberal individualism, polyamory exists as a particular form of intimate practice by which individuals can handle that conflict. In other words, some individuals, instead of juggling between being in a monogamous intimate relationship and living freely and autonomously, seek to secure their freedom and autonomy by choosing to practice polyamory.

Then, my question here is *who* are the individuals that are able to choose the non-normative practice of polyamory for the sake of their freedom and autonomy? This is an essential question because, as I discussed in Chapter 1, one's capability to be a free, autonomous individual is inextricable from one's particular racial, classed, and gendered positionalities. Illouz (2012), for instance, claimed that when many individuals in heterosexual monogamous relationships confront the dilemma between being a free, autonomous actor and being intimate with another, gender influences the different struggles they will face. While men often struggle with commitment phobia and worry about losing their freedom, women, who are in charge of childbirth and child-rearing, are more likely to suffer from their partner's unwillingness to make a commitment. When it comes to polyamory, one's racial positionality also tends to play a critical role in creating different possibilities for the choice of polyamory. Some individuals utilize polyamory as a means of exercising freedom and autonomy in their intimate life, but it is more likely that they are white middle-class individuals who are capable of handling the financial or social risks that might arise from their choice of a non-normative intimate practice. Who can afford to practice polyamory without worrying about the financial risks, such as losing a job, that they might encounter because of their non-normative intimate lifestyle? Who can choose polyamory without being burdened with fitting in with their social groups or being rejected by their ethnic communities? As many people of color in the US are already financially

underprivileged and suffer from a lack of social belonging due to their marginalized racial identity, polyamory appears to be a less affordable or unappealing option for them. To be clear, I do not mean that people of color cannot or do not choose polyamory. Yet, it is apparent that people of color, compared to white people, have more obstacles and limitations to choosing polyamory as an intimate practice. And what I observed in my fieldwork—the predominant whiteness of Southern Californian polyamory communities—effectively evinces the racially different possibilities of choosing polyamory.

How to Own a Polyamorous Life

Having shown how Southern Californian polyamorists narrate the values of freedom and autonomy as the essence of their choice of polyamory, I will now explore how individuals practice polyamory in ways that form them into free, autonomous individuals. As part of the process of self-formation as moral subjects, Foucault (1990b, 28) stated that elaboration (or ethical work) is the practice through which individuals carry out their relationship to the self. That is to say, individuals, in the particular form of relationship that they develop with the self, transform themselves into moral subjects through self-reflection, self-examination, and self-knowledge. By identifying the practice of polyamory as what Foucault called elaboration, this section examines how individuals recognize, examine, and improve themselves in the process of developing and maintaining their polyamorous relationships and how they employ psychotherapeutic knowledge and techniques during that process.

In this section, my analysis centers on three different aspects of the practice of polyamory: creating informed consent, processing and communicating, and committing to a relationship. In the first part, I showcase how polyamorists initiate intimate relationships by creating informed consent with their partners and how the practice of creating informed consent enables them to recognize themselves and act as free, autonomous individuals in their intimate relationships. In the second part, I focus on how individuals cope with various conflicts and issues in their polyamorous relationships through exercising what they call "processing". Processing signifies a practice of reflecting on, analyzing, and regulating emotions based

upon psychotherapeutic techniques, making it a crucial tool for polyamorists to establish themselves as free, autonomous beings distinct from their intimate partners as well as from society. In the last part, I address how polyamorists make commitments in their intimate relationships by sharing their vulnerabilities with their partners. Sharing vulnerabilities, which is an important part of polyamorous relationships, appears to signify to polyamorists the practice of taking responsibility for oneself. Altogether, I argue that the practice of polyamory serves as a constant process through which individuals, in their relationships to their intimate partners as well as to the self, constitute and govern themselves as free, autonomous individuals.

Creating Informed Consent

A married couple, Ella and George have been in a polyamorous relationship for almost 50 years, ever since they started dating each other. Without having the word polyamory, they used to always call their relationship "ethically and enthusiastically non-monogamous." According to them, the phrase "ethically and enthusiastically" indicated the basic principle of their relationship. While "ethically" meant that their relationship should be based on mutual consent, "enthusiastically" suggested how their consent should be processed; their consent has to be obtained by an "enthusiastic yes" rather than a "maybe". That is, by describing their relationship as "ethically and enthusiastically non-monogamous," Ella and George have agreed that clear mutual consent, of not only themselves but of all their partners, is the fundamental baseline of their polyamorous relationship.

As Ella and George illustrated, creating consent is one of the most essential aspects of the practice of polyamory. Believing that consent is the basic condition of polyamory, polyamorists tend to strongly condemn having non-monogamous relationships without mutual consent; if someone is being non-monogamous without their partners' consent, it is not polyamory, but cheating or adultery. In order to practice polyamory, many polyamorists insist that one should tell their partner honestly that they are polyamorous and obtain their partner's consent to polyamory, especially in a monogamous society where everyone is assumed to be monogamous:

> You know because we live in a society that assumes that you are monogamous. That's like the base. That is the default. And so, it is assumed that you are monogamous unless stated otherwise. So, it's very important that you express that you're polyamorous so whoever you're getting involved with understands what you come with. What I come with is a couple other partners who will probably love and adore you just about as much as I do. … I pretty much don't get involved with anybody or even date anybody unless they already know I'm polyamorous. I just don't want to have those hard conversations. I don't want to disappoint anybody. I don't want to waste either of our times. Like trying to develop a connection and then realizing it's just not compatible. Like there's a basic incompatibility. Same thing with being trans. *I just say right away who I am. I don't want to bother with anyone who's going to like hurt my feelings by being shitty and not understanding.*[26] (Emphasis Added)

Practicing polyamory for about five years, Gigi mentioned in our interview that she does not get intimately involved with anyone without letting them know she is polyamorous. The reason Gigi is straightforward about being polyamorous is, as she explained, because she does not want to invest her emotions and time in a person who will not accept her lifestyle. We can understand that it is economical and effective for Gigi to make sure that a person is compatible with her before they start dating. However, I indicate that telling people she is a polyamorist is also important *self-expression* for Gigi. As she stated, polyamory, like being transgender, is a part of who she is, and she wants to express herself honestly with her potential partners. Consent for polyamory, in this sense, essentially begins with one's clear self-expression of who they are, what kind of relationship they want to build, and what boundaries and limits they have in their intimate relationships.

Here, I point out that, when polyamorists create consent in their relationships, consent does not simply mean approval of non-monogamy itself, but an agreement with the kind of relationship the partners would like to build together. In fact, many polyamorists, by sharing basic information about themselves, tend to communicate about what their potential partners can or cannot expect from them; based on that, they and their partners can determine whether they are compatible or not and then decide to develop a relationship. The information that polyamorists usually share includes: the number of current partners they have, the type of polyamorous relationship they practice (e.g., non/hierarchical polyamory, solo polyamory, or don't ask don't tell), their expected relationship with a metamour, and STI and other sexual boundaries.

[26] Gigi, interview by author, San Diego, October 9, 2018.

While this is basic-level information, the amount and types of information vary depending on individuals. For instance, Jodie, who is a married woman in her forties living alone and who currently identifies herself as a relationship anarchist, has a detailed list of information that she tells her dates:

> I let them know I'm married. I let them know about my history with non-monogamy, and I talk about what relationship anarchy means to me. Up until this brand-new relationship that I'm fostering right now, you know, I was pretty strict about not seeing anyone too often. Because it fosters an expectation of seeing people about at that pace, and because [of] my freedom or my desire to have the kind of freedom that allows me to just connect with anybody at anytime and anywhere. That [freedom] sort of takes a lot of space. It requires a lot of space and a lot of aloneness. So, I never wanted anyone to have that wrong expectation in a relationship. So, if [there is] somebody that I see more than once, I do tend to let them know that they shouldn't expect to see me probably more than twice a month. It could happen [that] we see each other more often. But their expectation shouldn't be that. There's also plenty of contact like over messaging and stuff. I'm freely responsive over messaging but [no] actual date[s]. With my lifestyle, generally, it's about twice a month with any one partner except for the new one.[27]

In this respect, what really characterizes a polyamorous relationship, I argue, is *informed consent*. While it is a term mainly used in medical or legal contexts, informed consent indicates a process in which individuals can make an autonomous choice about a certain action. Consisting of five elements—disclosure, comprehension, voluntariness, competence, and consent/decision—informed consent is undertaken through a specific process (Faden and Beauchamp 1986, 274-276): first, all parties that are involved in an action disclose any necessary information related to that action and have full understanding about the given information. Then, they make a decision about the action without any coercion or manipulation. It is also important in this process to make sure that all the parties are competent to perform the action. Considering this process, I indicate that many polyamorists, like Jodie, tend to give their potential partner(s) the information that is necessary for them to make a decision. And when their potential partner(s) and themselves agree with the terms and conditions of the relationship, they decide to develop a relationship. While it sounds formal or outlandish in the context of intimate relationships, in her interview, Chloe told me that this process is more or less common among polyamorists:

> Usually, if I know I'm going to meet someone, and we're chatting, I have them [my rules] already typed out, as funny as it sounds. So, I can just copy and paste my rules, and then I'll just send them. Like this is the rule of my relationship[s], and these are my boundaries.

[27] Jodie, interview with author, Orange County, December 6, 2018.

> And what are yours? So, I can respect those as well. I usually send them off. Some people don't like my rules. Okay, that's fine. And some people are 100% for the boundaries. Okay. Great, that works for me. Okay. Well, what are yours? And then, I'll tell you if I can live by those. You know. … [for example, when they said] we're [doing] don't ask don't tell, [I'd say] sorry. Bye. See you later. (I: So, you're very upfront about your rules and boundaries?) Yes. That's pretty common actually in the ethically non-monogamous community and polyamorous community. Rules and boundaries are a very solid foundation for a lot of us. So, for us to be able to be like this, here's [my] rule and here's my boundaries. What are yours? That's how we match with people. More via our boundaries and safety nets versus anything else, really. Can you be okay with this? And of course, you know that there has to be attraction and all that. That's given. But the rules have to match and the boundaries have to be in line with one another, or at least be able to be respected.[28]

Not every polyamorist is like Jodie, who has prepared detailed information about herself to share with her potential partners, or like Chloe, who has a standard routine for going over her boundaries and rules with her dates. There are, in fact, also polyamorists who are less strict or more casual about the process of creating consent with their partners. Nevertheless, the prevalent and fundamental understanding among polyamorists in Southern California, as I found from interviews and observations of polyamory community meetings, is that a polyamorous relationship should be based on an informed decision and mutual agreement. And certainly, many polyamorists do gain informed consent from their partners in their own way before developing serious polyamorous relationships with them.

How then can we understand polyamorists' practice of creating informed consent with regard to their management of the self? My argument is that creating informed consent is essentially the process through which polyamorists affirm their being as an autonomous, free-willed individual. In *A History and Theory of Informed Consent*, Ruth Faden and Tom Beauchamp stated that the very justificatory basis of informed consent is a principle of respect for autonomy: "[a] person should be free to choose and act without controlling constraints imposed by others" (1986, 8). As they pointed out, informed consent presumes autonomous individuals who have the right to make autonomous decisions. With that said, I illustrate that, through the whole course of exchanging informed consent with their intimate partner(s), what polyamorists fundamentally experience is *a sense of the autonomous, free-willed self*. By expressing themselves,

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[28] Chloe, interview by author, San Diego, October 24, 2018.

clarifying their own limits and boundaries, and obtaining their partners' agreement with those boundaries, polyamorists tend to actively construct a self that is free and independent from their intimate partners. And, through this process, they are required to acknowledge their partners' freedom and autonomy as well.

In regard to polyamorists' management of the self, another important point in creating informed consent, I point out, is *the emphasis on self-awareness.* This is, in fact, what we have already seen as one of the main American polyamory credos, "know yourself." As I have discussed in the previous chapter, many polyamory texts claim that individuals, in order to practice polyamory, should have a good understanding of the self. They indicate that individuals, without knowing what they want from an intimate relationship, cannot help but comply with the social norm of monogamy. We can understand that this logic works the same in how polyamorists exercise their autonomy from their intimate partners. The only way that polyamorists can maintain a sense of the autonomous, free self in distinction from their intimate partners is that they are well aware of who they are—their boundaries, expectations, and limits for intimate relationships—and clearly express that awareness through creating informed consent. As such, when creating informed consent is the practice of constituting and realizing the autonomous, free-willed self within an intimate relationship, what underlies this practice is self-awareness.

Processing & Communicating

Eddie is a heterosexual, cisgender man who has been practicing polyamory for about ten years. While he now considers himself an experienced polyamorist, Eddie mentioned that there was initially a process of trial and error through which he learned how to manage polyamorous relationships. He particularly pointed to his "first real polyamorous relationship" with S. While it was his first experience of watching his partner getting intimate with another person, he illustrated that he was poor at handling his emotions. Though he felt jealous, he did not admit his feelings and stayed in denial. However, as he tried to hide his jealousy, he came to feel resentful of S; and he got defensive about himself in his communication with S. Eventually, Eddie became unable to talk with S, believing that she was his "crazy-maker." While

his relationship with S ended badly, Eddie stated that he learned an important lesson from that relationship—*the importance of processing*:

> Just deciding [to be] poly doesn't make you good at it. You know how much you have to process your feelings, right? *Processing, processing, processing*. And, talk about everything all the time. Just talking doesn't also make things okay. *It's a process through which you get better at talking and better at knowing yourself, you know, [and] better at admitting, identifying your feelings and your thoughts and talking about them candidly*.[29] (Emphasis Added)

To be honest, it does not appear to be easy to handle a polyamorous relationship. As I have observed polyamorists' lives, they not only have to contradict their internalized normative value of monogamy, but they also need to deal with various relationship situations in which multiple people are involved. Given these difficulties, many polyamorists in Southern California, as shown in Eddie's comments, claim that processing is how they deal with complex emotional issues in their relationships. As one of the most-discussed topics in polyamory community meetings, processing appears to be polyamorists' essential task for managing their intimate relationships successfully. Next, I describe what processing is and how it helps an individual have a successful polyamorous life. I then discuss what role processing plays in polyamorists' management of the self with a focus particularly on how American therapeutic culture inhere polyamorists' practice of processing.

Simply put, what polyamorists call processing is a particular therapeutic procedure that they follow in dealing with their emotions, especially negative emotions such as sadness, anger, anxiety, and jealousy. Considering processing as a healthy, productive way of managing one's feelings, polyamorists tend to distinguish it from repressing emotions or reacting to emotions. While the specific manner or steps of practicing processing may differ by individual, processing is commonly carried out in the following way: individuals look at their emotional state from a distance, investigate what triggered their emotion(s), and comprehend the root causes of their emotion. And through this course, individuals are ultimately expected to break down their negative emotions. In her interview, Gigi detailed how she normally processes her feelings of jealousy:

[29] Eddie, interview by author, San Diego, October 12, 2018.

> First, I'm feeling like, “Oh, I feel kind of sad right now.” This [feeling] is coming out of nowhere. I was just talking to my partner and their partner, and we were having a nice time, and I'm feeling kind of sad now. I'm also feeling like I’m not engaging [in] the conversation anymore. So, I'm feeling distant from this conversation. Why am I feeling sad? What just happened right now in this conversation that made me feel sad and distant? What made me go off in my head and start thinking about other things instead of being present and engaged? Well, we were just talking about this in a relationship. Umm. Maybe it was a certain word that my partner used, and I didn't know that they [my partner] used that word to describe themselves in [the] relationship to their other partner. And then, I guess that that makes me feel sad and distant because I thought that was a word that they [my partner] only used to describe our relationship. And it's like, is it really important that word only gets used [for our relationship]? So, okay. All of that together, I guess that would be called jealousy because I want something that my partner has with somebody else. Okay. So, if that's jealousy, what does that mean? What do I need to do with that? And I thought like, “I'm jealous about this thing, this word that my partner use[d] to describe their relationship with someone else. Is it important [that] that word is only used for our relationship? No. Does that take away from my relationship with them if they use that word for another partner? No.” … So, there's nothing to be really jealous about. So, I can let that go. And I didn't tell her about it right away until later. And [later] I was like, well actually, I did feel jealous this one time. And it was because of this, and she was like, “Oh, okay. Thank you for telling me.”[30]

In the course of processing her feelings, Gigi identified her emotion as jealousy, examined why she felt jealous, and understood that there was no significant underlying issue causing her jealousy. After releasing her jealousy effectively, she communicated about her jealousy with her partner and gained comfort and reassurance from her partner. Gigi, in this sense, claims that it is processing through which she can take responsibility for her feelings of jealousy without making it her partners’ burden. As Gigi mentioned, she has developed the capacity to process her emotions through constant practice, and it has become “a really valuable tool” for her to self-regulate her emotions within her intimate relationships.

While Gigi has demonstrated how polyamorists conduct processing, I will show that processing is not always as easy or straightforward as in Gigi’s example. Processing can require a significant amount of time and effort when polyamorists face complicated or multilayered emotions. It also tends to take a long time when emotions are connected to deep inner issues. Here, I showcase how Bella and her partner, D, have had a long course of processing to manage their underlying insecurities.

[30] Gigi, interview by author, San Diego, October 9, 2018.

Bella is a married polyamorous woman. While she has three polyamorous partners, including her husband, her primary sexual partner is D, with whom she has been together for a year. Though she feels completely secure with her husband, Bella said that she struggles with a sense of insecurity in her relationship with D. Her fear was that he might find a better sexual partner, thereby pushing her away or abandoning her altogether. Initially, Bella could not pinpoint what she was feeling exactly. It took the very slow and painful work of processing to reach such an understanding. Feeling scared, she first closed herself off from talking with D. She did not want to give him the wrong impression that she was trying to control him. But unfortunately, D started to feel confined in their relationship when Bella could not process her feelings. As both Bella and D could not communicate about what they were feeling, their relationship faced a serious crisis. According to Bella, after a huge fight that almost led to a breakup, they finally started to process their emotions. It appears that while she struggled with jealousy and fear of being abandoned, he also suffered from a fear of being controlled, which he developed from his previous experiences of manipulative monogamous relationships.

Although Bella and D have not yet overcome their fears, both of them no longer avoid their issues. And importantly, they can now communicate about their emotions by processing them. As Bella described, D could not even recognize what was bothering him in the past, so he could not tell her anything. Nowadays, whenever her comments or actions trigger him, he talks to her, saying, for example, "Look, try not to take it personal. It's not directed to you. I know you don't mean it in that way, but that's what I'm used to hearing [from my past girlfriends and my family]." When he feels like he is being controlled, D deals with the feeling responsibly without blaming Bella for his feelings and communicates with her. As such, Bella's situation shows that, through a long course of processing, they have faced their own fears, understood where their fears come from, and are now trying to take responsibility of those issues by fixing them *on their own*.

Meanwhile, what I found interesting in Bella's case is that she described their whole course of processing as their endeavor to fight their own "past demons." She believed that all of her and D's insecurities and fears came from their past relationships, which is how they learned to relate with other

people. Hence, processing, for Bella, is a therapeutic technique to cope with the past experiences that inform current emotional responses to particular situations:

> That's how we have learned [fears and insecurities]. You don't know what to [be] fearful of if you haven't experienced it. If you've never seen a spider in your life, how do you know [to be] scared of it? Well, I mean, if the thing jumps at you and bites you, that's the first experience with it, so that's going to be stuck in your head. Or if you see your friend, if we both see a spider for the first time and you freak out because you have experience with [a] spider, I'm going to freak out because that's your reaction, and I don't know [anything else but] that. So that's [what] we learn from. That's how we learn our conditioned responses.[31]

With respect to Bella's explanation, I indicate that it is indeed a prevalent belief among polyamorists in Southern California that an individual's past experiences lie at the heart of their current emotional struggles. During interviews with me, many polyamorists illustrated how they have searched out the root causes of their insecurities and fears from their past experiences, including a dysfunctional relationship with their parents in their childhood, an experience of surviving rape, and a family members' traumatic death. Polyamorous married woman Zoey, for instance, mentioned that her troubling childhood experiences with her alcoholic father are deeply rooted in the way in which she reacts to her relationship issues with her new polyamorous partner. According to Zoey, she was able to set her old experience aside in her relationship with her husband, who she has been with since she was 16. But after starting to practice polyamory and having a new intimate partner, she cannot help but reopen her old wounds from her parents because she has found out that they still affect the way that she withdraws herself from emotional situations. By processing her emotional reactions, Zoey is hence currently trying to address her deep inner problems, which she has long buried inside:

> You know, I went through a lot of bad things in childhood with my parents. And it's like I put that in the box. And you know, I was happy and [did] my life, but that's still sitting out here in the box. So, when those overwhelming emotions happen, I don't deal with them very well. … Now, the box is open, and I'm having issues with that right now. I'm actually going to go back to counseling because it's affecting [me].[32]

Why did Eddie exclaim the importance of "processing, processing, processing" for his polyamorous relationships? Why is processing so necessary to polyamorists and their successful

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[31] Bella, interview by author, San Diego, January 20, 2019.
[32] Zoey, interview by author, San Diego, October 18, 2018.

polyamorous lives? I illustrate that processing, as a method to handle one's own emotions, is essentially an exercise in self-awareness. It is a self-activity through which individuals objectify and analyze their own emotions, gain self-knowledge of what lies behind their emotional reactions, and transform themselves by using that knowledge. My argument is thus that processing plays a critical role in the way that polyamorists govern themselves in accordance with the ideal of being an autonomous, free-willed individual.

I above all point out that through processing, polyamorists exercise emotional autonomy from their intimate partners. Processing, in other words, is how polyamorists self-regulate and take responsibility for their own emotions without depending on or controlling their intimate partners. For instance, as shown in Gigi's practice of processing, polyamorists, while feeling jealous, look inside—examining where their jealousy comes from and what the root causes of their jealousy are. Instead of considering their partners as the source of their jealousy, polyamorists connect their feeling of jealousy with their own inner issues and cope with their jealousy by addressing those issues. In such a manner, processing is the practice by which polyamorists govern themselves as emotionally autonomous beings in their relationships with their intimate partners.

However, I indicate that processing does not simply mean polyamorists' exercise of emotional autonomy from their intimate partners. More fundamentally, processing serves as a self-activity through which polyamorists manage themselves as autonomous, free-willed beings in their relationship to the self. As discussed in Bella and Zoey's cases, polyamorists, through the course of processing, aim to deconstruct the past experiences that have informed their emotional reactions. The ultimate goal of processing that polyamorists seek to achieve is not just self-control over their emotions but a change in their emotional reactions to current situations by dealing with their past experiences. That is, by virtue of processing, polyamorists try to liberate themselves from their own past, while avoiding allowing their past relationships or events to determine their current actions or choices. Therefore, it is processing through which polyamorists construct themselves as autonomous, free beings in their relationship to the self.

Lastly, while processing operates as a self-activity to govern oneself, I demonstrate that what is deeply embedded in polyamorists' practice of processing is a particular understanding of the self that is

derived from *American therapeutic culture*. Many sociologists have indicated that, since Freud's psychoanalytic ideas proliferated among American intellectuals and the middle-class in the mid twentieth-century, a "therapeutic culture" has grown in American society (Berger 1965; Ross 2012; Nolan 1998; Illouz 2007, 2008). In *Saving the Modern Soul* (2008), Eva Illouz specifically defined therapeutic culture as "a body of the cultural codes and practices in which the psychoanalytic perspective—which includes aspects of psychiatry, psychotherapy and psychology to a broader extent—appears and plays a role" (2008, 15). With the rise of therapeutic culture, Illouz (2008, 50) maintained that the Freudian psychoanalytic approach, which promotes the idea of "introspection, a focus of feeling and a search for a lost or true self," functions as a privileged perspective to fundamentally reformulate the way in which Americans envisions their relationship to the self. That is, through the psychoanalytic perspective, American individuals have started to perceive the self as a mysterious yet glamorous object which they need to discover and fashion with a calculative, methodical attitude (Illouz 2007, 8; Peter 1965, 40).

In light of this, I have illustrated that it is the psychoanalytic perspective that lays the foundation of polyamorists' practice of processing. As a practice by which individuals perceive their emotions as objects detachable from themselves, analyze them objectively, and ultimately fix the inner issues of the self, processing is fundamentally a psychoanalytic technique for managing the self. And polyamorists, by utilizing that technique, can not only exercise autonomy from their intimate partners but also can cope with the inner self, while liberating it from its own past. In a nutshell, I assert that, when processing operates as a vital part of practicing polyamory, what essentially constitutes the practice of polyamory is the psychoanalytic perspective on and management of the self.

Committing to a Relationship

Along with creating informed consent and processing and communicating, the last aspect of practicing polyamory, which I address in this section, is committing to a relationship. As many polyamorists distinguish their relationships from dating around, open relationships, and swinging by the emotional commitment that they make to their partners, making a commitment is one of the most crucial components

of polyamory. Here, I detail how polyamorists commit to their polyamorous relationships and further discuss what commitment signifies to polyamorists' management of the self.

Commitment in a polyamorous relationship looks markedly different from commitment in a monogamous relationship. In her analysis of the contemporary experience of love, Illouz (2012) claimed that with the new architecture of romantic choice, which is characterized by excessive choices and the maximization of freedom, individuals—especially men—tend to be reluctant to commit to a relationship because they worry about the opportunity cost of their choice. As Illouz illustrated, committing to a monogamous relationship means that two people promise to be the one and only special person to each other by not loving anyone else. In contrast, committing to a polyamorous relationship does not require exclusivity between partners. Though they are in a committed relationship, polyamorists are, in fact, expected to meet new people and find love. For instance, Ella and George, who have been in a polyamorous marital relationship for almost 50 years, told me that they routinely check whether they are still happy with being each other's primary, live-in partner. Admitting that their meaning to each other can change as a result of their relationships with their other intimate partners, they have regular check-ins to discuss where their relationship stands. This means that Ella and George, though in a committed relationship, are actively aware that they are not each other's one and only love and that their relationship can always change. Commitment in a polyamorous relationship, in this sense, does not rely on the belief of unchanging, permanent one and only love. How then do polyamorists commit to a relationship while also embracing the changing, impermanent nature of their intimate relationships?

I point out that central to the way in which polyamorists make a commitment is a *vulnerability*—being vulnerable in their intimate relationships. While the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines vulnerability as "the quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally," what polyamorists commonly mean by vulnerability is revealing their honest thoughts, feelings, and desires to their intimate partners. That is, many polyamorists state that they build and confirm intimate commitment by sharing vulnerable parts of themselves with their partners:

In their interview, Andy recounted how they and their partner became closer as they shared being vulnerable with each other for the first time. As Andy illustrated, we all perform ourselves in our everyday lives, be it the performance of success, bravery, or whatever one wants to project to the world. While what we perform is not completely untruthful, it is "not the whole truth" either. According to Andy, vulnerability, in this sense, is an act of showing another person that what you perform every day is not the wholeness of yourself; and it depends on "how much you're able to let go of your armor" in front of that person that creates intimacy. While having yourself be seen fully by another person can cause fear, Andy claims that it is an important experience that comes up in an intimate relationship.

Indeed, many polyamorists emphasize that sharing vulnerability is necessary for their intimate relationships. Admitting that exposing delicate, fragile parts of the self to another person is risky, polyamorists tend to believe that being vulnerable is an essential practice for opening their hearts to their intimate partners and letting them into their lives. For example, Laura, a white bisexual polyamorous woman, explained how vulnerability leads to "increasing emotional intimacy" and "increasing commitment":

> The ability to talk it [jealousy] out, and put things out on the table, and put your vulnerability out there, saying where you're vulnerable. To say [that] I'm jealous and this is bothering me, and that you don't have to fix it. That's a huge vulnerability. Why don't I just keep that to myself? Why do I bother sharing it at all? I share it so that my partner can appreciate … the struggles that I'm going through. … You're not going to get growth of [the] relationship without vulnerability exchange. Both people have to put their vulnerability on the table. (Author: Why is that?) *What we're looking for is ultimately people in the world that are closer to us than anybody else. And they're not going to be closer to us if we don't let them in. And the last thing that you know, the things that we don't share with the whole rest of the world we share with those [who we are] emotionally intimate with. Our vulnerabilities.* Some people never show their vulnerability to anyone. They go to [their] death bed without revealing vulnerabilities. But if you, I think, [are in] your relationship with somebody, you have to put yourself on the chopping block, and they have to do [the same]. And that, one way to encourage your partner to put themselves on the block is you get up as well. Then, you've created a safe space to allow them to do [so] as well.[33] (Emphasis Added)

[33] Laura, interview by author, San Diego, January 12, 2019.

As Laura noted, committing to a polyamorous relationship means that one promises to become a safe space where their partner can reveal the vulnerabilities that they do not want to show other people. Individuals have different vulnerabilities; some might consider their honest feelings that come up in an intimate relationship (e.g., shame, anxiety, and jealousy) as vulnerabilities, whereas others might think their vulnerabilities are particular life experiences or issues. However, what's important is that polyamorists, no matter what their vulnerabilities are, tend to connect their vulnerabilities to the truth of the self; their vulnerabilities signify their true self. As such, I demonstrate that a committed polyamorous relationship is one in which individuals can express and share their true selves without worrying about being judged or rejected.

Meanwhile, I point out that it is crucial to understand that just because polyamorists share their vulnerabilities with their partners does not mean that they are asking their partners to look after or fix them. While expecting their intimate partners to become their safe space for showing their vulnerabilities, polyamorists highlight that it is not their partners but themselves who are responsible for dealing with their vulnerabilities: their emotions and life issues. The value of sharing vulnerability in a committed relationship, as polyamorists mention, lies in the experience of having oneself be seen fully by another person for *oneself*. Here, I elucidate what this seeing and recognition means through Jodie's interesting anecdote about how she managed her vulnerabilities in her intimate relationships.

On the day of our last interview, Jodie looked more joyful than usual. Jodie told me that it was an especially happy day for her because, just that morning, one of her partners said that he loved her. It was exactly after nine months she first told him she loved him. She then described how she decided to tell him her feelings although she knew that he was not on the same page with her emotionally:

> I needed him to know that I was in love with him because, when I was spending time with him, I was behaving a little differently than normal. Because I was like there's a part of me that was lurching forward wanting to say I love you, and then I would stop myself. And there was a moment of awkwardness. So, I'm projecting this weird energy to him. … So, I knew he was going to be worried that there was something wrong between us. And the opposite was true. But I was also fearful that if I told him that I loved him, that would freak him out. It was going to be too much. The imbalance of our feelings was going to be too

> much, and he would leave the relationship because of it. So, I was scared for a little while to be honest, to be honest with him.[34]

Thinking that the emotional imbalance between them might make him leave the relationship, Jodie was scared to share her feelings with him. She nevertheless put herself forward since she needed to be honest with him. However, what's interesting in her account is that Jodie did not expect anything from him by telling him she loved him. She did not expect him to change his behavior because, she argued, he was not responsible for her feelings:

> You know he didn't ask for [my] falling in love with him, right? And so, I think it's not fair that when feelings change[d] that we then changed the expectation of [the] relationship. I don't think that's fair. So, we just had to make it through that little spot. Yes. I'm in love with you. I need you to know [my feelings] so that we don't have those awkward moments that you don't know what's going on with me. But I don't need anything else.[35]

Just as she hoped, her partner did not change any of his behaviors after she expressed love for him. And thankfully, he did not break up with her either. In fact, he did exactly what Jodie wanted for him to do: he carefully listened to her feelings and appreciated her being honest with him. In this way, as an autonomous, free-willed individual, Jodie shared her feelings—her vulnerabilities—with her partner and also took care of it by herself. They were her vulnerabilities, and they were also *her own responsibility to deal with*.

By building a committed relationship, polyamorists create their own secure space to show their vulnerable selves. Yet, many polyamorists mention that sharing vulnerabilities is never risk-free, even in a committed relationship; as they expose their vulnerabilities, there is always a possibility that they might get judged or rejected. Despite the risk of abandonment, polyamorists insist that individuals should share their vulnerabilities with their intimate partners. But why? Why do polyamorists put so much value on sharing vulnerabilities with their intimate partners? I claim that sharing vulnerabilities is not only the key to commitment in a relationship with others but also *the essential practice by which individuals constitute and govern themselves in their relationship to the self*:

[34] Jodie, interview with author, Orange County, December 6, 2018.
[35] Jodie, interview with author, Orange County, December 6, 2018.

> When you get to the stage, finally being honest with yourself, then you have to be brave enough to share that with someone else. And again, this is all the fears of judgment, and rejection, and abandonment. So, if you're honest with them, will they reject us? It's always about, again, it's about connection and belonging. … What's important [about vulnerabilities] is to the self. Right? Because you're not abandoning yourself. You're being compassionate. It's this delicate little thing, but you're not ignoring it anymore. You're acknowledging this delicate thing, and then you're offering it to someone else, saying please don't break this. Please be gentle with this. What a brave thing to do! That's vulnerability to me.[36]

As shown above, Jodie remarked that sharing vulnerabilities means being honest, not just with others but with herself. For her, vulnerability means not abandoning the fragile, delicate parts of herself and being compassionate with herself. That is, sharing vulnerabilities with a partner is fundamentally a self-activity through which individuals face the vulnerable parts about themselves, accept them, and own the truth of the self by revealing them. Andy, similar to Jodie, mentioned that sharing vulnerabilities is a critical experience they have had that enables them to understand their vulnerable, true self: "when you're with someone who sees you, then you see yourself in their eyes." Laura, in this respect, claimed that sharing vulnerabilities is a "hugely liberating" experience for her because it is an experience of being who she truly is without hiding parts of herself or pretending to be something that she is not. On account of this, I assert that polyamorists' sharing their vulnerabilities is, after all, the practice of constituting and governing the self—the practice by which they define and manage the self.

I have mentioned earlier that commitment cannot look the same in monogamy, which assumes that there is a one and only love, and in polyamory, which opens up the possibility of finding new loves. So then, does making a commitment have completely different meanings in a monogamous relationship and a polyamorous relationship? My answer is yes and no. On the one hand, while polyamorists expect their committed relationships to be a space where they can share the truth about the self and have it appreciated, I point out that this is more or less the common expectation of most Americans for intimate relationships. Illouz (2012) demonstrated that in our contemporary individualist, capitalist society, an intimate relationship operates as the arena in which individuals compete for recognition of the self. When "social

[36] Jodie, interview with author, Orange County, December 6, 2018.

worth is no longer a straightforward outcome of one's economic or social status, but has to be derived from one's self, defined as a unique, private, personal, and non-institutional entity," it is love that "provides a strong anchor for recognition, the perception and constitution of one's worth" (Illouz 2012, 120). Following that, I claim that polyamorists, like people in monogamous relationships, also perceive their intimate relationships as a critical site in which they can form and recognize the self. Polyamorists likewise experience their intimate relationships as "an ongoing, indeterminate process" of "the reconfirmation of one's own individuality and value" (Illouz 2012, 119).

On the other hand, I contend that the way in which polyamorists seek to confirm the worth of the self through their intimate relationships shows a significant difference from people in monogamous relationships. According to Illouz (2012), individuals, while facing ontological insecurity, seek to find their one and only love who can provide confirmation of their individuality and value. The worth of the self is, in this sense, contingent upon the one and only intimate partner's validation. When individuals do not earn appropriate recognition or get rejected by their partners, their sense of the worth of the self cannot help but crumble, regardless of their economic or professional achievements. I however illustrate that, for their sense of the worth of the self, polyamorists try not to rely on their partners' validation—how their partners approve of their individuality and value it. Instead, their emphasis is on how they themselves, through connecting with intimate others, recognize and express their own individuality and value. That is, to constitute and govern the autonomous, free-willed self, polyamorists tend to believe that confirming the worth of the self is not their partners' but their own responsibility, as can be seen in Jodie's explanation. To be clear, this does not mean that polyamorists do not value their intimate partners' recognition or that they do not need others at all for recognition of the self. As I have argued, an intimate relationship is undeniably critical to polyamorists as the main site where they can reveal the self and have it fully seen by others. Yet, what lies at the core of how polyamorists confirm the worth of the self, I claim, is not their relationship with their partners but *their relationship with the self*—how they perceive and constitute the value of themselves in their relationship to the self. In short, in polyamorous relationships each individual

is supposed to take full responsibility not only for their own thoughts, desires, and feelings but also for their own well-being, the worth of their own selves.

A Journey to an Authentic Self

One of the pioneering American polyamorists, Deborah Anapol, wrote an article "What is Polyamory really about?" in the online magazine *Psychology Today*. In the article, she noted that polyamory is a philosophy of loving that follows the question of "What is the most loving and authentic way I can be present with these people and with myself at this time?"[37] Here, her definition of polyamory resonates with the views of many Southern Californian polyamorists. During my fieldwork in Southern California, I observed that in polyamory discussion meetings, polyamorists often referred to the value of authenticity to explain their polyamorous lives. Polyamorists also emphasized the authentic self in one-on-one interviews. In short, believing that polyamory helps one's actualization of the authentic self, many polyamorists appear to seek to achieve their authentic self through polyamory. What do polyamorists mean by the authentic self? And how and why do they think polyamory helps them actualize the authentic self?

In the previous section, I analyzed Southern Californian polyamorists' experience of polyamory through Foucault's notion of elaboration. I illustrated that as the practice of having multiple intimate relationships, polyamory serves as a constant process through which individuals, in their relationship with their partners as well as the self, constitute and govern themselves according to the principle of autonomy and freedom. In this section, I will address polyamorists' pursuit of the authentic self through polyamory. To that end, I return to Foucault's illustration of subjectivation. Foucault (1990b, 28) stated that, in the process through which individuals form themselves as moral subjects, there is a telos, which is "a mode of being characteristic of the ethical subject." Individuals, establishing themselves as ethical subjects, conduct their actions in conformity with a moral rule. And through those actions, individuals commit themselves

[37] Anapol, Deborah. "What is Polyamory really about?" *Psychology Today*, May 7, 2010, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/love-without-limits/201005/what-is-polyamory-really-all-about

not just to the moral rule but, more importantly, to "a mode of being characteristic of the ethical subject," the telos of the ethical subject. On account of this, this section focuses on the authentic self as a mode of being that polyamorists commit to by practicing polyamory. Specifically, in what follows, I analyze how individuals search for and attain the authentic self via practicing polyamory and how the norm of whiteness is embedded in polyamorists' pursuit of the authentic self. Ultimately, my claim in this section is that, while Southern Californian polyamorists practice polyamory as a means of discovering and actualizing the authentic self—the true essence of the self that is untethered from social influences and others' control—by using psychotherapeutic knowledge, individuals' experiences of polyamory are nevertheless inextricable from their racial positionality.

Despite the fact that many Southern Californian polyamorists refer to authenticity as a virtue of their polyamorous lives, authenticity is not a value unique to polyamorists. As authenticity grew into a prevalent cultural value through the mid and late 1900s, "the culture of authenticity" has emerged in contemporary American society (Guignon 2004). Concerning the rise of the culture of authenticity, in *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972), Lionel Trilling illuminated the ethical ideal of authenticity by comparing it to a related concept: sincerity. According to him, while both sincerity and authenticity were born with the development of modern society—when people started to recognize their internal space, "self," as detached from their social roles—sincerity indicates how truthfully an individual performs their social roles. Sincerity, in other words, mainly concerns the harmonious relation between one's own truth and the external world. However, the ideal of authenticity, in contrast to sincerity, is inherently rooted in one's own relation to the self. Trilling, in fact, claimed that the ideal of sincerity gradually transformed into the ideal of authenticity with the evolution of modern society, particularly the development of a more distinctive conception of self with a stark division between the interiority and exteriority of the self (Varga 2012, 16). That is, since an individual became a disintegrated self in the midst of volatile relations with others, the vexing processes of presenting the self, and incessant institutional controls, authenticity—"the honest soul in its wholeness"—grew into an exceptional individual value (Trilling 1972, 47). The "impenetrable,

perdurable, and autonomous" essence of an individual became considered as the strength of each person (Trilling 1972, 93).

While Trilling's discussion shows that being truthful to oneself lies the foundation of authenticity, I argue that there is another essential element of authenticity: autonomy (Ryan and Ryan 2019; Verga 2012). In *Authenticity as an Ethical Ideal* (2012), Somogy Varga demonstrated that authenticity and autonomy, while certainly being different, are essentially interconnected. In order for individuals to act according to the truth of the self and to express that truth, one has to have "the ability to put one's own behavior under reflexive scrutiny and make it dependent on self-determined goals" (Honneth 1994, 59, as cited in Verga 2012, 19). Though an authentic life is not synonymous with an autonomous life, one can lead an authentic life on the basis of autonomy. As such, consisting of truthfulness to oneself and autonomy, the popular American ethical ideal of authenticity is that individuals should be true to themselves and lead a life that is expressive of what makes them truthful to themselves (Guignon 2004, 5; Varga 2012, 5).

Noting that authenticity signifies the state or quality of being true to oneself and being able to act according to what is truthful to oneself, polyamory seems to be unequivocally relevant to authenticity. Put another way, considering non-monogamous desire as the perdurable, true essence of an individual that is not disciplined by society, some might think that practicing polyamory itself is an actualization of the authentic self against social forces. While this could be a simple way to understand how polyamory leads one to express the authentic self, I argue that polyamorists' actualization of the authentic self is not at all a simple process. It rather entails onerous, sophisticated self-activity. Far from simply expressing one's non-monogamous desire, polyamory serves as a complex, profound process through which individuals seek out the truth of their inner self and responsibly follow that truth.

Here, to describe how polyamory operates as an individual's journey to an authentic self, I look at an excerpt from my interview with Chloe. In this part of the interview, Chloe was discussing what an authentic self is and how one can pursue it:

> Chloe: Authentic self, I would say that it goes again [down to] finding your own happiness, your own sadness, your own anger, [and] your own emotions. I mean, you have to find your own emotions as an individual. What makes you angry? What makes you sad? What

> makes you happy without any outside influence[s]? So, for me, something that makes me angry would be something along the lines of people who are very racist or people who are very, just not open-minded, but that's my own emotion to deal with. So, if that makes me angry, why does it make me angry? And getting down to the core self of that. And then I can deal with people [who] are close-minded and racist or whatever. So, working with yourself and finding out what makes your emotions work and how to self-soothe those emotions.
>
> Author: Are you saying that being an authentic self includes [that] you know how to soothe yourself?
>
> Chloe: Right. Right. You have to self-soothe. I mean, you hear the term self-soothe a lot of time[s] with babies, right? Like moms or dads are like no, they need to learn to cry, which totally makes sense. They do. [By] Learning how to work through your own emotions and give yourself space, and being kind with yourself, you can do a lot. So, if I am upset about something, [there is] a thing that works good with me. I like to use meditation as a tool for myself, kind of just bring me back down and give me relief from whatever I'm feeling. So, if I have a bad day where I'm really sad about something, I usually will meditate because I know it takes my emotions and tells me it's okay. And I do a lot of talking to myself. So, if I'm sad over my dog dying, I don't know. Well, just use that as an example, my dog died. I'm super sad. I can go out on the road and take it out on the road because maybe somebody hit my dog. I can go and take it out on every person driving a car and be super angry and hurt. Or, I can reflect and go, okay, I'm sad, and I'm upset that my dog is no longer with me. Anybody in my situation and who loves their dog as much as I did would feel the same way. So then, you turn [it] into self-validation. And that's strong work right there.[38]

During the interview, the notion of an authentic self naturally came up as Chloe was answering the question about what makes an intimate relationship healthy. As a criterion for a healthy intimate relationship, she mentioned the importance of being an independent individual—that is, the importance of an individual's pursuit of being "an authentic individual self," in a relationship. She was explaining how one can find and actualize the authentic self. From Chloe's illustration, I argue that, while one's pursuit of the authentic self fundamentally requires the constant practice of self-awareness and self-regulation through emotional reflection, polyamory serves as that practice.

Basically, polyamory operates as a constant journey of building self-awareness. Chloe remarked that individuals cannot know their individuality without self-work. Since an individual's true essence is not something that can be noticed at a glance, people need to discover their own true, authentic selves by focusing on their own emotions. Given this, polyamory is basically an intimate practice that compels

[38] Chloe, interview by author, San Diego, October 24, 2018.

individuals to find their own true essence by looking into themselves. As I have shown in the earlier discussion of polyamorists' practice of creating informed consent, a polyamorous relationship begins with individuals' clear awareness of what they truly want from their intimate lives, regardless of social expectations. Also, within a polyamorous relationship, individuals, when facing various relationship issues, need to inspect their own feelings; by using a psychoanalytic technique, which they commonly call processing, polyamorists are asked to observe their emotional states, analyze the mechanisms of their emotional reactions, and discover the truth of the self that underlies their emotions. In such a way, polyamory requires individuals to explore and produce their true, authentic beings by making them constantly introspect their emotions.

Along with the practice of self-discovery, polyamory also compels individuals to develop skills for regulating themselves. Another important point that Chloe mentioned about being an authentic self is that individuals should be equipped with the ability to cope with their emotions on their own. Without properly controlling and appeasing their own emotions, individuals cannot be who they truly are. Concerning this, I point out that an individual's ability to self-control their emotions is necessary to maintain a polyamorous relationship. While the practice of processing enables polyamorists to unveil their true, authentic beings by deciphering their emotions, the elementary goal of processing is to self-regulate one's own feelings. As I have previously illustrated, far from bluntly venting their emotions—such as anger, sadness, or jealousy—to their partners, polyamorists, by practicing processing, seek to take responsibility for their emotions and address their inner issues on their own. And by virtue of the practice of self-regulating emotions, polyamorists are further expected to communicate their honest feelings, inner issues, and the vulnerable truths of the self with their partners. In this manner, polyamorists argue that through the course of creating and maintaining a polyamorous relationship, they can recognize their true being and live an authentic life.

"Be your authentic self!" "Be true to yourself!" "Be yourself!" When I first heard these expressions from polyamorists during my fieldwork in Southern California, I thought that they were self-liberating mottos encouraging polyamorists to follow their own desires, thoughts, and feelings regardless of what others think of them or what society expects them to be. As I continued to talk with polyamorists and

observed their discussion meetings, however, I came to realize the burden of being an authentic self. Being an authentic self means not only that one needs to discover their own true, unique essence by unraveling the social relations, institutional forces, and moral values that inform them, but also that one has to take responsibility for all the consequences encountered as a result of expressing one's true, unique being. Being an authentic self, in this sense, is indeed a complex and onerous task that entails the unrelenting practice of self-discovery and self-discipline.

Meanwhile, when polyamorists, through practicing polyamory, assert that they are following their true, authentic beings untangled from societal and others' control, I claim that the entire process through which polyamorists actualize the authentic self ironically acts as a thoroughly social practice. Put another way, polyamorists' practice of pursuing the authentic self is inherently built upon American therapeutic culture. As I have shown in the previous section, what allows polyamorists to deal with the painful or discomforting feelings that come up in polyamorous relationships is a psychoanalytic technique, which they call the practice of processing. Without the cultural capital of psychoanalytic knowledge, polyamorists can neither understand nor control their emotions. That is to say, when polyamorists find their true essence by looking at their feelings, it is not because there is a certain truth of the self that is buried in their feelings and waiting to be discovered. It is rather because they are able to interpret their feelings through psychoanalytic tools and transform their understanding of their emotions into certain knowledge of the self by relying on the psychoanalytic concept of the self.

More fundamentally, I point out that the social value of being an authentic self *itself* is closely entwined with therapeutic culture in the US. That is to say, it is through the development of therapeutic culture that being an authentic self has been established as a desirable goal for individuals in the US. As Freud's psychoanalytic perspective transformed the way that Americans managed the dynamics of the inner self by providing them with a tool to decipher their inwardness and developed into American therapeutic culture, the true, authentic self gained a positive value in American society (Lunbeck 2012; Turner 1976). As many American psychologists, such as Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, have emphasized the optimistic and liberating aspects of the human psyche, the authentic self has come to be cherished as what

individuals ought to discover and realize rather than repressing (Illouz 2008, 157-159). As such, when being an authentic self is endorsed as an ideal individual value in American society, some individuals utilize polyamory as a means of finding and actualizing their authentic selves as autonomous individuals who have the courage to stand by the truth of the self and continuously reflect on that truth (Havens 1986, 377).

Lastly, while polyamory essentially serves as an individual's journey to an authentic self, it is important to remember that polyamory is not equally available to everyone, but is contingent on one's racial positionality. Considering the racial unevenness of polyamory communities, it is necessary to further discuss polyamorists' pursuit of the authentic self in connection with race—how race operates in the way that polyamorists find and actualize their authentic selves. Here, I showcase how the norm of whiteness is ingrained in the ideal of the authentic self that polyamorists are working towards through their practice of polyamory.

Racial homogeneity, as I illustrated at the beginning of this chapter, is one of the most noticeable characteristics of polyamory communities. Though I encountered a few polyamorists of color during my fieldwork in Southern California, few polyamorists of color regularly attended the polyamory communities' meetings.[39] In point of fact, the organizers of the three Southern Californian polyamory communities that I participated in and the polyamorists who actively engaged in the communities were all white. Given that racial unevenness is not a unique issue to Southern Californian polyamory communities, other polyamory scholars have sought to explain the lack of racial diversity in polyamory communities. For instance, Sheff and Hammers (2011) conjectured a few reasons that could inhibit people of color from practicing polyamory. They said that, though straying away from sexual norms generally causes social ostracism and oppression, people of color tend to be more susceptible to negative outcomes due to their non-normative lifestyles because they lack racial privilege. Besides, since people of color are more often subject to state surveillance and regulation compared to white people, it is much more difficult for them to manage a non-

[39] Among the polyamorists of color that I encountered in my fieldwork in Southern California, there were relatively more Hispanic American polyamorists than African American or Asian American polyamorists, which, I think, reflects the regional contexts of Southern California.

normative lifestyle (Sheff and Hammers 2011, 211). Sheff and Hammers raise a valid point. Given that practicing polyamory demands social, financial, and emotional resources, people of color have different social and economic conditions that make it harder for them to afford a polyamorous lifestyle.

Acknowledging that, I also point out that race does not just create different social and economic conditions in one's life but, more fundamentally, it affects one's psychic life in a different manner, as mentioned by Fred, the co-founder of the first nationwide Black polyamory community in the US:

> I wanted to form a group because I felt like what I experienced wasn't [addressed in existing polyamory communities]. There was no safety net for people of color. Neither questions that I had nor the concerns that I had [were] being really addressed. And also, what we talked about earlier, dealing with the people that have been traumatized from systematic oppression. So, I don't think they [existing polyamory communities]'re equipped with or worried [about] how to deal with that. And so, there are things that are like narratives that they shared, which was like if a person lies to me, dump him immediately, right? It's just not something that works well in our community, *because we've dealt with hundreds and hundreds of years of the truth causing us to be tortured and killed. So, the truth is not an easy thing for us*. We have a thing called "lie to get by," right? You know, the police pull you over, you don't know what the situation is but you better have a thousand lies just in case, right? Or, maybe you've been disenfranchised to such a degree that love is just something that you can experience because of your past or your present, right? So, when a woman approaches you and she asked you, what do you do for a living? I'm a rocket scientist? (laughing) And you're going to experience that love as long as it lasts until she figures out what's going on, right? So, I've actually seen guys lying about where they work. But the whole deal is that we demonize these people, right? … *Within that context, you have our community where this is an issue. We lie sometimes just to preserve who we are*.[40] (Emphasis Added)

This is a part of the conversation that I had with Fred. I came to know Fred through Erica, one of a few polyamorists of color that I met during my fieldwork. Knowing my interest in the racial dynamics in polyamory communities, Erica introduced Fred to me, and thankfully, he agreed to talk with me. In our conversation, Fred told me the story of how he came to form a polyamory community for Black people and what he wanted to achieve through that community. Interestingly, as he explained how existing polyamory communities were not capable of addressing Black people's issues, Fred mentioned how uncomfortable he was with the way white polyamorists worship truth-telling. As they grow up and live in American society, Black people, Fred stated, tend to develop a fundamentally dissimilar relationship to the truth compared to

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[40] Fred, personal conversation with author, December 18, 2018.

white people. Under systematic, institutional discrimination and oppression, Black people become accustomed to hiding their truth, because telling the truth often puts them in danger or causes suffering. Nevertheless, without considering Black people's different experiences, Fred said that white polyamorists tend to uphold the unconditional value of the truth while rejecting or morally devaluing people who have trouble with telling the truth.

Just as Fred suggested that the racist history of the US has shaped Black people's discomforting relationship with the truth, many race and postcolonial scholars have illuminated how racial dynamics are essentially inscribed in our psychic lives. For instance, in *Black Skin, White Mask* (1986), Frantz Fanon eloquently discussed how race determines not only how we experience the social, economic world but also how we experience *ourselves*. Fanon indicated that, in the face of a compromised, inferior racial image of the self, Black people experience themselves through alienation and fragmentation. Between the moral, ideal self and the truth of the self, Black people are doomed to "a constant effort to run away from [their] own individuality, to annihilate [their] own presence" (Fanon 1986, 43). Hence, for Black people, achieving self-consciousness is to "forever combat with [their] own image" (Fanon 1986, 150). Similarly, in *Racial Melancholia, Racial Dissociation* (2018), David Eng and Shinhee Han noted that Asian Americans also experience individualized yet collectively shared psychic suffering. They claimed that Asian Americans develop particular psychic mechanisms in association with histories of immigration, assimilation, and racialization and that race or racism essentially underpins Asian Americans' personhood, making their agency and will racialized experiences.

With respect to the racial constructions of the psychic world, we can re-examine polyamorists' pursuit of the actualization of the authentic self. Here, my argument is that white normativity fundamentally underlies the ideal of the authentic self. As I have shown previously, being an authentic self requires individuals to find the truth of the self, liberated from social, institutional forces and others' influences, and to responsibly follow that truth. This means that being an authentic self, above all, starts from one's recognition and affirmation of their own truth or individuality detached from social forces. As all individuals are social productions, it is not easy to envision oneself unshackled from society. Nevertheless,

I point out that it is the position of whiteness that allows individuals to think themselves free from society and to approve of the wholeness of their individuality. In other words, people of color, as Fred insightfully stated, tend to have a much harder or more painful experience of facing and following the truth of the self. When people of color find themselves being put in danger by the truth of their mere existence or when they experience themselves through a socially compromised, inferior image of the self, seeking for the true, authentic self appears to be a rather painful, dangerous, or nearly impossible ideal for people of color. Needless to say, people of color also tend to face much harsher repercussions for expressing their true self than white people do. In this manner, I argue that, when Southern Californian polyamorists utilize polyamory as a means of actualizing their authentic selves unfettered by social, institutional forces and other's influences, the norm of whiteness is deeply entrenched in their practice of polyamory. To clarify, I do not mean that people of color cannot or do not pursue the authentic self through the practice of polyamory. As a matter of fact, Fred himself argued for the ideal of authenticity in his polyamorous life even while pointing out Black people's different relationship to the truth. Instead, my claim is when the norm of whiteness is embedded in the practice of polyamory, polyamory cannot offer the same options for individuals who have different racial positionalities, and polyamory is essentially a racialized experience.

Conclusion: Polyamory, an Authentic Self, and Racialized Experiences

In this chapter, I have explored Southern Californian polyamorists' experience of practicing polyamory through the theoretical frame of Foucault's subjectivation. I have discussed how polyamory serves as a self-activity by which individuals constitute and govern themselves as free, autonomous individuals. While creating and maintaining intimate relationships with multiple partners, polyamorists are constantly required to observe, analyze, and improve themselves using psychoanalytic knowledge and techniques. I have therefore argued that polyamory primarily operates as an individual's journey to an authentic self, which entails the persistent practice of self-awareness and self-discipline. Since being an authentic self is a popular ethical ideal in American society, individuals utilize polyamory as a means to

actualize their authentic selves and to live ethical lives. This chapter ultimately gestures towards three implications for the ethical ideal of the authentic self as well as for the practice of polyamory in the US.

First, my analysis of Southern Californian polyamorists exemplifies how one's journey to authentic selfhood operates as a socially constructed process of disciplining oneself. Being an authentic self signifies an individual's expression of their unique, intact, and true essence, which is unshackled from social forces and others' control. Yet, polyamorists' path to the authentic self consists of a series of socially manufactured practices to observe, analyze, and regulate the self. Given the ethical ideal of the authentic self, polyamorists are compelled not only to produce self-knowledge by adopting the cultural capital of psychoanalytic knowledge but also to regulate themselves according to that self-knowledge. As critical scholars have noted, the ideal of authenticity serves to reproduce and reinforce capitalistic power structures (e.g., Adorno 1970; Bellah et al. 1985; Fleming 2009), and this chapter suggests that being an authentic self serves as a governmental mechanism through which individuals control and discipline their inner, private selves in compliance with the American ideal of the individual—the autonomous, free, yet self-regulated individual.

Next, by arguing that polyamory mainly functions as an individual's journey to an authentic self, this chapter also critiques *who can or cannot utilize polyamory as a means of actualizing the authentic self*. As I have mentioned earlier, polyamory communities are white-centered; not only are the communities that I observed predominantly white, but previous studies have also indicated racial unevenness in polyamory communities (e.g., Sheff and Hammer 2011). Concerning this, scholars have argued that, as practicing polyamory requires certain cultural and financial resources, people of color are less likely to be able to afford a polyamorous life (e.g., Noël 2006; Haritaworn at el. 2006; Sheff and Hammer 2011). My analysis likewise has indicated that practicing polyamory takes a great amount of effort as well as cultural and social capital. Acknowledging that people of color's unprivileged social and economic positions affect their practice of polyamory, this chapter, however, reconsiders the white-centeredness of polyamory communities in connection with the ideal of the authentic self, which lies at the core of a polyamorous life. In other words, it is important to question who the people are that can afford the polyamorous life that can lead them to expressing their authentic, true essence against social expectations and institutional forces.

Finally, this chapter addresses polyamory as a non-normative intimate practice that disrupts or resists the normative sexual system of heterosexual monogamy. I have demonstrated that the practice of polyamory, though seemingly immoral or perverse, foregrounds the prevalent American ethical ideal of being an authentic self—that is, by practicing polyamory, individuals seek to construct and manage themselves as autonomous, authentic individuals. Having said that, this chapter neither devalues nor disclaims the "disruptive potential of polyamory" (Klesse 2014, 92) to transform the sexual system of heterosexual monogamy. By building polyamorous relationships that oppose the norm of monogamy, polyamorists indeed actively challenge the existing rules and values of sex, love, and relationships, which are considered to be natural or ideal. That is, regarding polyamory as an act of resistance against the heterosexual monogamous social order, this chapter has tried to tackle the mechanism through which the resistance of polyamory is carried out. As Foucault (1990a, 95) famously noted "where there is power, there is resistance," this chapter highlights that the practice of polyamory, while confronting the existing system of heterosexual monogamy, is closely entwined with, or shaped through, other dominant cultural values in American society—such as liberal individualism and the therapeutic ethos. With this understanding of the specific conditions in which polyamory has developed and operated as a specific way of resisting the norm of heterosexual monogamy in America, the next chapters continue to explore polyamory in the different social contexts of South Korea.

PART TWO: The Development of Polyamory Culture in Seoul

Preface to Part Two

In the first part of my dissertation, I addressed how the development of polyamory culture in the US was entangled with its specific racial and gender dynamics and the moral imperative of being a liberal individual. By drawing from my fieldwork in Southern California, I also showcased how individuals experience polyamory as a journey of realizing authentic selfhood—the true essence of the self that is unshackled by social forces and other's influences—which entails constant self-reflection and self-discipline based on psychotherapeutic knowledge and techniques. Ultimately, Part One gestured towards how polyamory operates as a racialized practice of the self by which one can attain autonomy and freedom. Departing from the US, the second part of my dissertation will scrutinize the development of polyamory in South Korea. Although nonmonogamy is not new to South Koreans, polyamory emerged in South Korea *through* "the West, Western cultures and the English language" (Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan 2002, 6). Not only has South Korean polyamory culture grown by utilizing polyamory books, articles, and other polyamory resources which were produced by American polyamorists, but also South Korean polyamorists show a close affinity to American polyamory communities across national boundaries.

Given that, I use *transnationalism* as a theoretical framework to analyze how polyamory has grown in South Korea. Since the late nineties, scholars of sexuality studies have used transnationalism as a critical analytic frame to examine how local modes of sexual subjectivities are reconfigured through increasing global socioeconomic connections in the post-Fordist capitalist era (e.g., Povinelli and Chauncey 1999; Manalansan 2003; Boellstorff 2005; Blackwood 2010). The framework of *transnationalism* is distinct from globalization (Grewal and Kaplan 2001, 664). Transnationalism addresses asymmetrical aspects of the globalizing process. Without attention to inequalities in global interactions, many studies on globalization consider "the global" as a homogenizing or unidirectional flow from the West to the non-West (e.g., Altman 1996); in this unidirectional narrative of globalization, the liberation and promotion of premodern, non-Western local sexual differences are assumed to be a result of Western modernity (Cruz-Malavé and

Manalansan 2002). In contrast, a transnational perspective puts stress on national difference and inequalities as integral parts of the globalization process and criticizes the teleological, developmental explanation of local sexual differences by highlighting the forces of imperialism, nationalism, and racism. Taking a transnational approach, I examine how US-Korea power dynamics, which have been shaped through the unique modern history of South Korea, play out in the development of polyamory. When consensual nonmonogamy was introduced to South Korea under the American name of polyamory, South Koreans' desire for nonmonogamy was reshaped, redefined, and revalued in relation to the US hegemonic power. Polyamory developed in South Korea not only through the economic and cultural forces of globalization, but in conjunction with the legacies of colonialism that remain part of US- South Korea relations today.

While bringing attention to postcolonial power dynamics, my analysis also stresses South Korea's complex *internal* socioeconomic and cultural elements, which have shaped the development of polyamory in South Korea. In the article "Queering Asia," Ara Wilson (2006) pointed out that many transnational sexuality studies, although providing postcolonial critiques of how Western hegemony is ingrained in Asian sexual politics, still rely on the Western-centric, "import-export calculus" model. To overcome a Western-Eastern duality as well as a modern-traditional dichotomy, Wilson (2006) argued that Asian queer studies require *critical regionalism*, which approaches "Asia not merely as the recipient of first-world influences but as itself generating complex modernities and transnational flows in a global context shaped by political economic asymmetries." Informed by Wilson's insight, I seek to challenge a Western-centric model of sexual modernity by bringing South Korea's regional intra-dynamics into a focal locus of analysis. With an aim of decentering the hegemonic model of Western sexual modernity, I foreground South Korea's intra-dynamics to explore the development of polyamory. Nevertheless, my emphasis on South Korea is not an essentialist or nationalistic approach. Far from a homogeneous, stable national unity, I consider South Korea as a cultural and political construct produced through its specific historical processes. By focusing on heterogeneous elements within South Korea, I showcase that polyamory has grown in South Korea intertwined with its political economy of family and Confucian patriarchal gender dynamics.

Part Two consists mainly of three chapters. Chapter 3 examines the development of the social discourse of polyamory in South Korea in the 2000s and the 2010s. It shows how South Korean social discourse of polyamory has changed from an impossible Western lifestyle to an alternative, feminist practice of intimacy while being entangled with the growing forces of neoliberal globalization after the Asian financial crisis of 1997 as well as the shifting dynamics of the heteropatriarchal nuclear family model and gender relations in South Korea. While Chapter 3 addresses how the social, cultural understanding of polyamory has changed over the last two decades, Chapter 4 analyzes the emergence of polyamorous subjects in South Korea and how they have created polyamory culture through community building and the production of polyamory knowledge. Chapter 4 reveals the complex, creative ways South Koreans have interpreted and recreated polyamory culture in interaction with the changing gender dynamics in South Korea. Lastly, Chapter 5 focuses on how individuals experience polyamory in South Korea. It elucidates how South Korean individuals primarily practice polyamory as a means to craft a private self that is untethered from their social roles, relationships, and statuses, while illuminating the gendered nature of polyamorous experiences in South Korea.

Chapter 3 Polyamory Emergence in South Korea:
From a Western Fantasy to an Anti-Normative, Feminist Practice

> In Sonoma County, located in Northern California, lives the Ravenheart family. Contrary to our conventional sense, this family—who was introduced in the online magazine *Nerve,* which is published in New York—is composed of three heterosexual men and three bisexual women. These six not only live together as a family but also have sex as a group; they all share affection for each other. A type of family like the Ravenheart's is called "polyamory."[41]

This is an excerpt from a news article titled "Love, Does It Have To Be Only With You?" published by *OhmyNews*—a South Korean liberal online newspaper—in 2006.[42] The article presented a polyamorous American family living in Northern California as an example of polyamory. It also illustrated that polyamory books and magazines were being published in the US as polyamory was getting more popular among Americans. The article's introduction of polyamory as a new, alternative sexual lifestyle to its readers was predicated upon a basic understanding of polyamory as something that is exclusively Western or American and strange to South Koreans. Such a portrayal of polyamory was not unique to this article. In fact, it was quite common for the South Korean news media in the 2000s to represent polyamory as a Western practice irrelevant to South Koreans. However, throughout the 2010s, the media portrayal of polyamory significantly changed, so much so that I began to see interviews of South Korean polyamorists appearing in articles. That is, the South Korean news media came to discuss polyamory as a practice that South Koreans can or do try rather than a uniquely Western lifestyle.

This chapter traces how the South Korean social discourse of polyamory developed in the 2000s and the 2010s through both global postcolonial power dynamics and socioeconomic changes within South

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[41] Sŏnghŭi Hong, "Love, Do I need to love only you?," *OhmyNews*, November 20, 2006, http://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/View/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0000374492
캘리포니아 북쪽 소노마라는 마을에 '레이븐하츠' (Ravenhearts)라는 가족이 살고 있다. 뉴욕에서 발행되는 잡지인 <너브>(www.nerve.com)에 소개된 이 가족은 우리의 통념과 달리 이성애자인 남자 셋과 양성애 성향의 여자 셋으로 이뤄진 가족이다. 여섯 명은 함께 먹고 살 뿐만 아니라 섹스도 함께 하고 감정을 교류한다. 레이븐하츠 가족 같은 관계 유형을 '폴리아모리' (Polyamory, 비독점 다자연애) 라고 한다.

[42] *OhmyNews* is a South Korean online newspaper that uses an open-source style of news reporting with the motto "Every Citizen is Reporter." As citizen participatory, collaborative media, *OhmyNews* is considered to be one of the most left-leaning, liberal newspapers in South Korea.

Korea itself. Questions that I consider include: How did polyamory come into being in the South Korean social discourse? How did the South Korean social discourse of polyamory develop in the 2000s and 2010s? How did the social discourse of polyamory interact with socioeconomic and cultural changes in South Korea over the last two decades? And, finally, what does the development of polyamory discourse tell us about the (re)construction of South Koreans' private lives in the 2000s and 2010s?

To approach these questions, I primarily take two socioeconomic elements into consideration. First, I claim that the development of the social discourse of polyamory is closely linked with the growing forces of neoliberal globalization in South Korea in the 2000s and the 2010s. After the Asian financial crisis in 1997, South Korean society went through far-reaching reforms of the socioeconomic system in line with the logic of neoliberalism (Lim and Jang 2006a; Pirie 2012). As many scholars have well elaborated (e.g., Ong 2006; Song 2006), neoliberal reforms are not simply changes in policy and state governance, but, importantly, entail changes in the very logic by which individuals construct their social and personal lives. In the 2000s and the 2010s, under the duress of ceaseless self-development for survival in the competitive, neoliberal labor market, South Koreans, especially South Korean young adults, were indeed required to reconfigure their private as well as their economic lives according to the logic of neoliberalism. Given these changes, in this chapter, I showcase how the social discourse of polyamory developed in interaction with the growing forces of neoliberalism after the Asian financial crisis of 1997.

Another important element that I focus on is the changing dynamic of South Korean familism culture. Under the Confucian tradition, South Korean society has traditionally been characterized by its strongly family-oriented culture, or familism culture (e.g., Chang 2010; H. K. Kim 2016). Particularly, as the South Korean government undertook a family-centered modernization project in the 1960s and the 1970s, establishing a nuclear family for oneself has operated as an essential survival strategy for South Koreans. Having said that, following the socioeconomic reconstruction of South Korea after 1997, familism culture underwent a noticeable change in the 2000s and the 2010s; while the normative value of the heteropatriarchal nuclear family has been weakened due to the new emphasis on individual freedom and choice, increasing challenges have also arisen against patriarchal family gender roles. In fact, South Korean

society observed the momentous development of feminist activism in the 2010s. Under these circumstances, this chapter carefully considers how the development of the social discourse of polyamory in the 2000s and 2010s was entangled with changes in familism culture after 1997.

This chapter comprises four main sections. The first section, "South Korean Familism Culture," historicizes modern South Korean familism culture, which provides a crucial cultural background for the growth of polyamory in South Korea. I show how familism culture, based on the patriarchal nuclear family, was formed under the Park Chung Hee regime and how the Asian financial crisis of 1997 affected South Korean families in the 2000s. The second section, "Polyamory as an Impossible, Western Fantasy in the 2000s" shows how polyamory was first brought into the public discourse in the 2000s. By focusing on the first South Korean polyamory novel, *My Wife Got Married* (2006) and its film adaptation (Jeong 2008), I describe that polyamory was mainly represented as a Western foreign practice that is impossible in South Korea. The third section, "The Rise of Samp'osedae in the 2010s," contextualizes a shift in the social discourse of polyamory in the 2010s. I illustrate that samp'osedae—a generation who has abandoned the three life events of dating, marriage, and childbirth—revealed a fundamental change in the logic of the heterosexual nuclear family in the post-crisis contexts, thereby producing heterogeneous discourses about intimacy, marriage, and family in South Korea. Turning the focus back to cultural representations of polyamory, the fourth section, "Polyamory as an Anti-Normative, Feminist Choice in the 2010s," elaborates how polyamory gained new cultural understandings in the 2010s. With the changing social atmosphere surrounding the heteropatriarchal nuclear family model in South Korea, polyamory has come to be portrayed as an experimental, yet viable, practice of intimacy in association with the values of individual choice, autonomy, and anti-patriarchism. In the conclusion, I elucidate how the social discourse of polyamory developed in close intersection with the reconstruction of South Koreans' private lives in the post-crisis contexts. Through the socioeconomic reform after the economic crisis of 1997, South Koreans' private lives have undergone deep changes that call the normative logic of the heterosexual nuclear family into question and emphasize individual choice and self-realization. In interaction with these changes,

polyamory appeared in the public discourse and has grown into one of the alternative ways of practicing intimacy in South Korea.

South Korean Familism Culture

The development of polyamory in the US initially emerged as a sexual practice that resists the white, middle-class culture of the nuclear family (Chapter 1). Specifically, American polyamory culture was developed mainly by white, middle-class women who claimed individual freedom and sexual agency against the patriarchal order of the nuclear family. Can we then assume a similar path of development for polyamory culture in South Korea? My answer is no. While American cultural values are entrenched in the emergence of American polyamory, polyamory has grown in South Korea in close interaction with its own cultural values. In this section, I paint the important background against which polyamory developed in South Korea: South Korean familism culture.

The Making of South Korean Modern Familism

Many scholars have examined South Korean family culture as a part of East Asian Confucian traditions (e.g., Park and Cho 1995; Slote and DeVos 1998; Kim and Finch 2002a; Park and Chesla 2007). While it is undeniable that Confucian values—such as patrilineality, filial piety, and hierarchical gender roles—have operated importantly, Confucianism is an insufficient frame to explain family-centeredness in a South Korean individual's life. The framework of Confucianism, as reinforcing the Western modernity/Oriental tradition dichotomy, often overlooks the complexities of modern familism culture. As sociologist Kim Hye-Kyung (2016) noted, the familism culture of South Korea, combined with Confucian values, took shape through the Japanese colonial period and its modernization process.

In *South Korea Under Compressed Modernity: Familial Political Economy in Transition* (2010), sociologist Chang Kyung-Sup claimed that South Korean familism is formed by plural ideologies—Confucianism, instrumental familism, affectionate familism, and individualistic familism—which evolved in the modernization process. The reason that family centers on both an individual's public and private life,

he stated, is because the family plays multiple roles in South Korea. Constructed through multiple ideologies, the family lies at the core of how South Koreans attain moral convictions, economic and social success, emotional protection, and self-realization.

Emphasizing the modern development of familism, both Kim (2016) and Chang (2010) stated that Park Chung Hee's authoritarian regime played a critical role in shaping modern family culture. Many scholars likewise claimed that familism culture grounded in the nuclear family model resulted from the Park regime's developmental policies (Cho 1997; H.J. Kim 2002; Kwon 2015, 63; C. Lee 2018, 33). The nuclear family remained far from the norm for Koreans until Park's regime even though social discourses of the nuclear family started to grow during the late Chosŏn Dynasty era and the Japanese colonial period (H. Kim 2011). The vast majority of South Koreans lived in patrilineal extended families, and concubinage was still common even in the 1950s (Jung 2006; Mah 2016).[43] Park′s regime established the heterosexual monogamous nuclear family as the social norm by revising family law and the Family Planning program (Kim 2009).

Targeting the nuclear family as a basic unit of policies, the modernization process under Park's developmental regime was essentially entwined with the formation of familism based on the nuclear family model (Chang 2010, 5). The Family Planning (FP) program (*Kajok Kyehoek Saŏp*) exemplifies how familism culture was established as a result of Park's developmental policies. As identifying overpopulation as a major obstacle to economic growth, Park's regime launched the Family Planning program as part of the Five-Year Economic Plan in 1962 (Lee 2004, 170). By setting an annual fertility goal, the Park regime carried out the FP program, thereby successfully lowering the fertility rate (from 6.33 children per women

[43] While having a concubine was common in the Chosŏn Dynasty, in the late nineteenth century, a public discourse emerged arguing for the abolition of concubinage for the sake of modernization (Jun, 2001; HJ Kim, 2011). Admiring Western monogamous love marriages, Korean Enlightenment intellectuals condemned concubinage as a deleterious custom that should be eradicated, and the Chosŏn Dynasty eventually banned concubinage in 1905. Under Japanese colonial rule, the legal enforcement of monogamy was consolidated. By clarifying monogamy as the guiding principle of marriage, colonial law regarded bigamy and concubinage as legitimate causes for divorce (Jung, 2008:86-88). Nevertheless, such legal restriction did not instantly abolish concubinage in practice. It was not until the 1960s that monogamous marriage became stabilized in South Koreans' everyday lives through women's persistent efforts during the US Army Military Government (1945-1948) and the First Republic of Korea (1948-1960) (Mah, 2016).

in 1955 to 2.92 in 1975).[44] The significance of the FP program however lies not in smaller household size itself but the establishment of the family model in South Korea. Kim Hye-Kyung (2009) stated that while the FP program ostensibly targeted birth control, it built the ideal nuclear family life in effect. By portraying a heterosexual monogamous couple and their children as the basis of modern family life in public campaigns, the FP program naturalized nuclear family life. Cho Eunju (2018) likewise illustrated that the FP program served to idealize the emotional sexual union of a married couple as well as the family's role of childcare. As such, Park's regime created new norms for the healthy modern nuclear family, consisting of a loving heterosexual monogamous couple and their one or two children.

South Korea is certainly not the only modern state to intervene in building modern family culture. As many scholars have shown, modern nation states explicitly and implicitly play a significant role in the formation of the modern normative family model (e.g., Cott 2000; Hartog 2000; Yan 2003). Yet, South Korean modern familism was forcefully shaped by full-scale interventions of the developmental state. As Park's regime conducted family reform as a governmental policy and undertook a family-centered modernization project, the family essentially became South Koreans' survival strategy. In family-centered developmental policies in the 1960s and 1970s, there was no place for individuals because individuals were only identified with their gendered family roles (D. Lee 2017, 17). The family was *a means of survival* by which individuals could be recognized as subjects by the nation state. Through military service and entering the workforce, men gained full citizenship as breadwinners. Women were given secondary citizen status as the caretaker within the patriarchal family; they were recognized as citizens through their national duties of controlling their fertility, managing family resources, and supporting family (Moon 2005). To maintain their status as citizens, both men and women had to be incorporated into the patriarchal family system, albeit in asymmetrical manners.

In a nutshell, South Korean familism culture developed due to the unique, privileged position of the family during the state-driven modernization process. As an essential unit of the modern socioeconomic

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[44] https://web.archive.org/web/20120108231814/http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Excel-Data/DB01_Period_Indicators/WPP2010_DB1_F01_TOTAL_FERTILITY.XLS

system, the family became a constituent element of South Korean's public and private lives. And the heterosexual nuclear family was established as the unquestionable, normative logic for organizing an individual's life course (Cho 2020; Nahm and Namgoong 2012).

South Korean Families After 1997

The Park Chung Hee regime, by reforming South Korean families, effectively accomplished its modernization project. Praised as an exemplar of the developmental state, South Korea showed dramatic economic growth under the military dictatorship from 1961 to 1987 (Woo-Cummings 1999; Park 2011).[45] While 40.9% of South Koreans lived in absolute poverty in 1965, the rate declined to 4.5% by 1984 (Choo at el. 1996, 89). The increase of GDP per capita was also significant (from $105.77 in 1965 to $2,306.86 in 1984).[46] Given this trend, South Koreans took national economic progress for granted. At an individual level, people believed they could find a stable job, get married, buy a house, and provide a better future for their children as long as they worked hard (U and Park 2007, 72). Yet, such a belief did not remain long after 1997.

In 1997, South Korea faced its worst economic collapse since the Korean War. While signs of economic decline began appearing in the mid 1990s, the Asian financial crisis, triggered in Thailand in July 1997, struck down the South Korean economy. With currency depreciation and a series of bankruptcies of large conglomerates known as *chaebols*, the economic plummet was soon out of control. On December 3, 1997, the IMF approved a bailout package totaling US$58.4 billion. Indeed, the crisis hit almost every family. Within half a year, the unemployment rate doubled, and the number of unemployed reached roughly 1.4 million by June 1998 (Lee and Han 2006, 307).

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[45] Park Chung Hee was assassinated in 1979 and his military dictatorship ended. However, military dictatorship continued to govern South Korea as general Chun Doo Hwan seized the power through a military coup on 12 December, 1979. Through the June Democracy Struggles in 1987, South Koreans achieved the nineth amendment of Constitution, which allows the direct presidential election.

[46] https://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/stats/Economy/GDP-per-capita

As newly-elected Kim Dae Jung's administration vigorously undertook free market economic reform under the IMF's guidance, the economy recovered rapidly.[47] By 2001, South Korea left the IMF's supervision by repaying the entirety of the IMF loan. While the economic recovery was successful, the crisis profoundly transformed the South Korean socioeconomic system. Under the IMF's guidance, far-reaching structural reforms were conducted on industrial, financial, and governmental systems in line with the logic of the neoliberal free-market (Lim and Jang 2006a; Pirie 2012). In the post-crisis society, South Koreans were met with an increase of labor flexibility, a deterioration in labor quality, a surge of the working poor, and a widening socioeconomic gap (Kim 2004; Lim and Jang 2006b; Shin 2013; and Lee 2015). Much like the role of the family was altered by the South Korean modern socioeconomic system under Park Chung Hee's regime, family lives were affected once again by the aftermath of the crisis.

Many scholars have examined how the financial crisis impacted family norms and values (e.g., Lim 1998, 2000; C. Chung 2001; Cho 2005; Kim and Finch 2002b; H. Park 2011). While their works offer inconsistent analyses of how family lives changed after 1997, some claim that the crisis contributed to weakening the norms of the patriarchal nuclear family. Kim and Finch (2002b), for instance, argued that patriarchal family relations were challenged as many women were forced to support their families following massive layoffs of white-collar and blue-collar workers during the economic collapse. They pointed out that the crisis put women under the double burdens of supporting a family and housework, revealing cracks in the gender system of the Confucian patriarchal family. Han Kyunghye (1998) similarly indicated that men's authority in the family was undermined as their role as a breadwinner deteriorated through the crisis.

Statistical indices also evinced the weakening of the patriarchal nuclear family after 1997. While the marriage rate was decreasing throughout the 1990s, it dropped notably after the crisis (9.4% in 1996 to 6.8% in 2006).[48] The fertility rate also fell significantly. As the total fertility rate declined to 1.132 in 2005, which is 0.44 lower than in 1996, the low fertility rate became a social problem (Paik 2009, 208). In contrast,

[47] During the Presidential election, which was held two weeks after the IMF approved a rescue package, the ruling party lost power due to the malmanagement of the economy. This marked the first peaceful transfer of power in South Korea's modern political history after the democratization in 1987.
[48] http://www.index.go.kr/unify/idx-info.do?idxCd=4230

the divorce rate increased at an accelerated pace after the crisis. While 45,700 couples got divorced in 1990, the number dramatically rose to 116,300 in 1998 and remained similarly high throughout the 2000s (K. Han 2009). Moreover, as Cho Uhn (2005) pointed out, unconventional families—such as interracial families, immigrant families, and transnational families—emerged in the wake of economic globalization after 1997.

While these studies and statistical indices illustrate that the norms of the patriarchal nuclear family weakened after 1997, it is not sufficient to simply conclude that the crisis undercut family values. Many feminist scholars noticed that, during the national crisis, social efforts to save patriarchal familism culture appeared prominently (e.g., J. Lee 2004; Song, 2009; Cho 2008; H. Kim 2012). Particularly, the social discourse of "families at risk" arose in the late 1990s. Spotlighting the diminished status of men in families, news media stressed the value of the family. With an aim of "empowering husbands (*Namphyen Ki Salligi*)," civil groups also carried out social campaigns (H. Park 2011, 86). Responding to the social discourse of "families at risk," the South Korean government enacted "the Healthy Family Law" in 2003. The Law sets the heterosexual nuclear family as the model family and supports families that fit with that model (J. Lee 2004). As Song (2009) noted, the government, while reforming social policies using neoliberal logic, persisted with the norm of the nuclear family.

There are arguments that the financial crisis reinforced the culture of patriarchal familism, particularly bolstering women's role (S. Park 2007, 2009; Cho 2008; H. Park 2009, 2010). Park Sojin (2009), for example, contended that job insecurity and structural inequality were magnified during the economic reforms, making South Koreans more dependent on the family for survival. Based on the housewife's role in managing family finances and children's education, the family became a crucial tool for individual success. This trend is especially noticeable among middle and upper-middle class families, and "family CEO" and "educational manager" emerged as the neoliberal subjectivities of middle-class housewives in the post-crisis contexts (S. Park 2007; H. Park 2010). While the crisis of 1997 seemingly diminished the norm of the patriarchal nuclear family, familism culture based on the patriarchal nuclear family model still strongly operated in the 2000s.

I have thus far discussed how the economic crisis changed the familism culture of South Korea. While previous studies showed contradictory pictures of South Korean families after 1997, what is obvious, I demonstrate, is that South Korean families were never the same before and after 1997. As the crisis forced the reconstruction of the socioeconomic system, it also profoundly affected familism culture. Here, by drawing from the previous studies, I point out three major impacts that the economic crisis had on South Korean families.

First, the patriarchal gendered family roles—which define men as the breadwinner and women as the caretaker—started to be reconfigured. Through the economic crisis, men's status as breadwinner became destabilized, and women were increasingly expected to contribute to supporting family, especially among working-class families (Kim and Finch 2002b). Although the patriarchal nuclear family model remains dominant, gender roles in the family have become less rigidly understood than they were prior to 1997, which implies the possibility that the power dynamics between women and men have been changing in the post-crisis period.

Second, family lives came to be significantly varying according to social class. Although class is always closely entangled with an individual's family life, it became a principal element forming one's experience of family relations, norms, and values in post-crisis times. Specifically, while the instrumental role of the family in social mobility intensified among middle and upper-middle class families, working-class families could not provide the same support for family members. That is, for working-class people, establishing a patriarchal nuclear family would not be as appealing or essential of a task as it was before 1997.

Third, and most importantly, the flexibility of the patriarchal nuclear family model was revealed. Since the family grew into a constituent part of South Koreans' public and private lives under Park's developmental regime, the heterosexual nuclear family has operated as the unquestionable logic to structure an individual's life. Yet, through the crisis, South Koreans started to observe not only how flexible the role of family can be to an individual's life but also how susceptible the value of family is to socioeconomic systems. And once flexibilities of the nuclear family model came to be unveiled in the late 1990s and 2000s,

there increased South Korean individuals who questioned and reevaluated the logic of the heterosexual nuclear family in the 2010s, which I will describe in later in this chapter. Before that, the next section turns to an analysis of cultural representations of polyamory, which were produced amid the transformation of familism culture in the 2000s.

Polyamory as an Impossible, Western Fantasy in the 2000s: An Analysis of Polyamory Representation in *My Wife Got Married* (2006)

> My wife got married. That's all.
> I'm not her friend. I'm not her relative. I'm not her ex-husband either. The stark fact is that I'm her current husband. What makes this unbearable indeed for me is that she is also well aware of this fact, more aware than anyone.
> My life's gotten screwed up.[49]
> - The opening lines of Pak Hyŏnuk (2006)'s novel *My Wife Got Married*

Having discussed changes in South Korean families after 1997, this section examines media representations of polyamory in the 2000s by focusing on the first South Korean polyamory novel *My Wife Got Married* and its film version. It showcases that, while polyamory appeared in the South Korean media discourse in the 2000s in ways that were entangled with changes in South Korean families after 1997, polyamory was primarily portrayed as a Western fantasy that was impossible for South Koreans.

As South Korean families underwent changes in the aftermath of the financial crisis, one way that people apparently observed these changes was through cultural representations of family. In the late 1990s and 2000s, an increasing number of films dealt with the breakdown of patriarchal nuclear family—such as a woman leaving her husband and child after falling in love with her sister's fiancé (E J-Yong's *An Affair* in 1998), a head of a family being divorced after his wife finding out that his extramarital relationship led to their son's death (Im Sang-soo's *A Good Wife's Lawyer* in 2003), and a family consisting of non-blood

[49] 아내가 결혼했다. 이게 모두다.
나는 그녀의 친구가 아니다. 친정 식구도 아니다. 전남편도 아니다. 그녀의 엄연한 현재 남편이다. 정말 견딜 수 없는 것은 그녀 역시 그 사실을 누구보다도 잘 알고 있다는 것이다.
내 인생은 엉망이 되었다 (Pak 2006, 5)

related people (Kim Tae-young's *Family Ties* in 2006) (Kang 2009). Among these was Chŏng Yunsu (2008)'s film portraying a polyamorous family, based on Pak Hyŏnuk's best-selling novel *My Wife Got Married* (2006). Due to the combination of popular cast members and its unconventional theme, the film became a hit at the box office, while attracting extensive media coverage. Both the novel and film have in fact played a critical role in the way that polyamory made its initial public appearance in South Korea and still remain as one of the most popular cultural representations of polyamory up to 2020.

In *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Culture* (2005), Gopinath shows how female queer subjects are literally or symbolically excluded at the intersection of dominant discourses of patriarchal nationalism and heteronormative feminism. To indicate the illegible and unimaginable position of queer female subjects, Gopinath (2005, 16) uses the notion of impossibility. For her, impossibility does not simply mean the absence of visibility, but rather a particular positionality that is rendered unrepresentable, invisible, or alien within dominant diasporic and nationalist logics. Informed by Gopinath, my analysis focuses not on the visibility of polyamory but on the cultural logics that represent polyamory. My analysis of *My Wife Got Married* reveals that polyamory is portrayed as an illegible, impossible Western practice that is foreign to South Koreans. Though bringing polyamory into visibility in the public discourse, *My Wife Got Married* fantasized and mystified polyamory within patriarchal, nationalist logics.

My Wife Got Married begins with the male protagonist Tŏk'un's narration of how he meets his wife Ina six years ago. A mediocre office worker, Tŏk'un met freelancer programmer Ina while she was working for his company. As he and Ina found a common interest in soccer one day, they quickly become close, and their relationship developed into an intimate one. Yet, she told him that she would not take part in a monogamous relationship. Confused and disappointed, he nevertheless could not break up with her. While being with her made him happy, he felt insecure in their relationship. Hence, he tried to make their relationship secure by marrying her. He believed that marriage would make her settle down with him forever.

Tŏk'un's marital life was essentially perfect until Ina told him that she wanted to marry another man. In spite of his expectation that marriage would bind Ina to him, Ina developed a serious relationship with a man named Chaegyŏng, and she asked Tŏk'un to allow her to have a second husband. Because he was more afraid of losing her than of her having another husband, he decided to try an unconventional lifestyle as a polyamorous family.

Although he permitted Ina's marriage to Chaegyŏng, it was not easy for Tŏk'un to accept his wife's other husband. Feeling vengeful, he tried fooling around with other women. Yet, he could not fall in love with another person. Furthermore, Ina's pregnancy turned him back into a loyal husband. At the same time, the baby changed the relationship between Tŏk'un and Chaegyŏng. After the baby was born, there were increasing occasions in which they had to interact. Ultimately, Tŏk'un got used to his unique familial situation. For the sake of the happiness of their unconventional family, Tŏk'un, as Ina suggested, decided to move to a Western country where, they believed, the family could live freely without societal judgments. In brief, *My Wife Got Married* is the story of how an ordinary man—who strongly resisted polyamory—gradually yet painfully accepted his wife's other love and built a polyamorous family.

Significantly, the story is narrated by the male protagonist, which shapes the way *My Wife Got Married* represents polyamory. As the story provides detailed descriptions of Tŏk'un's confusion, shock, and agony over his wife's polyamorous lifestyle, the audience empathizes with his struggles. The story, however, offers very little explanation about its female protagonist. By seeing only Tŏk'un's side of the story, the audience cannot know what made Ina reject monogamy, why she wanted to get married, what difficulties she experienced in having two husbands, and so on. That is, the audience is not given a chance to understand the female character. Because the story is told from Tŏk'un's perspective, the audience can only experience Ina through *the male protagonist's gaze*, which mystifies and fantasizes Ina and her polyamorous life. The story portrays Ina in as unrealistic a way as it does her polyamorous lifestyle. Except for her polyamory, Ina is depicted as a man's perfect fantasy—a woman who fulfills his sexual desires while also serving as the model wife, daughter-in-law, and mother.

Above all, Ina is described as a sexually irresistible woman who understands the world of men. Ina shares Tŏk'un's biggest passion, soccer. Tŏk'un narrates that she is one of the few women who loves and knows more about soccer than he does. Of course, soccer is not the only thing that he enjoys with Ina. In the novel, he often expresses his satisfaction with their sex life. According to him, she knows how to make a man perform his best in bed. Interestingly, he describes this satisfaction by calling her "the best shadow striker." In soccer, the shadow striker is a player who remains in the background while helping the striker make goals. Although Ina is a sexually active woman who pursues sexual pleasure with multiple men, she is described as playing a supportive, submissive, or subordinate role in their sex life. That being said, her sexual performance never transgresses against his domination. When Tŏk'un asks her about her sexual fantasies, her answer clearly indicates the role the "perfect woman" is expected to play according to heterosexual men; her answer is "sex with Tŏk'un."

Ina is also a flawless wife and daughter-in-law. Before they get married, Tŏk'un was already attracted to Ina's cooking and cleaning skills. He was just as amazed at how good she was at cooking as he was with her sexual prowess. He was happy with her desire to clean his home whenever she came over, especially because she did it silently without making him feel embarrassed about his messiness. Not only that, Ina is also a perfect daughter-in-law. While struggles between in-laws—especially between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law—are common in South Korea, Ina is a dedicated daughter-in-law who takes on all the hard work for Tŏk'un's family events. Indeed, Tŏk'un's mother told him that Ina is "impeccable in every aspect."

After her second marriage with Chaegyŏng, Ina is portrayed as an even more unrealistically "perfect" woman. Juggling running a house, taking care of a husband and in-laws, and working as a professional is not easy. Yet, Ina flawlessly does it, not only for Tŏk'un but also for Chaegyŏng. While working as a full-time programmer, Ina successfully manages two households, two husbands, and two sets of in-laws. Moreover, one of the ways that Tŏk'un gets revenge for her second marriage is to entirely abandon housework. Although he did not take on an equitable share of the domestic work before, he does "not touch any housework at all" after she marries Chaegyŏng. And she completes all the housework by

herself without complaining. Through her work, the "house got tidied up, the refrigerator was filled with dishes she made, and a pile of laundry was done and nicely folded in the wardrobe" (Pak 2006, 102).

In South Korean society where the patriarchal nuclear family model strongly operates, Ina is far from ordinary in her decision to pursue polyamory. She is a courageous, strong woman who fights for her own happiness regardless of the social norm of monogamy (H. Kim 2015, 164-165). However, while Ina is pursuing a polyamorous life for her own happiness, her life is not centered on herself but on her two husbands, their families, and her daughter. Having two husbands, Ina willingly embraces dual domestic labor, dual familial duties, and dual subjection to the patriarchal system (Kang 2009, 531; H. Kim 2015, 166). In this regard, the polyamorous life which *My Wife Got Married* describes is a pure fantasy created from *the patriarchal male perspective*. Without involving any change of patriarchal familial relations, *My Wife Got Married* created a fantasy character, Ina— a sexually irresistible woman who can make a man perform his best in bed and at the same time who is the model wife, daughter-in-law, and mother—to represent a polyamorous romance. Whilst in reality South Korean women have too much of the burden of domestic labor with only one husband,[50] Ina has no problem managing two households and two husbands along with her own successful career. Her polyamorous life appears as an impossible practice, which only a "superwoman" to achieve.[51]

While portraying polyamory as a fantasy through its unrealistic female character, *My Wife Got Married* also suggests that polyamory is an inherently Western practice, which is impossible in South Korea. One way *My Wife Got Married* indicates this impossibility is its ending. Both the novel and the film end with Tŏk'un, Ina, Chaegyŏng, and their daughter leaving for a Western country for the sake of their happiness; in the novel, they move to New Zealand where Tŏk'un and Ina went for their honeymoon, whereas in the film, they settle in Spain, a location related to Tŏk'un and Ina's shared passion for soccer.

[50] OECD data showed that as of 2009, South Korean women did unpaid domestic work (227 minutes per day) 5 times longer than men (45 minutes per day). Compare this to American women, who did 1.7 times as much unpaid domestic work as men. (Source: http://www.index.go.kr/potal/main)

[51] Sukhyŏn Kim, "It's the world in which a wife has got married again…but why?", *Pressian*, November 3, 2008, http://www.pressian.com/news/article/?no=91689#09T0

While *My Wife Got Married* has a happy ending, it is noticeable that all the characters involved in the polyamorous lifestyle leave South Korea and go West.

The film displays the illegibility of polyamory in South Korea more dramatically than the novel does. The novel portrays moving to New Zealand as Ina's decision. She tells Tŏk'un that due to other people's scrutiny, it would be difficult to raise their daughter in South Korea and suggests settling in New Zealand to be freer from societal judgements. While the novel merely speculates about the social repercussions of polyamory, the film explicitly depicts them. One day, Tŏk'un realizes that his colleagues are gossiping about him after reading a magazine article which presented Ina as Chaegyŏng's wife and assuming that his marriage had ended. Although he had not gotten divorced, he could not say anything to his colleagues because revealing his polyamorous family would be more damaging than bearing the social stigma of being divorced. Leaving South Korea is the inevitable price they have to pay for their polyamorous familial life, insomuch as polyamory is an illegible, invisible lifestyle in South Korea.[52]

Unsurprisingly, as the novel explains polyamory as an originally Western practice, Ina is from the US. Although there are no descriptions about when her family moved to the US or why she now lives alone in Seoul, her parents are ostensibly US immigrants. After Ina gave birth to her daughter, she stayed with her parents in the US for a few months. The fact that Ina is from an immigrant family in the US is not coincidental. It clearly signals that her polyamorous desire is from the West. As Gopinath (2005, 19) illustrated, within South Asian public culture, the queer female subject, in contrast to the nationalist figure of the pure, authentic "woman," is rendered as "foreign," due to being too long in the West. In line with this argument, I claim that Ina's American childhood positions her polyamorous desire as a Western product foreign to South Korean society.

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[52] While Pak promised a happy ending for Tŏk'un, Ina, Chaegyŏng, and their daughter's polyamorous familial life by making them leave South Korea and go West, it is doubtful that this would actually bring them happiness. As he described in the novel, polyamorous people form their own communities and organizations in the American and European countries, but it does not mean polyamory is not prosecuted in Western countries. Also, since polyamorous communities, as shown in chapter two, predominantly consist of 'white' people, it is probable that Tŏk'un, Ina, and Chaegyŏng, as people of color, would have a hard time getting along with polyamorous communities in the country they newly settle in.

Not only does the text imply the impossibility of polyamory in South Korea, extra-textual media make the same suggestion. In media coverage about the novel and the film *My Wife Got Married*, polyamory is repeatedly discussed as an unrealistic Western sexual lifestyle. For instance, Son Yechin, who played Ina, expressed the impossibility of understanding Ina's character: "To be honest, Ina was a woman whom I couldn't identify with".[53] Son then illustrated that, to perform the role, she tried to develop a picture of Ina's personal background—including what kind of unconventional familial relationships she had and what experiences she might have had in foreign countries—that made her become polyamorous. The emphasis on the impossibility of polyamory also similarly appeared in the novelist Pak Hyŏnuk's interview. Pak argued that, by writing a story of polyamorous romance, he aimed to suggest that monogamy might not be the absolute standard for all human lives. Nevertheless, when asked if he could ever have a polyamorous girlfriend, he distanced himself from polyamory: "I have lived in the Republic of Korea for thirty-eight years and seven months. How could I deviate so easily away from the value system that I have naturalized and internalized for so long? Knowing there are different forms of love and marriage is not the same as accepting them in reality. [Laughs]".[54] Pak clearly views polyamory as a valid lifestyle for another time and society, but as "an unrealistic fantasy in the South Korean society in which we are currently living".[55]

When the novel and film *My Wife Got Married* came out, their representation of polyamory was certainly radical. Given that the abolition of concubinage in South Korea was achieved through women's efforts (Mah, 2016), Ina is a progressive, unorthodox female character. Her claim to two husbands suggests a new possibility to transform the patriarchal marriage system (H. Kim 2015, 165). Undeniably, *My Wife Got Married* contributed to increasing social awareness of polyamory as a new sexual lifestyle among South Koreans.

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[53] Yongsŏng Mun, "Son Yechin, "Ina is a Brazen woman, I don't Understand Her," *Asia Business Daily*, October 10, 2008, http://www.asiae.co.kr/news/view.htm?idxno=2008100617485598254
[54] Chuyŏn Pak, "My Wife Got Married, Interview with novelist Pak Hyŏnuk," *Weekly Kyŏnghyang*, May 9, 2006, http://weekly.khan.co.kr/khnm.html?mode=view&code=116&artid=11954
[55] Kain Ku, "Pak Hyŏnuk who won Segye Literary Award for his novel 'My Wife Got Married'", *W-Dong-A*, April 12, 2006, http://woman.donga.com/3/all/12/135126/1

My analysis of *My Wife Got Married*, however, reveals that in the 2000s, polyamory was mainly described as *a Western lifestyle* which is impossible in South Korea. Two dominant ideologies underlie such a representation of polyamory. The first one is patriarchism. As reviewed in the previous section, the patriarchal nuclear family model strongly operated in the 2000s even though South Korean families were changing after the financial crisis. Given the dominant ideology of the patriarchal nuclear family, polyamory—especially the polyamorous female subject who transgresses the pure and loyal wife's role—occupies a space of impossible fantasy. In *My Wife Got Married*, Ina's earnest conformation to patriarchal logic ironically unveils the impossibility of polyamory. The second one is ethnonationalism. Portraying non-normative sexual and gendered bodies as Western foreign products is an ethnonationalist trope that has been commonly used in South Korea since the 1960s (Henry 2020, 242). Through this trope, which represents any "deviant" sexual bodies as virtually unthinkable alien beings, South Korea has sought to build a pure national identity in contrast to the so-called West. This trope was also utilized in the public discourse of polyamory in the 2000s. Depicting polyamory as a Western spectacle, both *My Wife Got Married* and media discussions of it repeatedly claimed that South Korea was a pure nation where polyamory was impossible.

After all, while the crisis of 1997 unyieldingly had an impact on South Korean families, the dominant ideology of the patriarchal nuclear family still remained undiminished. The novel and film *My Wife Got Married* clearly indicated such dynamics of South Korean families in the 2000s. In the aftermath of the financial crisis, *My Wife Got Married* spotlighted polyamory as an alternative type of family. Yet, as central to *My Wife Got Married* is the ideology of the patriarchal nuclear family, it was mainly the portrait of polyamory: an impossible Western fantasy.

The Rise of Samp'osedae in the 2010s: A New Generation Renouncing Dating, Marriage, and Childbirth

While the Asian financial crisis of 1997 brought about immediate, visible impacts on South Korean families, it had even more significant long-term effects on South Korean modern familism culture. Due to

the broadscale neoliberal reconstruction of the socioeconomic system after 1997, South Koreans were forced to reorganize their private, family lives according to neoliberal logic, while reevaluating the meaning and value of the heteropatriarchal nuclear family in their lives. With regard to this reevaluation, this section focuses on the rise of the discourse of samp'osedae as a symptom of the shifting value of the nuclear family among South Koreans in the 2010s.

Samp’osedae is a neologism resulting from the combination of “sedae” (세대, 世代) and “samp’o” (삼포, 三抛). While “sedae” means generation in Korean, “sam” means three, and “p’o” is an abbreviation for “p’ogi” (포기,抛棄), which means to give up. A combination of these three words, samp’osedae signifies the generation who has given up three things, namely courtship, marriage, and childbirth due to economic hardship.[56] As samp'osedae emerged as a serious issue in the early 2010s, the discursive landscape of intimacy, marriage, and family showed a critical transition with the increase of heterogeneous, competing discourses surrounding them. By analyzing the discourse of samp'osedae based on media articles, government reports, and statistical date, this section contextualizes changes in the South Korean social discourse of polyamory in the 2010s.

In what follows, I first trace how samp'osedae arose as a serious social concern in the post-crisis contexts of South Korea. Drawing from a concept from queer theory, namely chrononormativity, I illustrate how samp'osedae was widely perceived as a national crisis, which threatens the future of South Korea. I then discuss how the rise of the samp'osedae discourse signifies a fundamental change in the normative logic of the heteropatriarchal nuclear family in post-crisis, neoliberal South Korean society. Although young people’s economic hardships are an integral part of the main narrative for why samp'osedae emerged, conflicting narratives have also appeared to explain samp'osedae. I argue that the rise of samp'osedae, rather than simply being a sign of young people’s economic adversity, reveals the growing importance of individual freedom, choice, and self-realization in an individual’s private life in South Korea; and ultimately,

[56] As the term samp’osedae came into prominence, people also started to use derivatives of it depending on the number of things given up—such as sap’o sedae (which adds friendship to the list), op’osedae (which adds both friendship and home ownership) and enp’osedae (which indicates a person who has given up a non-specified number of things).

the samp'osedae discourse constituted a critical transition in the social discourses of intimacy, marriage, and family—which ultimately contributed to changing the polyamory discourse in the 2010s.

The Poor Youth Who Need to be Rescued

In May 2011, *Kyŏnghyang Shinmun* launched a series of feature articles on the welfare state. The second article in this series, "The Overburdened South Korean Family," introduced the term "samp'osedae" to describe a young generation who had given up the three important life events of courtship, marriage, and childbirth due to economic hardships.

> When the state passes the cost of public welfare along to families, it cannot be a sustainable welfare model. As the burden that families must bear crosses a certain threshold, people are no longer willing to have families, and low fertility grows into a social risk. This is exactly what is happening to South Korean youth today. Due to job instability, student loan repayment, an unpromising job market with a high unemployment rate, skyrocketing housing costs, and excessive living expenses, young people either give up or indefinitely postpone dating, marriage, and childbirth. The emergence of 'samp'osedae' who have discarded the three most basic steps for having a family implies that the conventional family model is breaking down in South Korean society in the absence of a public welfare system.[57]

Recounting the adversity of three young people—part-time worker Sangchin who quit college because of tuition costs, irregular worker Chihye who could barely afford to repay her student loans, and Yunchin who had long been unemployed after graduating from college—the article illustrated that none of them showed interest in marriage or childbirth in the future, and they all considered dating to be a luxury they could not afford. The article claimed that the burden put on young people's shoulders because of the lack of welfare programs was causing the breakdown of the conventional nuclear family model. This clear, provocative message instantly attracted a huge amount of attention from the government and civil society as well as the young generation. Samp'osedae became a significant social issue throughout the 2010s.

While this *Kyŏnghyang Shinmun* article primarily triggered the rise of the samp'osedae discourse, samp'osedae grew into a serious problem because of widespread concern over the dissolution of the family as well as the poor youth. At the time of the article's publication, South Korean society was already

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[57] Chŏngin Yu and Pak Ŭnha, "The overburdened South Korean family," *Kyŏnghyang Shinmun*, May 11, 2011, http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=201105112139085&code=940702

bombarded with discourses of the poor youth, initiated by the book *The 880,000won Generation* (*P'alshipp'almanwŏn Sedae*) (Lee and Yun 2018; Song and Lee 2018).[58] Written by economist U Sŏkhun and social critic Pak Kwŏnil, the book was published in 2007, ten years after the Asian financial crisis. By analyzing socioeconomic conditions faced by the young generation under the post-crisis contexts, U and Pak argued that young people necessarily endure economic hardship as they are entrapped by high college tuition, high housing costs, and a precarious labor market. As U and Pak (2007) noted, inexperienced young workers were hit most directly by the neoliberal reforming of the labor market. While the youth unemployment rate[59] declined after its peak of over 12% during the crisis, it remained around 7.5% in the 2000s, which is 3% higher than its level in 1996 (**Figure 3.1**). With increasing labor flexibility, the youth also accounted for the largest portion of irregular employment workers (Grubb et al. 2007; Schauer 2018). According to the Korean Labor Institute, the youth held only 21% of regular jobs, but held 25% of non-permanent jobs and 26% of part-time jobs in 2011 (**Figure 3.2**) (Sŏng and Chŏng 2011). As a result, in post-crisis South Korean society, the young generation was forced to endure cruel competition and to undergo ceaseless self-development—such as participating in study-aboard or internship programs, obtaining various certifications or additional educational degrees, or gaining high grades on the English Proficiency Test—in order to find stable jobs (Abelmann et al. 2009; Yoon 2014; and Cho 2015).

Along with the extensive discourse on the poor youth, a prevalent concern over the collapse of nuclear family also emerged. As discussed in the first section, the discourse of "the family at risk" started to grow after the outbreak of the financial crisis in 1997. Concerning statistical indices—such as marriage rate, divorce rate, and fertility rate—have suggested the trend of the dissolution of the nuclear family.

[58] Authors, U Sŏkhun and Pak Kwŏnil called the South Korean young generation as "880,000won generation" since the average salary for irregular workers in their twenties was about 880,000won in the 2000s. According to them, this is before tax reduction, and after taxes, the amount of money that a young irregular worker would be even lower. In the book, they argued that with this small amount of money, young generation's quality of life may well be unbearable, and would be impossible to think about buying a house after working for a couple of decades (U and Pak, 2007:63). While "880,000won generation" was also used as the title of their book, it soon became a byword for South Korean millennials in the 2000s. (In 2008, the average exchange rate from USD to Korean won (KRW) was 1,105. Thus, 880,000won was approximately equal to $800 USD in 2008.)

[59] While the UN and OECD calculate the youth unemployment rate based on people aged 15 to 24 years, South Korea uses a different age range, 15 to 29 years. This is mainly related to South Korean men's late entrance into the workforce due to serving in the military for 21 to 23 months under the conscription system.

Particularly, the low fertility rate was the biggest concern of South Korean society. While the fertility rate continually declined in the 1980s and 1990s, the trend accelerated in the 2000s, and as of 2005, the rate was 1.076, lower than that of Japan and Germany (**Figure 3.3**). To address this, the South Korean government founded the Presidential Committee on Aging Society and Population Policy (*Chŏch'ulsan' Goryŏngsahoe Wiwŏnhoe*) in 2004. Many central and local governmental policies were introduced to boost the birth rate in the 2000s. With increased governmental efforts, the fertility rate slightly rebounded in 2010, but in 2011, it was 1.24, still far lower than the OECD average of 1.77.

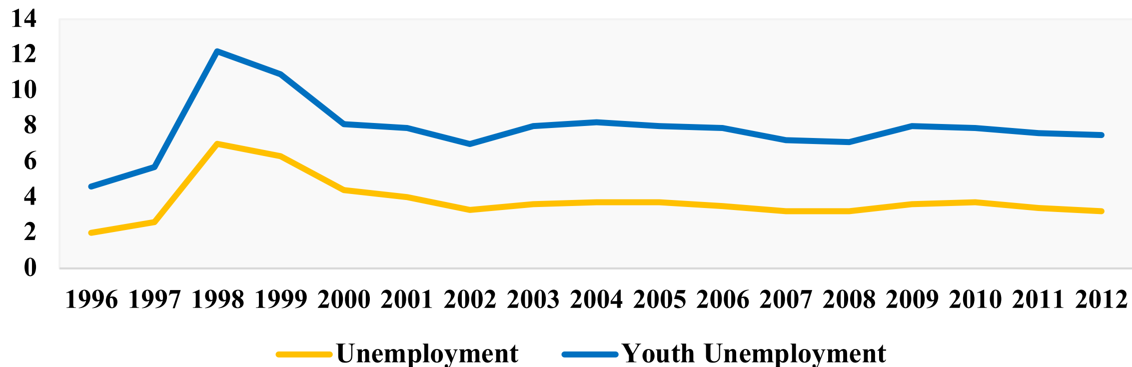

Figure 3.1 Unemployment Rate (Unit: %), Source: http://www.index.go.kr

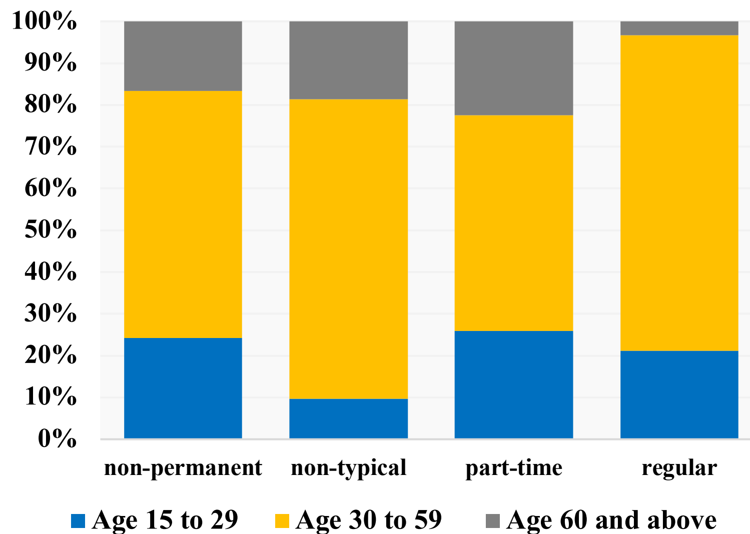

Figure 3.2 Employment by Age in 2011,
Source: 2011 KLI Labor Statistics on Non-Regular Workers

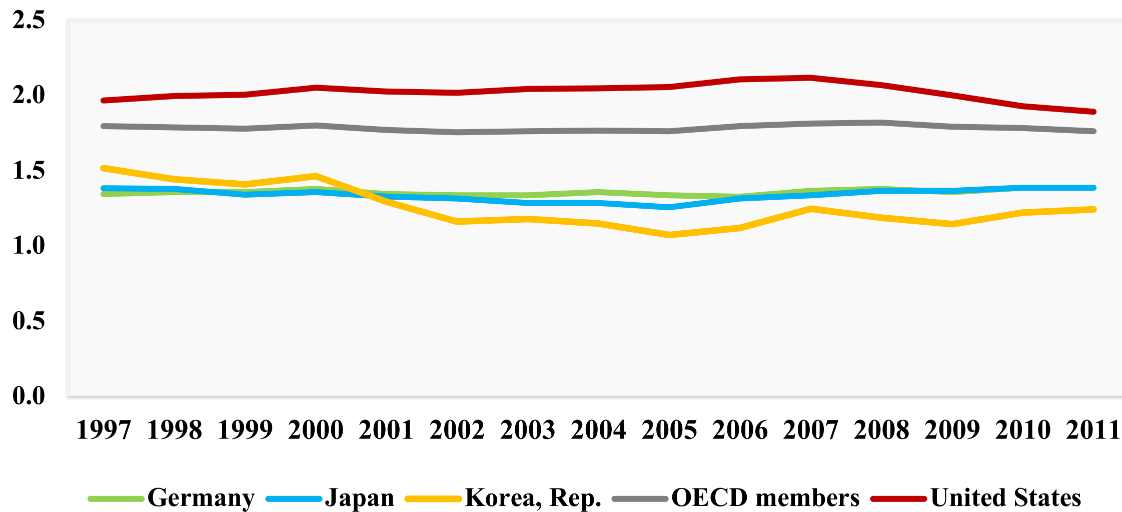

Figure 3.3 Fertility Rate (Births per Woman), Source: https://data.worldbank.org

The *Kyŏnghyang Shinmun* article on samp'osedae illuminated the close connection of two serious social problems—the poor youth and the collapse of the family. By attributing the rise of samp'osedae, a generation who had lost or was holding off on "the very natural desire" for intimacy, marriage, and childbirth, to economic burdens, the article convincingly argued that young people's economic hardship had worsened the trend of family dissolution. However, the reason that samp'osedae had such a far-reaching impact on South Korean society was not simply because it showed the connection between these two issues. Rather, by combining these two issues, samp'osedae addresses an entirely different, yet more urgent, issue—*a crisis of chrononormativity*.

In *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, Elizabeth Freedman (2010, 3) illustrated chrononormativity as the temporal regulation used to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity. While our temporal experience, which seems like a natural, somatic fact, is constructed by institutional, cultural forces, she illustrated that individuals are forced to embody a so-called "proper" temporality to make their lives legible and acceptable. Similarly, Halberstam (2005) claimed that in Western cultures, the life cycle of the human subject is ruled by the middle-class logic of reproductive

temporality. The individual's life course is scripted by a schedule of imagined activities related to heterosexual reproduction. Although not everyone follows this temporality, Halberstam (2005, 5) claimed that most people internalize it as desirable and natural. In the case of South Korean society, as John Cho (2020) noted, the heterosexual nuclear family has served as the normative logic to regulate an individual's temporal experience since it was built under Park Chung Hee's developmental regime According to this logic, South Koreans arrange their life course—when is the "proper time" to get a job, prepare a house, get married, and have children—and those who lag behind this timeline are stigmatized or socially invisible (Cho 2020, 271).

What samp'osedae unveiled to South Korean society was that economic hardship had increasingly made individuals either fail or refuse to follow "proper" temporality. Samp'osedae sent a clear message that chrononormativity was endangered in the post-crisis contexts of South Korea. This message was especially alarming because of the apparent connection between chrononormativity and national progress. Since chrononormativity is used to maximize productivity, properly temporalized individual bodies, Freedman (2010) indicated, serve a nation's economic interests. Halberstam (2005) likewise stated that reproductive temporality is inherently tied to a nation's progress since it engenders inheritance by which one generation passes its values, wealth, and goods on to the next. Reproductive temporality lies at the core of the way a nation's future is envisioned (Edelman 2004). As such, when the *Kyŏnghyang Shinmun* article pointed out the rise of samp'osedae—a generation who had abandoned the life course scripted by the logic of the heterosexual nuclear family—it ultimately warned the society that its future was at risk. It was *a threat to South Korea's future*.

In the South Korean media discourse of the 2010s, many new reports indeed depicted samp'osedae as a critical challenge to the nation's sustainability, as can be seen in the following headlines: "Unable to Afford Raising a Child… Vicious Cycle of Low Childbirth-Low Growth",[60] "Insecure Future. No Marriage

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[60] SBS Eight O'Clock News, "Unable to Afford Raising a Child… Vicious Cycle of Low Childbirth-Low Growth," aired September 30, 2012, on SBS, https://news.sbs.co.kr/news/endPage.do?news_id=N1001407932&plink=OLDURL

or Child for Me",[61] and "Bankruptcy in Less than 20 Years: Lowering Tax Revenue and Increasing National Debt"[62]. Highlighting how economic adversity forced young people to abandon dating, marriage, and childbirth, these articles asserted that samp'osedae endangers the nation's progress:

> *If the number of newly born babies is continuously decreasing at this rapid pace, it is possible to imagine that the nation will shut down someday*. As you know, the number of newborn babies this year has already decreased to the level of 40 million per year, and it is obvious that it will go down further. Now, the fertility rate is 1.13 per woman and I'm also sure that it will go down to 0%. Yesterday, I read an interesting essay written by a young person. S/he mentions that dating is laborious. What does that mean? It means s/he can't even think of marriage, which takes much more labor than dating. Getting a job itself is not easy, and it is not uncommon for a couple, both the man and woman, to be irregular workers. For them, marriage might not be an affordable choice. But, suppose that the couple gets married anyway. Given their insecure lives, how can they have a child? I think *it's a critical point that the government should take action about*.[63]

During a panel discussion on the YTN news program, social critic Lee Chonghun pitched the urgency of addressing samp'osedae. As young people are forgoing marriage and childbirth due to the economic adversity, the nation's future is at risk. Thus, he argued the future of South Korea depends on society creating an environment in which young people can afford dating, marriage, and children.

In short, samp'osedae arose as an urgent social issue under the post-crisis South Korean contexts in the 2010s, indicating a crisis of chrononormativity due to young people's economic struggles. Put another way, by unveiling that young individuals were increasingly abandoning the "proper" life course scripted by the logic of the heterosexual nuclear family, samp'osedae was considered as a risk to South Korea's growth. Thus, scholars, politicians, journalists, and civic organizations claimed that it was necessary to solve young people's economic struggles and rescue samp'osedae for the sake of the nation's future. Many governmental policies were implemented to help samp'osedae, such as extra benefits for unemployed youth, rental housing programs, and loan programs for low-income young people.

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[61] KBS News 9, "Insecure Future. No Marriage or Child for Me," aired February 20, 2013, on KBS, https://news.kbs.co.kr/news/view.do?ncd=2616201&ref=DA

[62] Kang Arŭm, "Bankruptcy in Less than 20 Years: Lowering Tax Revenue and Increasing National Debt," Han'gug Ilbo, February 24, 2015, https://www.hankookilbo.com/News/Read/201502240478491498

[63] *YTN Sisa T'angt'ang*, "The lowest number of births ever before... Any solutions?" aired February 22, 2017, on YTN, https://www.ytn.co.kr/_ln/0103_201702221930475466

The Young Generation Who Choose Not to Pursue Dating, Marriage, and Childbirth

It is undeniable that young people's bleak economic conditions, which mainly resulted from the reconstruction of the economic system after 1997, played a critical role in the rise of samp'osedae. But can the samp'osedae phenomenon be fully explained by young people's economic hardship? With enough economic support, would samp'osedae, as many scholars, politicians and journalists claimed, revert back to the "proper" life course scripted by the logic of the heterosexual nuclear family? The answer is most likely no. By closely looking at the samp'osedae discourse in the 2010s, I showcase that the rise of samp'osedae rather marked an essential change in the logic of the heterosexual nuclear family that structured the individual's life course in the post-crisis contexts.

Along with the economic explanation of samp'osedae, the media discourse of the 2010s utilized another popular narrative to account for samp'osedae: *the young generation has become pessimistic about and calculative toward dating, marriage, and family.* In identifying samp'osedae as a crisis of chrononormativity, this narrative mainly focuses not on young people's economic hardship but on the loss of the "traditional" values of love, marriage, and family among the young generation.

> Love has become a particularly taxing assignment for South Korean young people in their twenties and thirties, for whom it is sometimes considered a luxury. The term 'samp'osedae' that was coined to describe young people who cannot help but abandon relationships, marriage, and childbirth betrays the reality of South Korean young people. There are too many social, structural obstacles that make it difficult for young people to follow their emotions and devote themselves to love. *It is a cold-hearted society in which people prioritize money, jobs, appearance and all other kinds of 'qualities' over love*.[64]

This narrative appears to lament the "cold-hearted" reality in which the young generation no longer has as much passion for romantic love as older generations had. Critical of the trend of samp'osedae, many news articles highlighted that young people came to have a calculative attitude toward love, marriage, and

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[64] Ko-ŭn Lee, "Professor Kwak Kŭmchu in the Department oof Psychology at Seoul National University, "What is Love: Psychology of Love,"" *Kyŏnghyang Shinmun*, July 12, 2012, https://www.khan.co.kr/feature_story/article/201207022117485
더구나 한국의 20~30 대 젊은이들에게 사랑은 때론 사치로 여겨질 정도로 어려운 일이 되었다. 연애, 결혼, 출산을 포기할 수밖에 없어 탄생한 용어 '삼포세대'는 이런 세태를 잘 보여준다. 감정에 충실하고 사랑에 목매는 절절한 연애를 하기에도 사회구조적 장애물이 많다. 돈, 직업, 미모 등 각종 '조건'이 사랑을 앞서는 냉정한 사회다.

family, as can be seen in the following headlines: "'Do You Long for Romantic Love?'… Love has Turned into a Commodity,"[65] "'Being in a Relationship is So Tiresome,' I Just Want Dating Around through Online Dating Applications,"[66] and "My Relationships Always Have a Sad Ending. Can I Improve My Relationships by Studying Them?"[67]. In these articles, samp'osedae is depicted as a "sorrowful" trend of the young generation no longer blindly pursuing love, marriage, and family.

In this narrative, love, marriage, and family are portrayed as pure and noble life experiences. Although admitting that young people are now under more difficult economic conditions than older generations, the narrative underscores that love, marriage, and family are the essential, genuine experiences of human life and that we ought to reaffirm their value. In a *Han'gyŏre* op-ed article, "Family, a Place Where Ethics Sprout," written by anthropologist Cho Hanhyechŏng, it is clear how the values of love, marriage, and family are romanticized:

> Fathers who have a secure job and mothers who wait for children with a meal prepared are disappearing. We have arrived in the era in which economic growth ends up being a disaster and in which risks are systematically produced, and actions that we take hastily in order to escape immediate insecurities lead to increased risks. A family that is formed by a couple busy calculating and controlling risks can sometimes be more heartless than a heartless society. … Family is a place where we form pure and authentic relationships. It is the place where motherhood raises children as independent persons without controlling them and fatherhood shows children the world of hospitality.[68]

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[65] Songi Pak, "Do you long for romantic love?'… Love has turned into a commodity," August 3, 2013, *Kyŏnghyang Shinmun*, http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=201308031102491&code=940100
[66] Pyŏngkuk Pak and Sŏ Chihye, "Being in a Relationship is So Tiresome,' I Just Want Dating Around through Online Dating Applications," October 20, 2014, *Herŏltŭgyŏngje,* http://news.heraldcorp.com/view.php?ud=20141020000268&md=20141020094151_BK
[67] Chŏngmin Yun, "My Relationship Always Gets a Sad Ending. Can I Improve My Relationship by studying it?", September 2, 2015, *Chungangilbo*, https://news.joins.com/article/18571826
[68] Cho Hanhyechŏng, "Family, a Place Where Ethics Sprout," May 5, 2015, *Han'gyŏre* http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/opinion/column/689868.html
안정된 직장을 다니는 아버지와 매일 식탁을 차리고 아이들을 기다리던 대기조 어머니들은 사라지고 있다. 경제성장과 발전이 재앙으로 돌아오는 시대, 위험이 체계적으로 생산되는 시대가 도래했고 섣불리 불안에서 벗어나려는 움직임은 리스크를 더욱 높일 뿐이다. 치밀한 계산 아래 위험요소를 통제하고 관리하느라 바쁜 부부가 만들어내는 가정은 때로 비정한 사회보다 더 비정하다. … 가정은 쓸모를 따지지 않는 차원의 관계들이 만들어지는 곳이다. 아이를 지배하지 않으면서 주체화시키는 모성, 스스로 삶을 살아낼 자녀를 위해 환대의 장을 보여줄 부성이 자라는 곳이다.

I have thus far shown the two major ways in which samp'osedae was explained. While the first understands samp'osedae as a result of financial hardship, the second approaches samp'osedae as a decline in the values of love, marriage, and family. These two explanations, while focusing on different aspects of samp'osedae, share one basic premise: samp'osedae is a serious social issue to be addressed.

Rejecting that premise, however, another alternative understanding of samp'osedae, which emphasizes individual choice, emerged in the media discourse of the 2010s. Asserting that not everyone needs to follow the "proper" life course, this third narrative indicates that increasingly young people consider dating, marriage, and family not as "necessity" but as "choice."

> Although it is admittedly an apparent social trend that the marriage rate and childbirth rate are declining, the conclusive discourse arguing that young people have "given up" romantic relationships and marriage silences the various values about romantic relationships and marriage that have emerged [among young people]. *A growing number of young people consider romantic relationships and marriage not as "necessity" but as "choice." It means that there are increasing numbers of people who do not regard "the choice of not getting married" as a "non-normative" life course.* The term "samp'osedae," which has become a byword to describe the young generation's bleak reality, is now overused in the media. But there has rarely been any analysis that scrutinizes what values or perspectives young people have regarding romantic relationships and marriage.[69] (Emphasis Added)

This assessment is from the article, "Have We Really Become 'Sampo' because of 'Money'?" published by *GOHAM.20*—an independent magazine that represents young people's voices—in 2015. Criticizing the idea that economic adversity alone caused samp'osedae, this article suggests that the rise of samp'osedae is rather related to *the growing emphasis on individual choice*; instead of supposing that having a heterosexual nuclear family is necessary, young people design their own life course. Regarding samp'osedae, many news articles also showed a critical change in the normative value of the heterosexual

69 Verdad, "Have We Really Become 'Sampo' because of 'Money'?", October 6, 2015, *GOHAM.20,* http://www.goham20.com/46025/
이전 시대에 비해 결혼율과 출산율이 낮아지는 현상이 분명한 것은 인정한다고 하더라도 청년들이 연애와 결혼을 '포 기'했다고 단정 짓는 담론은 연애와 결혼에 대한 다양해진 가치관을 묵살한다. 연애와 결혼이 인생의 '필수'가 아닌 '선 택'으로 생각하는 청년들이 많아졌다. 이제는 '결혼을 하지 않겠다'라는 말을 해도 그것을 '비정상'적인 삶의 궤도로 간주하 지 않는 사람들이 늘어나고 있다는 말이다. '삼포세대'는 청년들의 어려운 현실의 '대명사'가 되어 각종 매체에도 '청년 세대'를 지칭하는 단어로 남용되고 있다. 그러나 그 담론 속에서 실제로 청년들이 연애와 결혼과 대해서 어떤 가치관을 가지고 있는지, 분석이 이루어지는 경우는 거의 없다.

nuclear family model among young people, as the followings titles demonstrate: "It's not 'Give Up' but 'Reject,'"[70] "People no Longer Think Childrearing is an Investment for their Own Future,"[71] "We are Different, the Era of Individualism has Arrived,"[72] and "Is Marriage Optional or Necessary?"[73]. Far from being poor youth who cannot afford dating, marriage, and family, samp'osedae is presented as a new generation who willingly makes choices for their life courses, while refusing the heterosexual nuclear family model.

In conjunction with the rise of samp'osedae in the 2010s, noticeable changes appeared in the public discourses of the heterosexual nuclear family. When the emergence of samp'osedae revealed a crisis of chrononormativity, South Koreans became more open about and expressive of their different choices for intimacy, marriage, and family than ever before. With the explosion of heterogeneous discourses about love, marriage, and family, the visibility of people who were considered to have strayed away from the "proper" life course increased.

Significantly, the newly-coined term pihon (비혼, 非婚), which had barely appeared in the media discourse of the early 2000s, became a common expression in the 2010s to indicate single people, replacing mihon (미혼, 未婚). Since the Korean word for single, mihon, *de facto* signifies the status of not being married *yet*, many single people who "choose" not to get married opt to use the word pihon instead, which simply means not being married (Lee 2015, 78). Opposing social perceptions that normalize marriage as part of one's life course, South Koreans have begun to perceive being single as a legitimate lifestyle (S. Kim 2016). Following this trend, in the 2010s, single people also started to speak up against social and legal discrimination—such as the tax system and housing policies that favor married couples.[74]

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[70] Hyŏngch'an Im, "It's not 'Give Up' but 'Reject'," January 16, 2012, *Han'gyŏre*, http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/opinion/column/514981.html
[71] Hŭisŏn Cho, "People no Longer Think Childrearing is an Investment for their Own Future," November 25, 2013, *Seoul Shinmun,* http://www.seoul.co.kr/news/newsView.php?id=20131125006002
[72] Hou Yun, "We are Different, the Era of Individualism has Arrived," September 8, 2019, *Kyŏnghyang Shinmun*, http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?art_id=201909071859001
[73] Chuye Na, "Is Marriage Optional or Necessary?," October 5, 2016, *Maeilgyŏngje*, https://www.mbn.co.kr/news/culture/3025212
[74] Cho Hyechŏng, "Single People in Their Thirties, their Social Hardship," *Han'gyŏre21*, March 1, 2012, http://h21.hani.co.kr/arti/special/special_general/31472.html

Social discourse about unconventional alternative families that diverged from the heterosexual monogamous nuclear family also grew throughout the 2010s. In 2012, the feminist organization UNNInetwork, for instance, held a photo exhibition titled *Not Allowed for the Normal Family* (*Chŏngsanggajok Kwallambulgajŏn*). Illuminating the everyday, mundane lives of non-normative families—such as single-parent families, families of same-sex couples, and families of choice—the exhibition drew social attention to various types of families that have always existed but that have not always been socially recognized (**Figure 3.4**). The critically acclaimed documentary film *The Two Lines* (Tugaeŭi Sŏn) also featured non-normative family structures.[75] Tracing the story of a cohabitating couple who decided to give birth without getting a marriage license, the film portrayed how the state controls individuals' private lives. Along with these artistic depictions, a legislative bill for the legal protection of cohabitating couples was proposed in 2015.[76] As such, different types of unconventional families started to demand recognition as families and developed a political movement for legal rights in the 2010s.

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[75] Ilho Chang, "Living as Unmarried Parents in Korea," May 6, 2011, *Sisa In*, https://www.sisain.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=10116

[76] Chaetŏk Lee, "'Life Partnership'… We Too Are Families," Jaunary 14, 2018, *Kyŏnghyang Shinmun*, http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=201801022304005&code=940100

Figure 3.4 Poster of Photo Exhibition, *Not Allowed For the Normal Family.*
(Source: www.unninetwork.net)

In the early 2010s, samp'osedae emerged in South Korea as an alarming message about a crisis of chrononormativity due to young people's economic adversity. Showing conflicting illustrations of samp'osedae, however, my analysis indicates that samp'osedae was a complex phenomenon surrounding the shifting value of the heterosexual nuclear family model and the increasing emphasis on individual freedom and choice in one's private life. I claim the rise of samp'osedae marks *a significant change in the normative logic of the heterosexual nuclear family, which has served to regulate South Koreans' life course since the Park Chung Hee period*. Within the post-crisis neoliberal context—which forced individuals to be subjects of endless self-development for survival in the competitive labor market—it appears inevitable that South Koreans had to re-evaluate the heteropatriarchal nuclear family model through the neoliberal logic that emphasizes individual freedom, choice, and self-development. Some individuals were compelled to give up having a nuclear family due to the lack of economic resources (K. Park 2011; Kim and Lee 2019),

whereas other individuals voluntarily refused to pursue marriage or childbirth for the sake of individual freedom and self-realization (Ho 2014; Sung 2014; S. Kim 2016).

To be clear, I do not mean that this change is a radical transformation or breakdown of the logic of the heteropatriarchal nuclear family. As shown in media discourses that emphasized the traditional values of love, marriage, and family, the logic of the heteropatriarchal nuclear family still remains powerful, and social, political forces continue to protect it as the dominant logic regulating an individual's life course. But, that notwithstanding, what the samp'osedae discourse clearly suggests is that young South Koreans, while following the values of individual freedom and choice, no longer take the heteropatriarchal nuclear family model for granted as natural or necessary for constructing their life course.

Through the rise of samp'osedae, what surfaced in South Korean society in the 2010s was the extent of the political battlefield surrounding the heterosexual nuclear family model. In "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," Gayle Rubin claimed that the sexual system, far from being monolithic and omnipotent, entails "continuous battles over the definition, evaluations, arrangements, privileges and costs of sexual behaviors" (2011, 165). When the sexual system operates based upon the hierarchy formed according to single sexual norm, Rubin demonstrated that there are *constant social, political, and legal struggles* through which individuals and groups try to alter or maintain the hierarchical position of their sexual conduct. In line with Rubin's explanation, I illustrate that by exposing a crisis of chrononormativity, samp'osedae brought social, political struggles both for and against the norm of the heterosexual nuclear family into view. In response to samp'osedae, people were on the one hand making social efforts to retain the norm of the heterosexual nuclear family, and on the other hand, various subjects appeared who contested this norm by expressing different desires for intimacy, marriage, and family. The rise of samp'osedae led to an explosion of heterogeneous discourses of intimacy, marriage, and family, which constituted a critical juncture for the social discourse of the heterosexual nuclear family in the 2010s. Through this, the social discourse of polyamory also started to change since the mid-2010s. With that in mind, the next section turns to an analysis of the changing cultural representations of polyamory in the 2010s.

Polyamory as an Anti-Normative, Feminist Choice in the 2010s

In this chapter, I have discussed cultural representations of polyamory in the 2000s. I have shown that, while polyamory first appeared in the social discourse in the 2000s intersecting with changes in South Korean families after 1997, it was primarily portrayed as an impossible Western fantasy under the dominant ideology of the heteropatriarchal nuclear family. However, there has been a significant change in cultural representations of polyamory with the rise of the samp'osedae discourse in the 2010s. As the samp'osedae discourse revealed the shifting value of the normative logic of the nuclear family in the post-crisis neoliberal context, South Korean society has increasingly paid attention to various alternative, non-normative lifestyles diverging from the nuclear family. In the wake of this change, there was also growing social attention to polyamory in the 2010s. Particularly, when feminist activism showed unprecedented growth in the 2010s, South Korean young feminists emerged promoting polyamory as a feminist practice for challenging patriarchal norms of intimacy. Hence, in this section, I scrutinize how the social discourse of polyamory changed in the 2010s in ways that are entangled with the rise of the samp'osedae discourse and the growth of feminist activism in South Korea.

In what follows, I first describe how media representations of polyamory changed in the 2010s. These representations portray polyamory as *an experimental yet valid option* to practice intimacy. I will then address South Korean feminists' increasing engagement in the discourse of polyamory. Through increasing feminist voices for polyamory, polyamory has gained new meaning as an anti-patriarchal, feminist practice in the late 2010s. Ultimately, I claim that in the 2010s' South Korean society, the public discourse of polyamory has grown with the increasing emphasis on the value of individual freedom and agency.

"A Precise Experiment on Love"

> Are you now in love with someone? Have you made a promise of everlasting passionate love for one person? Are the two of you building a serious relationship that no one else can break in on? Did you take a vow in front everyone that you would love your partner till

> death do you part? But, do you sometimes feel doubtful? Do you feel weighed down by the vow that you made? Do you also sometimes feel attracted to others?[77]

The above is the introduction from the article, “A Precise Experiment on Love, Polyamory,” printed by the weekly magazine *Han'gyŏre21* in February 2015.[78] This famous, popular article is often discussed as the first Korean media coverage of polyamory in South Korean polyamory communities, though multiple articles were published about polyamory prior to this. Nonetheless, many South Korean polyamorists remember this as the first media coverage because it was the first article to cover polyamory in South Korea. Based upon interviews with South Korean polyamorists, the article reported polyamory not as a foreign lifestyle that only Americans or Europeans can practice but as a type of intimate relationship that is in effect exercised by South Koreans. This article, in other words, introduced polyamory as a relevant, understandable practice, which any South Korean might have considered at least once.

To explain polyamory to its readers, the *Han'gyŏre21* article provided realistic, concrete descriptions of polyamorous relationships by drawing from stories of four South Korean polyamorists in their twenties. Chinhan, who said that monogamy made him feel enormous pressure to be the one and only for another person, recently reached an agreement with his partner to be polyamorous. On the other hand, both Tasom and Yena said that the prevalence of infidelity, dishonesty, and distrust made them sick of monogamy. Arguing that monogamy makes people possessive, Yena confessed that she had experienced self-destructive monogamous relationships, but that she was now happier in polyamorous relationships. Lastly, in a polyamorous relationship with her boyfriend for six years, Han Chiŭn claimed that polyamory was an experimental practice for resisting what is considered to be a “normative” relationship. Though it was not easy to manage emotional complexities such as jealousy at the beginning, she explained that she learned not only to accept and love her partner(s) as they are, but also to become a fully independent person as she is. Through their stories, the article claimed that polyamory is a non-exclusive intimate relationship

[77] Yesŭl Kang and Chiwŏn Ŏm, “A Precise Experiment on Love, Polyamory,” February 12, 2015, *Han'gyŏre21*, http://h21.hani.co.kr/arti/cover/cover_general/38989.html

[78] *Han'gyŏre21* is a leftist weekly news magazine, which is published by Hankyoreh Newspaper. *Han'gyŏre21*, compared to conservative magazines, tends to cover various gender and family issues with a liberal perspective.

practiced by people who pursue non-possessive, honest relationships on the basis of consent, trust, and constant communication.

I claim that this *Han'gyŏre21* article showed a fundamental change in the cultural image of polyamory from the 2000s to the 2010s. Rather than being portrayed as a Western spectacle, polyamory was portrayed as a relevant practice for South Koreans in the media discourse in the 2010s. Albeit experimental, polyamory appeared as a practice of intimacy that exists in and matters to South Korean society.

With regard to the changing cultural representation of polyamory in the 2010s, the webcomic *I Would Live as a Single* (*Tokshinŭro Salgetta*) written by Sŏnchŏngsŏng is another important instance.[79] Published weekly on the South Korean web portal naver.com from 2013 to 2016, the webcomic came to prominence because of its unconventional, yet realistic, story about polyamorous relationships. The main character of the comic is 35-year-old single woman Yuhŭi, who is a mediocre novelist. The story begins as Hyŏngmin, her boyfriend of six years, suggests trying polyamory. Believing that they are each other's lifelong partners, he claims that it would be good for them to explore new relationships with others while maintaining their partnership. Albeit reluctantly, Yuhŭi agrees because, while cherishing the deep intimacy with her boyfriend, she also wants new excitement in her life. They start dating other people, and she encounters emotional hardships, such as watching Hyŏngmin fall in love with a new person. On the other hand, she herself also develops a serious relationship with another person, Chaeda, who asks her to marry him. While Yuhŭi ultimately turns Chaeda down, this transforms the dynamic of her relationship with Hyŏngmin. The comic ends as she successfully publishes a new novel based upon her polyamorous experiences after breaking up with both Hyŏngmin and Chaeda.

[79] Sŏnchŏngsŏng's *I Would Live as a Single* was a popular webcomic series, which was also published as books. Because of the unconventional intimate relationships that the main characters practice, the webcomic initially faced harsh criticism. However, the webcomic gradually gained a large fandom, especially among young single women. In fact, as its subtitle *The Confession of* a *Woman who is Worried about Menopause* indicates, the main theme of this webcomic is not polyamory, but single women's lives. In the webcomic, many characters, including the main character, Yuhŭi, appear to be single for different reasons, and it paints very realistic portraits regarding not only their love lives, but also their economic and social struggles as single women.

This webcomic portrays polyamory in a significantly different way than Pak's novel *My Wife Got Married*. The biggest contrast between the novel and the webcomic is how main characters approach polyamory. As previously discussed, the novel centers on the male character Tŏk'un, who cannot understand polyamory yet tries to cope with his wife's other lover. Narrated from his perspective, the novel focuses on how he struggles to live with his polyamorous wife. In contrast, the webcomic is the story of the female character Yuhŭi and her exploration of polyamory with her boyfriend. Although polyamory was her boyfriend's suggestion, Yuhŭi actively engages in polyamorous relationships with others. And the webcomic illustrates the joys, frustrations, failures, and growth she experiences while exploring polyamory. The second contrast is regarding the endings of the narratives. Tŏk'un's story has a happy ending, as his polyamorous family moves to the New Zealand to find happiness. Yuhŭi's polyamory, on the contrary, ends with breakups. After ending her relationships, Yuhŭi continues her life as a single woman in South Korea and publishes a novel based on her experience of polyamory. Related to this, the third difference is how openly characters express their polyamorous relationships. Throughout the story, Tŏk'un never discloses his polyamorous marriage to anyone, and polyamory is a taboo that cannot be socially discussed. Meanwhile, Yuhŭi openly talks about polyamory with her friends, claiming it as her valid choice. Although facing condemnations from others, she is open and honest about her practice of polyamory.

As many South Korean polyamorists have noted, the webcomic convincingly describes a 35-year-old single woman's exploration of polyamory without romanticizing or demonizing it. While the novel, in spite of its happy ending, highlights the impossibility of polyamory in South Korea, the webcomic represents polyamory as a valid, worthwhile choice that individuals can make. As Yuhŭi narrates in the last episode, the webcomic suggests that polyamory is a meaningful experience which provides individuals with opportunities to grow and mature.

Although the representation of polyamory as an exotic Western spectacle has not completely disappeared, the *Han'gyŏre21* article and the webcomic *I Would Live as a Single* displayed a new representation of polyamory—an experimental, yet viable, way of practicing intimacy—in the South Korean social discourse of the 2010s. That notwithstanding, polyamory did not grow into a universally

accepted type of intimate relationship in the 2010s. Social stigmatization and persecution against nonmonogamy are still pervasive in South Korea. Yet, as competing desires came to the surface in the social discourse of love, marriage, and family in conjunction with the rise of samp'osedae, the very conditions in which South Koreans perceive polyamory changed. Polyamory emerged as an alternative form of intimacy against the heterosexual nuclear family model.

Polyamory as an Anti-Patriarchal Feminist Practice

While the social discourse of polyamory was experiencing significant changes in the 2010s, one of the most important changes was the increasing feminist interest in polyamory. As discussed in chapter one, feminism lies at the core of the development of polyamory in the US. Gender equality and sexual freedom are perceived as the principal elements of polyamory, and most of the American pioneering polyamorists claim to be feminists. In contrast, feminists did not engage in the early development of polyamory in South Korea. My analysis of *My Wife Got Married* has shown that the South Korean social discourse of polyamory did not emerge with the values of gender equality. Many feminists in fact criticized polyamory as "merely a progressive, liberal men's fantasy," which would create more oppression of women (S. Kim, 2008). Feminist hostility towards polyamory, however, began to change in the 2010s. With the historic rise of feminist movements in the 2010s, feminists tackled the patriarchal order of intimate practice. In this trend, feminists emerged who spotlight polyamory as non-normative, non-patriarchal, and non-possessive practice, and their voices have grown substantially to (re)shape the discourse of polyamory.

When it comes to South Korean feminist movements, the 2010s was a monumental period. In the wake of the political democratization of 1987, feminism became an important cultural, political force, drawing public attention to gender issues. Yet, feminism regressed soon after the financial crisis in 1997. During the 2000s, not only were women put in the front line of the economic crisis, forced to confront layoffs and precarious employment (Kim 2004, 232; Y. Lee 2015, 190-191), but also the prevalence of misogyny in the online space arose as a serious issue (Kim 2015, 289). Frustrated with the precarious labor market and the unpromising prospect of the future, young men appeared to assert their privilege by

discriminating against minority groups, especially women (Yoon 2013; Sohn 2017). Feminism, however, regained its momentum in the 2010s. Fed up with male-dominated, misogynist online culture, young women started fighting back by forming feminist online communities, such as Megalia.[80] The Kangnam murder case of 2016 also reignited feminist activism. A femicide in the bustling district of Kangnam allowed South Korean women to find their feminist voices by recognizing everyday gender violence (Lee, 2016).[81] Consequently, an increasing number of women identifying as feminists have mobilized social and political power to resist the male-dominated, misogynist South Korean culture.

With the unprecedent growth of feminist activism in the 2010s, young South Korean feminists have drawn social attention to gender issues like cyber sexual assault, dating abuse, and spycam sex crimes. Intimacy has also been brought up as a feminist issue. Many feminists started paying attention to how intimacy reproduces the patriarchal order. Particularly, the feminist team T'aryŏnae Sŏnŏn (Declaration of the Strike against Intimacy) formed to confront the patriarchal power ingrained in the practice of intimacy. Against the patriarchal, normative script of heterosexual monogamy, the team has sought for anti-patriarchal ways of practicing intimacy—including polyamory. Here, I elaborate how feminism has (re)shaped the discourse of polyamory in the 2010s by focusing on the T'aryŏnae Sŏnŏn team.

To understand the T'aryŏnae Sŏnŏn team's engagement in polyamory, it is important to understand what the team name means because the name indicates how they approach polyamory as an anti-patriarchal feminist practice. While "sŏnŏn" means 'declaration' in Korean, "t'aryŏnae"—which I translate as 'strike

[80] The online feminist community Megalia—which is now often used as a derogatory term for feminist in South Korea—was founded in response to online witch hunts against women during the 2015 outbreak of MERS. The striking point of Megalia is their way of fighting against misogyny. Instead of refuting misogynist, sexist online comments, Megalia simply repeated the comments back to men, replacing the word women with men, which is a tactic called "mirroring." To some extent, Megalia has successfully debunked prevalent forms of misogyny (Kim 2015:304). In the male-dominated, sexist online space, the harsh language that Megalia used against men shocked many South Koreans, and public awareness of misogynistic hate speech increased.

[81] In May 2016, a man stabbed a strange woman to death in a public toilet in the middle of the bustling district of Kangnam. This incident was especially appalling to women because the murderer waited for a female victim at the unisex bathroom while passing over six men. The murderer claimed that he targeted a woman because he felt that women ignored and humiliated him. While this incident made many women face their unsafe sexist reality, the police announced that this was not a hate crime due to the murder's diagnosis of schizophrenia. This police announcement stirred up anti-misogyny protests. Not only in Kangnam but also in other cities such as Daegu, Daejeon and Busan, women gathered to mourn the innocent woman's death and raised their voices against the misogynistic society.

against intimacy'—is a newly coined term. By adding the prefix "t'ar", which means 'escape' or 'strip off', to the word "yŏnae", which means the state of 'being in an intimate relationship,' the notion of "t'aryŏnae" signifies the active refusal of and protest against the patriarchal normative practice of intimacy (T. Kim, 2019). The team expressed their refusal of normative intimacy during a public performance on International Women's Day in 2019; reciting the Declaration of the Strike against Intimacy (**Figure 3.5**), the team performed a funeral for normative intimacy (*chŏngsang yŏnae*) at Kwanghwamun Square in Seoul.

We believe that human beings cannot own other human beings, and *we refuse relational exclusivity that is forced upon us* under the name of intimacy.
We oppose gender norms that confine diverse human beings to the binary gender categories of 'man' and 'woman,' and we fight against heteronormativity, which enforces binary gender norms.
We oppose the normativity of intimacy, which not only stigmatizes both young people who are not in an intimate relationship and aged people who are in an 'abnormal' intimate relationship, but also which engenders a social compulsion for individuals to be in intimate relationships.
We oppose aversion to people who practice forms of intimacy that deviate from the normative model, *polyamorists*, asexual people, other sexual minorities, and sex workers.
We condemn all types of visible or invisible violence that occur under the name of intimacy.
We dismantle the ideology of the nuclear family and patriarchy by seeking for many diverse forms of intimacy outside of normative intimacy.

Figure 3.5 Excerpt from the Declaration of the Strike against Intimacy (Source: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSftRrHsUJfj2awHFimdqPFmLmrOxjtTsUbn-FBgjs8-eOwjng/viewform)[82]

[82] 하나. 우리는 인간이 인간을 소유할 수 없다고 여기며, 연애라는 이름으로 강요되는 관계적 독점을 거부한다.
하나. 우리는 다종다양한 인간을 '남자'와 '여자' 역할에 가두는 성별역할극에 반대하고, 이를 강제로 수행하게 하는 이성애중심주의에 반대한다.
하나. 우리는 젊을 때 연애하지 않거나, 나이 들어 연애하는 인간을 '비정상'으로 규정하고, 모두를 연애에 대한 강박에 빠지게 하는 정상연애중심주의에 반대한다.
하나. 우리는 연애 밖 섹슈얼리티 실천자들, 비독점적 연애 관계, 무성애, 비연애, 성소수자, 성판매 여성 등에 대한 혐오에 반대한다.
하나. 우리는 연애라는 이름으로 발생하는 가시화·비가시화된 모든 폭력을 규탄한다.
하나. 우리는 연애라는 이름만으로 규정 불가능한 다양하고 풍부한 친밀성을 모색하여 정상가족 이데올로기와 가부장제를 뒤흔들고자 한다.

The main goal of the T'aryŏnae Sŏnŏn team is to destruct normative patriarchal power. During a media interview, To Uri, one of the team organizers, argued that the problem is "the patriarchal normative script of intimacy"—the social script that presumes a heterosexual couple must develop an exclusive intimacy with marriage as the ultimate aim.[83] While the normative script prescribes how people practice intimacy, those who do not follow it are stigmatized as "problematic" or "deviant." Most people struggle to fit into the gendered roles defined by the script. Furthermore, she also stated the individual's independence and agency are often restricted in the normative script of intimacy. Since normative intimacy supposes sexual and emotional exclusivity, people tend to feel entitlement over their intimate partner's body and emotions. Under the patriarchal system, such entitlement makes women susceptible to violence. Hence, she and her team members have sought to strike down the patriarchal normative structure of intimacy, which prevents people from developing intimacy in their own way and puts people under their intimate partner's control. By overthrowing the normative script, they believe that people will be able to design their own form of intimacy based on individual freedom and agency.

An interesting point in T'aryŏnae Sŏnŏn's argument is, however, their opposition to *exclusivity*. The team asserts that exclusivity, which is at the core of the normative script of intimacy, makes individuals lose their freedom, independence, and agency in intimate relationships. One of the team organizers, Suri, illustrated that people in an exclusive relationship act as if they "own their intimate partner".[84] This sense of ownership often puts women under their male intimate partners' control, which can range from interference in everyday matters, such as what they can wear or whom they can see, to serious psychological manipulation, like gaslighting. She hence claimed that exclusive relationships often violate independence and individual freedom. Exclusivity, the team argued, also aggravates women's vulnerable position in intimate relationships. Another team member, Hong Hyeŭn, pointed out that focusing exclusively on an

[83] Chŏngwŏn Lee, "The Emergence of Different Options as the Norm of 'Monogamy' has been Lax," November 2, 2019, *Han'gugilbo*, https://www.hankookilbo.com/News/Read/201910301365018402?rPrev=201910230470773008
[84] T'aekyu, Kim, "Feminist team the Declaration of the Strike against Intimacy "[We should] Stray away from the normative life course of getting a job, dating, getting married and having a child,"" April 23, 2019, *Today News*, http://www.ntoday.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=66459

intimate partner can make people disconnected from their other social networks and leave them vulnerable to their intimate partner's influence. In brief, the team maintained that it is "relational exclusivity that creates and holds the structure in which women are subject to men's violence".[85]

Here, the T'aryŏnae Sŏnŏn team's opposition to exclusivity does not necessarily mean their advocacy for polyamory. Nevertheless, there is a close affinity between their refusal of normative intimacy and polyamory. When the team illustrated that a sense of ownership granted by exclusivity makes a woman susceptible to her intimate partner's control, that explanation is exactly how American polyamorists advocated polyamory; in American polyamorous texts, it is widely claimed that polyamory allows individuals to exercise individual freedom and sexual autonomy, while monogamy naturalizes an intimate partner's control, (Chapter 1). It is not coincidental that polyamory, which is formed on the values of women's sexual freedom and autonomy, is spotlighted as an anti-patriarchal, healthy intimate relationship by South Korean feminists seeking to break away from the normative intimacy that oppresses women. Although polyamory is not the single answer for anti-patriarchal intimacy, polyamory, for South Korean feminists, appears to be a promising alternative that allows them to create intimate relationships in a non-possessive, non-patriarchal, and autonomous manner.

In this respect, I indicate that in the late 2010s, polyamory has been re-signified as a non-normative, anti-patriarchal, and non-possessive intimate relationship by South Korean feminists in the South Korean media discourse. Publicly advocating polyamory, feminists claim that polyamory does not merely mean having multiple intimate partners. They highlight that polyamory is an anti-patriarchal, healthy way of intimacy, which enables individuals to exercise agency and freedom. For instance, in the *Han'gyŏre* opinion piece, "Our Anarchic Relationship," feminist activist Hong Sŭnghŭi defined polyamory as a non-possessive relationship that does not follow the patriarchal norm of intimacy. While practicing polyamory, she pointed out that she and her partner built a non-possessive relationship, which is unconstrained by the normative

[85] Ibid.

logic of love, marriage, and family.[86] Similarly, Hong Hyeŭn also explained her practice of polyamory as a trial for an "anti-normative" intimate relationship. In the article "Think about Relationships and Love Outside of 'Normative Intimacy'" in the feminist magazine *Ilda*, she argued that polyamory allowed her to break away from normative intimacy.[87] In these articles, polyamory is emphasized as a non-possessive intimate relationship through which individuals can create their own way of practicing intimacy, a way that confronts the normative model. This same emphasis on non-possessiveness in polyamory was present in the colloquium *Escape from Normative Intimacy* held by the T'aryŏnae Sŏnŏn team:

> After realizing the invisible social grids—the syntax of "normative intimacy" prescribed by society—that govern the way in which I enjoy intimate relationships, such as in what manner, with whom, and how it should end, I again asked myself: is the practice of intimacy defined as normative what I want for myself? How well does the normative practice of intimacy demonstrate what I imagine my life should look like beyond love or intimacy? To look for answers to these questions, *I have practiced polyamory, and it has been my own process through which I gained agency.* … Whilst the normative script of intimacy expects people to perform their prescribed roles, polyamory allows people to write their own script of intimacy based upon each individual's demands; in order for polyamorous relationships to exist, individuals in fact have to understand and be able to express their needs. … And for this reason, *I believe polyamory does raise important questions about the process in which women gain agency*.[88] (Emphasis Added)

The social discourse of polyamory started changing in South Korea as the heterogeneous discourses of intimacy, marriage, and family exploded with the rise of samp'osedae in the early 2010s. The increasing emphasis on individual freedom and choice to construct an individual's life course rather than following the path of heterosexual nuclear family changed the cultural image of polyamory from an impossible, foreign sexual lifestyle to a form of intimate relationship that South Koreans might try. Polyamory, in other words, came to be portrayed as a valid, worthwhile choice that individuals can make within the narrative of self-growth. And importantly, feminist activism has emerged as a crucial force in the discourse of polyamory in the 2010. Arguing that normative intimacy oppresses women and violates women's agency,

[86] Sŭnghŭi Hong, "Our Anarchic Relationship," November 5, 2017, *Han'gyŏre*, http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/opinion/column/817551.html
[87] Hyeŭn Hong, "Think about Relationships and Love outside of 'Normative Intimacy," September 8, 2018, *Ilda*, http://www.ildaro.com/sub_read.html?uid=8302§ion=sc1#
[88] Taon Yun, "Polyamory 10 years: Questioning the Conventional Thought 'No Sex with a Friend,'" (paper presented at The Colloquium Escape from Normative Intimacy, The Onegin House, Seoul, April 30, 2019).

feminists suggest that polyamory is a feminist alternative to intimacy. Through feminist activism in the late 2010s, polyamory, rather than just being intimacy with multiple partners, has gained new meaning as a non-normative, anti-patriarchal, and non-possessive intimate relationship. Here, I however contend that it is not accidental that, in South Korean society, polyamory has drawn social attention through the rise of samp'osedae and the growth of feminist activism in the 2010s. Polyamory, as I have argued, in the US developed from its cultural values of individualism and feminism. Within social trends that increasingly emphasize individual choice and freedom, the Western practice of polyamory has arisen as an alternative form of intimate relationship through which South Korean individuals can exercise freedom and agency.

Conclusion: The Reshaping of the South Korean's Private Life in the Post-Crisis Time

In this chapter, I explored the development of the South Korean social discourse of polyamory in the 2000s and 2010s. While polyamory was initially represented as a Western sexual lifestyle that is impossible for South Koreans in the 2000s, its portrait evolved into an experimental, yet viable practice of intimacy in the 2010s; and in the late 2010s, polyamory has gained new meaning as a non-possessive, anti-patriarchal intimate relationship. I also situated the shifting cultural representations of polyamory within the South Korean political economic dynamics. Central to the development of the discourse of polyamory is the reconstruction of South Korean private life in the post-crisis contexts.

First, this chapter showcased that polyamory is represented as a “Western” practice of intimacy in the South Korean public discourse. Although different types of nonmonogamy—such as concubinage, adultery, swinging—have long existed in South Korea, polyamory was spotlighted as a *distinctive* type of non-monogamous relationship that originated in the US. South Korean society perceived polyamory as a new, foreign, and unconventional form of intimate relationship entangled with the American cultural values of individual freedom and sexual liberation. The US cultural hegemony is thus ingrained in how polyamory was introduced to and grew in the South Korean public discourse.

However, this chapter describes that the discursive formation of polyamory in South Korea is far from a plain, unilinear process in which South Koreans encounter the liberatory Western sexual practice of polyamory and come to accept it. While the social discourse of polyamory has developed significantly over just two decades, that development went hand in hand with the fundamental transformation of an individual's private life since the Asian financial crisis of 1997. The discourse of polyamory in South Korea developed in conjunction with the shifting value of the patriarchal nuclear family logic, the increasing emphasis on individual choice and self-development, and the growth of feminist movements in the post-crisis contexts.

When the financial crisis of 1997 profoundly challenged the modern socioeconomic system that developed based on the patriarchal nuclear family model under Park Chung Hee's developmental regime, South Korean families were also hit by the crisis. With the growing social discourse of "families at risk" after 1997, polyamory first appeared in the South Korean public discourse as an alternative type of family in the 2000s. Nonetheless, that did not mean that polyamory was positively represented. Through the dominant ideologies of patriarchal familism and ethnonationalism, polyamory was objectified as a Western sexual lifestyle which was an impossible practice in South Korea. However, the cultural image of polyamory started to change with the rise of samp'osedae in the early 2010s. Since the neoliberal reform of the socioeconomic system after 1997 pushed young people into a precarious labor market with little prospect of economic growth, young people, under the duress of endless self-development, optimized their private lives for survival in the labor market. In other words, growing numbers of young people emphasized their own choices in organizing their life course, while reevaluating the normative logic of the heterosexual nuclear family. Under these conditions, polyamory was discussed as an experimental yet viable practice of intimacy rather than as an illegible Western lifestyle. Meanwhile, with the changing value of the heterosexual nuclear family, patriarchal gender relations also emerged as a serious social issue since the mid-2010s. Advocating for women's freedom and agency, feminists have increasingly tackled the normative model of intimacy that oppresses women. Through feminist activism against normative intimacy,

polyamory has gained new social significance as a non-possessive, anti-patriarchal intimate relationship, through which individuals can exercise freedom and ownership over their intimate lives.

My argument in this chapter is neither that polyamory has emerged as a mainstream discourse of intimacy nor that it has become a more acceptable practice. Polyamory is still far from the mainstream culture of intimacy in South Korea at the point that I am writing this chapter. Instead, I emphasize how the South Korean cultural, socioeconomic dynamics have informed the public discourse of polyamory. While polyamory was introduced as a consensual non-monogamous relationship from the West, mainly the US, to South Korean society through global connections, the meaning of polyamory in South Korea was neither inevitable nor invariable. In other words, this chapter illuminated that the discourse of polyamory has grown through its continual interactions with the political economic forces reconstructing South Korean private life—particularly related to intimacy, marriage, and family—within the post-crisis contexts.

Chapter 4 (Re)creating Polyamory Culture in South Korea

While the social discourse of polyamory has grown since the 2000s, it was not until the 2010s that polyamorists became visible in South Korea. Put another way, individuals who self-identify as polyamorists started to come forward as polyamory came to be portrayed as a relevant and viable practice in the South Korean media discourse of the 2010s. And after that, these polyamorists, by sharing their polyamorous desires and experiences as well as by building polyamory communities, have collectively established the definitions, rules, and values of polyamory, which I call South Korean culture of polyamory.

As many of my interviewees recalled, South Koreans who introduce themselves with the word polyamory started to appear at first on Twitter in the early 2010s. And later, in 2014, the first Korean polyamory internet forum named *Polyamory* (*P'olliamori*) was established, allowing South Korean polyamorists to share their issues and experiences of polyamory in an online space. With the trend of increasing visibility of polyamorists, the year 2017 marked a real watershed moment in the growth of polyamory in South Korea. In 2017, not only was the first South Korean polyamory book—*We Practice Polyamory* (*Urinŭn P'olliamori Handa*) written by young polyamorists Sim Kiyong and Chŏng Yuna—published, but a polyamory Facebook page titled "Polyamory: Non-Exclusive Relationships with Multiple People" (P'olliamori: Pidokchŏm Dajayŏnae) was also created. Moreover, in the summer of 2017, polyamorist T'aera and polyamory Facebook page manager Chunhŭi organized the first recorded offline polyamory meeting in Seoul.[89] The meeting was a success with approximately sixty to seventy attendees, and it led to the formation of the very first South Korean polyamory community, Yŏrŏ: P'olliamori Net'ŭwŏk'ŭ (Multi: Polyamory Network), in the end of 2017. After that, another polyamory community was built in 2018 called Taae (Multiple Loves).

Drawing from South Korean polyamory texts, ethnographic data, and interviews, this chapter scrutinizes the process through which the culture of polyamory has been shaped in South Korea in its own

[89] I use a pseudonym for all of my interviewees except those who are publicly known to be polyamorous, such as Sim Kiyong who is one of the authors of *We Practice Polyamory*.

social contexts. Questions that I consider in this chapter include: How have individuals who identify themselves as polyamorists emerged in South Korea? Through what process have polyamory communities been built in South Korea? In this process, how are the meanings and values of polyamory discussed? What are various cultural and social forces that play out in the way that South Koreans form shared meanings of polyamory? Lastly, based on the process of shaping the culture of polyamory in South Korea, how could we build a more nuanced understanding of the transnational formation of sexual subjectivities beyond the hegemonic model of Western sexual modernity?

I approach these questions through a framework of *translation*. Traditionally, translation is seen as a linguistic practice of transferring a text from one language to another, which allows the dissemination of information across linguistic boundaries (e.g., Catford 1965). But in the late twentieth century, scholars of translation studies started to approach translation not merely as a linguistic transaction between two languages but as a process of "complex negotiation between cultures" (Trivedi, 2007, 280). This new approach emphasizes translation as a practice that is entangled with the broader issues of culture, history, and power relations (Barssnett 2007, 13-14). Niranjana (1992, 2), for instance, claimed that under the colonial and postcolonial context, translation necessarily "shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism." Since the logic of colonial domination is rooted in the process of translation—such as in deciding which texts should be selected for translation, which languages translations should be created for, and how a translated text should be circulated—translation is a crucial site for addressing the unequal relationship between Western colonial powers and colonized cultures.

However, translation has also been reconceptualized as a postmodern cultural phenomenon in postcolonial scholarship, in which it is often called "cultural translation." Departing from its literal definition, the concept of translation, in this sense, is used to tackle the construction of political and cultural subjectivities through immigration, diaspora, and other transnational movements (Trivedi 2007, 285; Buden el at. 2009). Most notably, in *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha discussed the postcolonial migrant experience as a cultural translation—a phenomenon in which two cultures with disparate temporalities and spatialities are hybridized. He indicated that when cultural difference is irresolvably

engraved in the migrant's life, migrant subjects, through cultural translation, unveil untranslatable elements of cultures and create a new, ambivalent, and transgressive "third space." That is, by saying that "translation is the performative nature of cultural communication," Bhabha (1994, 326) suggested that cultural translation produces a new space in which the postcolonial migrant subject constructs subversive agency against the colonial power.

In this chapter, I use translation in both senses of the term to unravel the process through which the culture of polyamory is shaped in South Korea. Considering translation as a political practice in which the logic of colonial domination is embedded, this chapter examines how the power dynamics of the US-Korea relation inform the culture of polyamory in South Korea. When polyamory is translated into South Korean culture, American cultural hegemony—which is represented as democracy and liberal individualism—is entrenched in the way South Koreans appraise and embrace polyamory.

At the same time, this chapter also considers translation to be a creative practice whereby new sexual subjectivities can emerge. Far from the unidirectional dispersion of Western modern sexual subjectivities, the culture of polyamory is built through a complex process in which South Korean polyamorists interpret the American culture of polyamory, deal with untranslatable cultural elements between the US and South Korea, and construct new meanings of polyamory. Whilst polyamory has developed in the US drawing from its dominant cultural values of liberal individualism, pro-sex feminism, and psychotherapeutic ethos (discussed in Chapter 1), not all these values are translated into South Korean polyamory culture. Instead, South Koreans actively (re)create the culture of polyamory at entanglement with their own social, cultural contexts. As such, through the framework of translation, I seek to explain the formation of the polyamory culture in South Korea as a creative, interactive, and complex process of constructing sexual subjectivities.

This chapter is comprised of three main sections. The first section, "The Emergence of Polyamorous Subjects in South Korea," traces different trajectories through which South Koreans come to identify themselves as polyamorists. I describe how South Koreans encounter the American discourse of polyamory and how they employ the term polyamory. The second section, "The Circulation/ Production of

Polyamory Knowledge," details how South Korean polyamorists access, circulate and reproduce American knowledge of polyamory. I showcase how South Koreans get hold of polyamory knowledge in an uneven manner and how asymmetrical circulations of polyamory knowledge leave South Koreans with the possibility of building multiple, if not contradicting, meanings of polyamory. Finally, the last section, "The Making of South Korean Polyamory Communities" scrutinizes the formation of polyamory communities in South Korea. By analyzing the process through which South Korean polyamory communities are formed, I illustrate how the meanings and values of polyamory are shaped within the changing dynamics of gender and sexuality in South Korea. Altogether, this chapter elucidates the complex process through which South Koreans translate American polyamory culture and develop the subjectivity of polyamory in their own social contexts. Ultimately, the chapter contends that the development of South Korean polyamory culture is entwined with the postcolonial power dynamics between the US and South Korea, the social transformation of the heteropatriarchal order, and individuals' intimate desires and choices.

The Emergence of Polyamorous Subjects in South Korea

Non-monogamy was not new to South Koreans when polyamory was introduced to the public discourse in the 2000s. As mentioned earlier, concubinage was a more or less common practice until monogamy was established as a social norm both legally and culturally in the 1960s (Mah 2016); and even after that, various forms of non-monogamous relationship—such as extramarital sex and swinging—continued to be practiced among South Koreans (Kwak 2007; C. Kang 2009). Given these facts, it is plausible to think that polyamorists emerged in South Korea in line with its long history of non-monogamy. Though the connection between the development of polyamory and the South Korean history of non-monogamy is not negligible, I do not trace the emergence of polyamorous subjects from the South Korean history of monogamy. Rather, my focus in this section is how South Korean polyamorous subjects have come into being through interacting with the American culture of polyamory.

In this respect, I point out that when South Koreans recognize themselves as polyamorous, it does not simply mean that they practice consensual non-monogamous relationships. Since polyamory is essentially interlocked with certain American cultural values—including liberal individualism—which South Korean society tends to highly regard, those values are embedded in the way that South Korean polyamorists perceive polyamory. This section hence showcases how South Korean individuals *rename*, *reorganize, and rediscover* their desire for non-monogamous relationships by utilizing the American discourse of polyamory. That notwithstanding, I also note that a South Korean's identification as a polyamorist does not signify their assimilation with the American subjectivity of polyamory. As Boellstorff (2003, 236) noted, when the American discourse of polyamory is translated into South Korea, neither pure synchrony nor simple conversion is possible, and "disjuncture is inevitable." That is, South Korean individuals come to build their subjectivity as polyamorists through their contact with the American polyamory discourse as well as through their constructive agency and their cultural and social position. In what follows, I illustrate complex trajectories in which South Koreans develop into polyamorous subjects by drawing from three stories of polyamorists.

The first story points out that South Koreans come to affirm and formulate their existing non-monogamous desire by means of the American polyamory discourse. Sim Kiyong, who is in his mid-twenties, is a well-known queer activist as well as polyamorist. Since co-authoring the first South Korean polyamory book *We Practice Polyamory* (2017), Kiyong has been active in publicly promoting polyamory through media interviews and public lectures. Surprisingly, he published the book only two years after he came to know about polyamory. Kiyong first heard the word polyamory from his friend in 2015. Suffering from a possessive, monogamous relationship, Kiyong confessed to his boyfriend that he felt constrained by their relationship, but, rather than finding resolution, what he had to face was a breakup. As he recollects, there was no one who understood why he felt so constrained by his boyfriend's possessiveness or what kind of open, non-exclusive relationship he wanted to practice. Kiyong felt lost and helpless until his friend informed him that there is a non-monogamous practice called polyamory. As soon as he heard the term, Kiyong started an internet search. Yet, he could not find information about polyamory except for its

definition from the *Doosan World Encyclopedia*.[90] Then, Kiyong shifted his search from Korean to English, and the English websites he found did indeed open the door to polyamory for him. Through Wikipedia, the Huffington Post, and other polyamorists' websites, Kiyong gradually got a sense of what polyamory means. And, after reading an American polyamory book, Deborah Anapol's *Polyamory in the 21st Century*, he himself, now identifying as a polyamorist, decided to write a polyamory book to educate people about polyamory in South Korea.

Kiyong's story showcases that becoming a polyamorous subject was an active journey in which he came to approve of his existing intimate desire through the American discourse of polyamory and to empower himself as a polyamorist. In fact, before Kiyong knew the term polyamory, it was not easy to even communicate about his desire for a non-exclusive relationship, and of course, no one approved of his desire. Thus, when he learned about polyamory for the first time, he said that it was like "redemption" for him. Additionally, by reading other polyamorists' stories in Anapol's book, Kiyong felt "confident" that his desire for a non-possessive, non-exclusive intimate relationship was not wrong and could be actualized in practice. As such, Kiyong confirmed his non-monogamous desire and defined it as polyamory through the American discourse.

However, Kiyong, while identifying himself with the American term of polyamory, also clearly recognized the limitation of adopting the American polyamory discourse in South Korea. Though he was empowered by Anapol's "unapologetic and bold" argument for polyamory, Kiyong argued that the book showed him the stark difference between the US and South Korea. When the book illustrated that three people being in a polyamorous relationship could live in the same house and raise a child together, Kiyong could hardly envision such a relationship in South Korean society where a heterosexual couple's living together without being legally married is, itself, already stigmatized. Also, he claimed that, due to the

[90] The *Doosan World Encyclopedia* defines polyamory as "love with two or more than two people in a simultaneous manner" (두 사람 이상을 동시에 사랑하는 다자간 사랑). Along with the definition, it also provides a brief history of the development of polyamory in the US as well as an explanation of how polyamory is different from adultery, monogamy, and polygamy.
(Source: https://terms.naver.com/entry.nhn?docId=1349192&cid=40942&categoryId=31611)

different sense of hierarchy, the notion of consent cannot be directly applied to the South Korean context. Whilst the sense of hierarchy is deeply ingrained in any relationship in South Korea, he mentioned that in American polyamory texts, “there is no understanding of the sense of hierarchy” and, rather, an equal relationship is assumed. Hence, thinking that the American discourse of polyamory would be neither practical nor convincing in South Korea, Kiyong, as a South Korean polyamorist, decided to write a polyamory book that situates polyamory within the social contexts in which he lives:

> It’s maybe because South Korea is a country where the American Dream was a big thing. In South Korea, there are still so many young students who think that moving to the US or studying in the US could do everything. I mean, there are young students who believe that, in the US, there exist some mysteriously free cultures that they’ve never experienced. There are, in fact, many young people, not just young students, who believe that. That is to say, telling American stories will not change their minds [about polyamory]. Can it be possible in [South] Korea? Also, one thing that I kept being told was South Korea is “not [there] yet.” Because South Korea is conservative, because South Korea is Confucianist, South Korea is not there yet. You know what I’m saying? There are so many people who say South Korea is not there yet because it’s a sexually conservative society. So, [I thought] I would look for South Koreans. I’d do interviews [of South Koreans who practice polyamory] and prove that there are such people living in South Korea as well, which, I think, was the reason I wrote the book.[91]

The second story addresses how South Korean individuals come to reorganize their non-monogamous desire and practices by embracing the American discourse of polyamory. Chinun, who is in his early thirties, is an organizer of the online polyamory community Taae. Energetic and resolute, Chinun not only manages the community but also engages in various activities, such as a podcast, personal blog, and research, to promote polyamory. Chinun’s first encounter with the term polyamory was in 2017 through the webcomic *I Would Live as a Single*. At that time, Chinun and his wife had recently separated. Chinun

[91] Kiyong Sim, interviewed by author, Seoul, April 22, 2019.
우리나라가 일종에 아메리칸드림 여기 있었던 나라라서 그런지 미국의 넘어가면, 미국에 유학 가면은 다 된다고 생각하는 대학생들도 아직도 많은 나라고.미국은 자유로운 어떤 우리가 경험하지 못한 어떤 문화가 뭔가 비밀스럽게 숨겨져 있을 거라고 생각하는 대학생들 있거든요. 대학생뿐만 그냥 청년들이 많거든요. 그래서 미국 얘기를 옮겨와 봤자 와 닿지 않을 거다.한국에서 가능 하겠어? 그리고 제가 계속 얘기를 들었던 것 한국은 아직. 한국은 보수적이니까 한국은 유교적이니까. 한국은 아직 이야. 그런 거 있잖아요. 한국은 성적으로 보수적인 나라라서 아직 이야 이렇게 얘기하는 사람이 너무 많아 가지고 찾아 다녀야겠다 한국에 있는 사람들 인터뷰해서 이거 진짜 이런 사람들이 살고 있다고 증명 하고 싶어서 쓴 책이기도 한 거 같아요.

was far from a good, faithful husband. Getting married young in his early twenties, he neglected his wife and daughter and enjoyed his life like a single man. Their separation was mainly because of his infidelity. After his wife found out about his second extramarital relationship, she asked him to move out. However, after living apart, Chinun and his wife's relationship got better. Reflecting on his marital life, he also tried to figure out his issue with being unfaithful. And it was around that time when Chinun learned the word polyamory from the webcomic. Seemingly quite radical, Chinun said that polyamory appeared to him as a whole new possibility. He thought that polyamory could be a way that he could deal with his desire to be sexually connected with others while maintaining his relationship with his wife. With a hope for better intimate relationships, Chinun started to do research on polyamory, study the history of monogamy, and look for a polyamory community where he could talk with polyamorists in person. In the meantime, he also contacted the authors of the book *We Practice Polyamory*, Sim Kiyong and Chŏng Yuna, to consult with them about his practice of polyamory—asking questions such as how polyamory could help his situation and how he could start practicing polyamory. Through this process, he came to be convinced that he was a polyamorist. And with his wife's understanding, he began to engage in a polyamorous relationship with others.

In Kiyong's case, becoming a polyamorous subject meant validating and vocalizing his desire for a non-exclusive relationship through the American polyamory discourse. Chinun's story, on the other hand, indicates that developing a polyamorous subjectivity also involves reshaping one's non-monogamous practice of intimacy according to the American discourse of polyamory. For Chinun, encountering polyamory was indeed a transformative experience. As he came to identify himself as a polyamorist, the way in which Chinun perceived and practiced sex, intimacy, and relationships changed significantly. While one of the main reasons that his marital life was failing was his dishonesty, Chinun, by learning the discourse of polyamory, became more honest with his wife. At the same time, instead of treating sex as a shameful taboo, he has started to talk about his sexual desires openly as a natural part of himself. For the sake of his wife's consent, Chinun also tried hard to make his wife understand polyamory—such as by sharing what he learned about polyamory and listening to her concerns and feelings. While he had non-

monogamous relationships in a dishonest, unfaithful manner before knowing about polyamory, Chinun stated that, by adopting the American polyamory discourse, he tried to reorganize his non-monogamous desire in an "ethical" way. Put another way, becoming a polyamorist, for Chinun, was a way to transform his intimate relationship with regards to the values of freedom, honesty, and equality, which he believes has made his intimate life more ethical.

Though Chinun's identification with polyamory went hand in hand with reorganizing his intimate practice in a more ethical manner, his reorganization was not a one-time achievement but is a constant, ongoing process. Chinun, while identifying himself as a polyamorist, repeatedly said that he is still "in the process of learning polyamory." Due to the gap between knowing what polyamory is and practicing it in reality, there may well exist "many things to study further" while he is developing polyamorous relationships. But, more importantly, his emphasis on being in the process of learning about polyamory suggests that he is still grappling with the concept of polyamory. For instance, believing that consent is central to polyamory, Chinun mentioned that it is not yet clear to him how to define consent—for example, what are the requirements for sound consent to polyamory and to what extent consent is needed from intimate partners. Hence, while Chinun embraced polyamory to reorganize his intimate relationship, it appears that polyamory is rather an ambiguous, intricate concept that he needs to unravel more. For Chinun, becoming a polyamorist is a constant process of studying, interpreting, and elaborating polyamory.

I now turn to the last story to describe how South Koreans come to rediscover their desire for non-monogamous relationships through knowing the American discourse of polyamory. This is a story of how Minsu, Hari, and Sŏnu developed a polyamorous relationship. Minsu, who is in his mid-thirties, is one of the founding members of the first South Korean polyamory community, Yŏrŏ. When Minsu first met Hari, she had a boyfriend. Regardless of that, Minsu openly expressed his feelings for her, and he and Hari became close. After struggling with being in a love triangle, Hari ended up in a monogamous relationship with Minsu. Meanwhile, because they started their relationship in that way, Minsu and Hari were open to talking about various possibilities for their intimate relationship. In doing so, Minsu was first introduced to polyamory in 2015. Watching polyamory films and webcomic as well as reading polyamory articles, Minsu

discussed polyamory with Hari as a sound way of practicing intimacy, and they thought that they might want to try polyamory.

Nevertheless, it was not until Hari became intimate with Sŏnu that they began to describe their relationship as polyamorous. By the time she had been with Minsu for about three years, Hari first met Sŏnu in 2016, and soon they developed romantic feelings for each other. Already having considered polyamory as a viable option, Hari suggested having a polyamorous relationship to Sŏnu. She also frankly communicated about her feelings with Minsu. Without any prior knowledge about polyamory, Sŏnu was confused. But through research, they felt intrigued by the idea of polyamory and agreed to try a polyamorous relationship with Hari.[92] In the case of Minsu, while it was initially difficult to watch Hari falling in love with another person, he respected Hari's new relationship, which they had discussed previously. Although it was not at all an easy journey, Minsu, Hari, and Sŏnu have ultimately built a polyamorous relationship by managing all the relational conflicts as well as the social oppressions they have faced (I will discuss details of the social oppressions they encountered in chapter five). And now, while all living together, Minsu, Hari, and Sŏnu actively engage in polyamory activism to confront social persecution and discrimination against polyamory.

The previous two stories show that, through the American polyamory discourse, South Koreans can rename and reorganize, respectively, their existing non-monogamous desires, thereby becoming polyamorists. The third story, in contrast, illustrates that, by learning about polyamory, South Koreans can explore the non-monogamous desires that they were previously unaware of and develop into polyamorous subjects. Before knowing the discourse of polyamory, neither Hari nor Minsu regarded non-monogamy as a possible choice. When Hari got close to Minsu, they believed that she needed to choose either Minsu or her boyfriend at that time. And Hari, while feeling love for both at the same time, was agonized over the fact that she had to make such a choice. However, Hari felt differently when she met Sŏnu. Now familiar with the discourse of polyamory, Hari admitted her desire to be intimate with both Sŏnu and Minsu and

[92] Since Sŏnu identifies themself as a non-binary genderqueer, I use pronouns they/them/their for Sŏnu.

strove to realize it in practice. In the case of Minsu, he found a new possibility for non-monogamy by learning about the discourse of polyamory. And when Hari wanted to be intimate with Sŏnu, Minsu, albeit with difficulty, embraced her new relationship under the name of polyamory.

Given that Hari, Minsu, and Sŏnu rediscovered the possibility of a non-monogamous relationship by entertaining the American polyamory discourse, it is important to note that they understood polyamory not merely as a non-monogamous lifestyle. But rather, they perceived polyamory as an alternative to the patriarchal normative practice of intimacy. As a renowned young feminist writer, Hari is well aware of feminist issues regarding the normative model of the patriarchal nuclear family. She thus believes that polyamory is a way that individuals can build an intimate relationship based upon their freedom and agency. Likewise, Minsu, who is passionate about feminism and disability rights movements, mentioned that he was mainly attracted to the idea of polyamory because polyamory is a healthy way of practicing intimacy, one which enables individuals to exercise their agency and freedom. Sŏnu, who is actively involved in transgender and queer activism, was also similarly drawn to polyamory due to its non-possessive aspect. In this respect, I argue that central to the way that Hari, Minsu, and Sŏnu embraced the subjectivity of polyamory lie the principles of polyamory—individual agency, freedom, consent, and non-possessiveness—which they endorse. Although these values are not instantly achieved by practicing polyamory, Hari, Minsu, and Sŏnu believe that polyamory essentially helps them actualize these values in their practice of intimacy.

All three accounts indicate that encountering the American discourse of polyamory is critical to the process through which South Korean individuals develop into polyamorous subjects. The American polyamory discourse is inherent to the way that South Koreans form the subjectivity of polyamory by renaming, reorganizing, and rediscovering their desires for non-monogamy. That is to say, these stories display that, because the US, American culture, and English texts stand as the "original," the hegemonic power of the US is entrenched in the subjectivity of polyamory for South Koreans (Cruz-Malave and Manalansan 2002, 6). As a legible form of subjectivity originating in the US, polyamorous subjectivity has

come into being in South Korea intertwined with American cultural power, which is represented in the "ethical" or "democratic" values of polyamory—such as individual freedom, equality, and agency.

While showing the inevitable influence of the American discourse of polyamory, I however claim that South Korean polyamorous subjects are not just "the product of the Western influence" (Wilson 2006, 2). These stories of South Korean polyamorists also reveal the role of their constructive agency which has shaped their trajectories in becoming polyamorous subjects. Kiyong's story demonstrates that coming to be a polyamorous subject is an individual journey, made through one's own decisions and interpretations. Hearing about polyamory from his friend, Kiyong examined how well-suited polyamory was as a way to describe his desire by looking for and interpreting polyamory texts. And with recognition of the cultural disparity between the US and South Korea, he tried to rewrite polyamory within the South Korean social context. Chinun's story also discloses how individuals come to be polyamorous subjects through careful, deliberate steps. In the process of becoming a polyamorist, not only did Chinun research polyamory, he also studied the history of monogamy that oppressed his desire and contacted other polyamorists to get advice about the practice of polyamory. And Chinun, even after identifying as a polyamorist, continues to try to elaborate his understanding of polyamory within his real life through various community activities and studying. In Minsu, Hari, and Sŏnu's story, the subjectivity of polyamory was developed through conscious choices. Considering polyamory as a way to challenge the patriarchal normative practice of intimacy, which they were discontented with, they came to choose to practice polyamory in their intimate relationship. Here, coming to be a polyamorous subject was far from finding instant self-recognition in the American polyamory discourse. South Korean individuals, I assert, develop the particular subjectivity of polyamory through their active journeys, which involve selective interpretation, careful deliberation, and conscious choice of the American discourse of polyamory.

The Circulation/Production of Polyamory Knowledge

In the proceeding section, I addressed how South Koreans come to identify themselves as polyamorists through interaction with the American polyamory discourse. In particular, I have therein showcased that individuals construct the subjectivity of polyamory *not by* a passive reception of the American polyamory discourse *but through* an active process in which they search out and interpret the American discourse of polyamory and create their own understandings. While the previous section elucidated this process as the development of the polyamorous subject, in this section, I discuss this process by shifting my focus toward *the circulation and production of polyamory knowledge*. As shown in the stories of South Korean polyamorists, individuals form the subjectivity of polyamory by engaging in circuits of polyamory knowledge; individuals get hold of the American discourse of polyamory, distribute polyamory information through various channels, and also produce polyamory knowledge of their own. Put another way, in coming to develop the subjectivity of polyamory, individuals participate in the circulation and production of polyamory knowledge.

With regard to the circulation and production of the polyamory discourse in South Korea, I am interested in two issues: how individuals' participation in the circulation and production of polyamory knowledge differs according to their social positions and how the asymmetrical manners in which polyamory knowledge is circulated and produced inform South Korean polyamory knowledge. As many studies on the transnational formation of sexualities have discussed (e.g., Blackwood 2008; Dave 2012; Kam 2012), polyamory knowledge is not evenly accessed by South Koreans. It is usually well-educated, Westernized people of the middle and upper classes who have easier access to the American polyamory discourse and who are in a better position to distribute and produce knowledge. Yet, my argument is *not* that polyamory knowledge is available only to middle- and upper-class, well-educated people. Though social status causes uneven participation in the circuits of knowledge, individuals from various backgrounds can still take part in the circulation and production of polyamory knowledge. By considering unevenness as the very condition of how polyamory knowledge is circulated and produced among polyamorists, this

section illustrates how such uneven conditions are intertwined with the formation of particular understandings of polyamory among South Koreans.

Here, my analysis on the circulation and production of polyamory knowledge is built upon interviews as well as ethnographic data that I collected from both virtual and physical spaces. In my ethnography, I traced how polyamory knowledge is produced and circulated across online and offline channels. In the interviews, I explored different ways in which individual polyamorists partake in the circuits of polyamory knowledge. In what follows, I first chart out asymmetrical patterns through which polyamorists access, distribute, and produce polyamory knowledge. I then scrutinize how asymmetrical participation in the circuits of polyamory knowledge shape the ambiguous nature of polyamory knowledge. Ultimately, I argue that the asymmetrical circuits of polyamory knowledge contribute to creating multiple meanings of polyamory among South Korean polyamorists.

When I began my fieldwork in South Korea in 2019, I was concerned about polyamorists' response to my research and how willing they would be to accept me as a participant observer in their online and offline meetings. Contrary to my concern, most polyamorists welcomed me, and some of them eagerly helped my research. In fact, I soon realized that they also had great curiosity about what I know: the polyamory knowledge I learnt from American polyamory communities (see Introductory chapter). Although individuals who self-identify as polyamorists have been increasingly coming forward, polyamory in South Korea is still in its infant stage. Particularly, compared to the US where more than forty books, multiple websites, and podcasts are available for polyamory education, there are scant resources in South Korea. As of 2019, there were only two polyamory books published in Korean and a few media articles that accounted for polyamory.

While struggling with the lack of polyamory resources, many South Koreans rely on polyamory information available on the internet. With affordable, easy accessibility, the internet allows South Korean polyamorists to search for and use American polyamory resources, such as polyamory websites, personal blogs, e-books, social media, and podcasts. When South Koreans actively make use of online polyamory resources, I however illustrate that with the internet access, individuals do not acquire the same polyamory

knowledge. Specifically, an individual's English proficiency is one of the most critical abilities that defines the scope of information accessible to that individual (Berry and Martin 2003, 104).

I have found that individuals who are fluent in English access a wide range of polyamory information through the internet. In spite of the lack of South Korean polyamory resources, these individuals have no problem gathering information. For instance, Chaemin's polyamory knowledge primarily came from his reading of books on Kindle. After discovering his wife's affair with another man, Chaemin searched for American e-books that could help him deal with their marriage crisis. By reading those books, he came to learn about polyamory and chose to rebuild his marital relationship through polyamory. In Taesu's case, he referenced American websites to figure out how polyamory could be applied to his relationship. By getting to know about polyamory through the South Korean book *We Practice Polyamory*, Taesu's detailed understandings of polyamory were mainly derived from the website of the polyamory organization Loving More (lovingmorenonprofit.org). Suchŏng is another polyamorist who actively consumed American polyamory texts. When she had a hard time accepting her boyfriend's new partner, she read various American polyamory texts—including Easton and Hardy's book *The Ethical Slut*—to cope with her inner complications. As such, polyamorists who are equipped with a high level of English proficiency can readily access and acquire a great deal of polyamory knowledge, regardless of national or language boundaries.

Given that English proficiency is the crucial ability that prescribes the range of polyamory knowledge individuals can reach, I indicate that in South Korea, English is far from a mere medium of communication. The special status of English as critical cultural capital can be traced back to the specific modern history of US-Korea relations. Since the US army military government in Korea (1945-1948), English came to be recognized as a symbol of and as a means for becoming part of the "new power elite," who can approach advanced Western cultures and technologies (B.R. Kim 2015). In the wake of neoliberal globalization since the 1990s, the social value of English was further strengthened. As English emerged as a survival strategy for global competition, there arose what is often called 'English fever,' the social and individual obsessive pursuit of English skills (e.g., Park and Abelmann, 2004; Lee at el. 2010; J. S. Park

2011; Piller and Cho 2013). Briefly, in South Korea, English operates as crucial cultural capital that has complex social values—not only as a symbol of the elite class but also as an essential requirement for an individual's economic success.

In this respect, an individual's ability to explore polyamory knowledge is closely interconnected with their social class. Admittedly, since there is a societal obsession with English, most polyamorists seem to have basic English skills. And many of them do internet searches for polyamory knowledge in English, for example, by looking up the definition and brief history of polyamory on Wikipedia. Nevertheless, I demonstrate that the scope of information that one reaches varies by their level of English proficiency. The active use of American polyamory texts requires a high level of English proficiency, and polyamorists who easily access English-written texts are mostly middle and upper class, well-educated, and westernized individuals.

While an individual's access to in-depth polyamory knowledge is dependent upon their level of English proficiency, English is not a necessary condition for individuals to begin exploring polyamory knowledge. Even if an individual has little English skills, it does not mean that they have no access to polyamory; albeit unevenly, they still seek out polyamory knowledge to form their subjectivity as a polyamorist. In "Transnational Discourses and Circuits of Queer Knowledge in Indonesia," Evelyn Blackwood (2008, 501), following Ann Stoler, used the term, *asymmetries* to signify not a lack, or absence but a multiplicity of subjectivities. Blackwood illustrated that *asymmetries*, while pointing to the existence of multiplicity, disturb any claims that assume a form of "proper" or "correct" subjectivity, helping to make clear the ways in which heterogeneous subjectivities are produced in conjunction with transnational queer discourses and particular subject positions of gender, class, and ethnicity.

In line with Blackwood's illustration of asymmetries, I claim that by having different social positions, polyamorists develop particular, heterogeneous ways of accessing and participating in the circuits of polyamory knowledge. Above all, these polyamorists make full use of South Korean resources, which include not only two polyamory books published in Korean, but also media representations of polyamory, such as the novel *My Wife Got Married* and the webcomic *I Would Live as a Single* (Chapter 3). At the

same time, some polyamorists appear to figure out the principles and logics of polyamory through reading philosophical or psychological books that discuss love. Kakyŏng, for instance, said that reading Erich Fromm's books *To Have or to Be?* and *The Art of Loving* was helpful for her as she made sense of polyamory. Moreover, there are polyamorists who use interpersonal sources. Though American polyamory information is valued as "original" knowledge, polyamorists also tend to prefer first-hand information gathered from other South Korean polyamorists. For example, while reading books and other available texts, Kyujin found the concept of polyamory too complicated to understand. So, he decided to seek out other polyamorists. After talking with other polyamorists on an online chatroom, Kyujin said that he finally felt confident enough to try polyamory for himself. (I will discuss details of the polyamory online chatroom that he visited in the following section.) And last but not least, polyamorists also rely on American polyamory knowledge translated into Korean. As there are polyamory texts translated from English into Korean available on the internet, polyamorists can obtain basic information from those texts.

Indeed, some South Korean polyamorists, by using advanced English skills, do not just consume American polyamory texts. But, more importantly they also translate American polyamory texts into Korean and distribute those texts through polyamory discussion forums, personal blogs, or social media. To promote polyamory, these polyamorists share a range of translated polyamory information, such as the following: a basic introduction to polyamory, a list of polyamory terms and their definitions, practical tips for a polyamorous relationship, and US polyamory news. And other polyamorists who have difficulty directly accessing English-written texts employ that translated information for their exploration of polyamory. In this way, *translated knowledge* is at the heart of the asymmetrical circuits of polyamory knowledge, and it connects South Koreans with the American discourse of polyamory. With that in mind, for the rest of this section, I will turn to *the production of translated knowledge*, which is illustrative of South Korean polyamorists' asymmetrical participation in the circuits of polyamory knowledge.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I conceptualize translation *not* as a mere act of transmitting knowledge from one language to another *but* as a complex, agentic practice of knowledge production. When South Koreans translated American polyamory texts in Korean, translated knowledge is not only produced

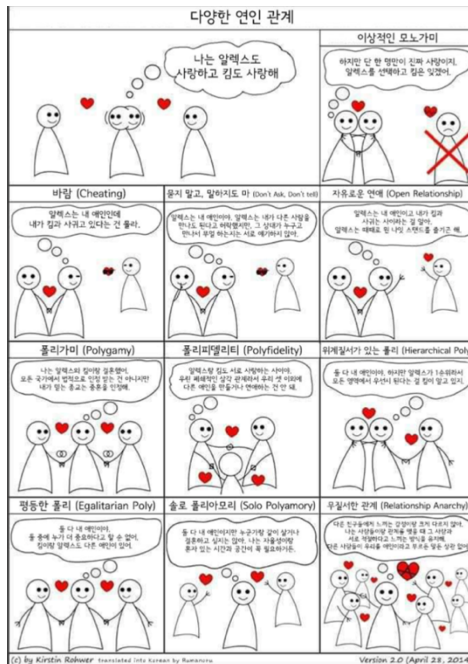
through their own constructive agency but also conditioned by their faculties, resources, and efforts. Here, with this approach, I showcase how translated polyamory knowledge displays three main characteristics, which are (1) limited scope, (2) fragmented form, and (3) ambiguous application, and how these characteristics of the translated knowledge ultimately allow South Koreans to build multiple, or contradictory, understandings of polyamory.

First, South Korean polyamory knowledge is characterized by being limited in its scope. From American polyamory texts, individuals do not simply learn a definition and history of polyamory, different forms of polyamorous relationships, and polyamory terminology. But more significantly, they can comprehend the ethics and values upon which polyamory is built and attain detailed instructions on how to successfully develop polyamorous relationships (see Chapter 1). On the contrary, the translated knowledge that is circulated among South Koreans has a narrower range of information, which mostly consists of basic, entry-level information of polyamory: what polyamory is, how different types of polyamorous relationships work (**Figure 4.1**), and what terminology exists to describe polyamorous practices and relationships (**Figure 4.2**).

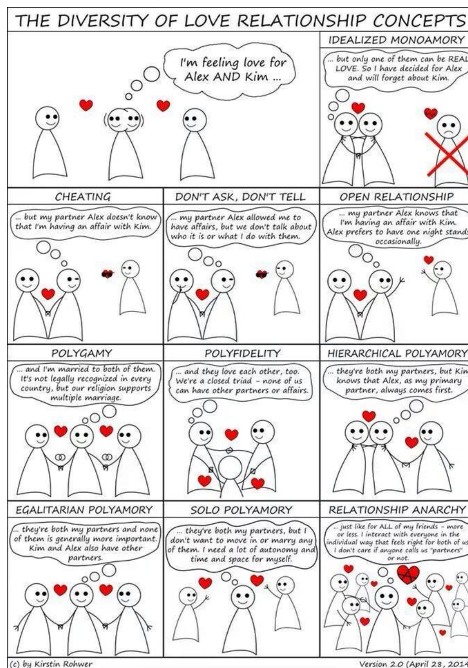
Undeniably, such introductory information is an essential tool in the way that South Koreans adopt polyamory and develop their subjectivity as polyamorists. Yet, since introductory information takes up the most part of translated knowledge, polyamorists do not attain in-depth polyamory knowledge. There is limited knowledge that South Koreans can utilize as they develop polyamorous relationships in practice. As an illustration, many American texts, derived from psychological knowledge, offer step-by-step techniques on how to manage jealousy in polyamorous relationships. Whilst such knowledge effectively helps American polyamorists handle difficulties in their practice of polyamory, South Koreans face a lack of resources for coping with practical issues in their polyamorous relationships.

When South Korean polyamory knowledge centers on introductory information, its narrow scope is closely entwined with the specific way translated knowledge is produced. Translated knowledge in most cases is produced voluntarily by polyamorists and circulated on the internet. Far from being professional translators, these polyamorists, for the sake of promoting polyamory, spend their own time and effort

translating American polyamory texts and sharing them. The production of translated knowledge demands a series of onerous tasks, from navigating American polyamory texts to selecting useful information. Furthermore, translating American knowledge does not just require advanced English skills, but also a fair understanding of the American culture of dating and relationships as well as a consideration of cultural differences between the US and South Korea. Under the circumstances, I argue that the American polyamory knowledge that can be translated most effectively is basic information. Compared to philosophical discussions or practical techniques of polyamory, introductory information is relatively straightforward and easy to translate as it does not call for complicated mediation of the cultural disparity between the US and South Korea.



a. Translated Polyamory Knowledge (Source: https://www.facebook.com/polyamoryINKorea)



b. Original Knowledge in English (Source: https://metakiki.net/relationship-concepts-cartoon/)

Figure 4.1 Polyamory Knowledge 1: The Diversity of Love Relationship Concepts

The images displayed here are a chart that shows different types of non-monogamous relationships including polyamory. While this chart is often discussed in polyamory communities' meetings, the first one (a) is translated one in Korean, and the second one (b) is original one in English.

목록 다음글 답글

■ 여러 자료실

폴리아모리 용어의 뜻 알아보기(Polyamory Definitions: Learn what these poly terms mean)

일산 추천 0 조회 156 17.10.22 11:09 댓글 7

저의 발번역으로 표현이 괴상한 점이 있으니 원어를 원하시는 분은

https://findpoly.com/blog/polyamory-definitions 로 가시면 됩니다.

(주의 : 역자의 요상하고 자의적인 한국어 번역 다수 포함!!)

◆◆

이 폴리아모리 용어들은 모두 무슨 뜻일까? 이 폴리아모리 정의들은 폴리아모리스트들이 하는 얘기들을 이해하는데 도움을 줄 수 있을 것이다.

Hierarchical ; 위계적

위계는 관련 당사자들이 지위에 따라 서열화되는 체계이다. 위계적 관계는 어떤 파트너쉽이 다른 것에 우선순위를 가지는 것을 말한다. 어떤 부부가 관계를 오픈하기로 결정했는데 서로를 다른 새로운 파트너들보다 우선순위에 두기로 합의했다면 그들은 각자 서로의 "프라이머리"파트너가 되고 새로운 파트너들은 "세컨더리"가 된다.

Metamour : 메타무르

당신의 파트너의 파트너
예) Nancy는 Ned와 결혼했고, Ned는 Natasha와 사귀고 있다. Nacy와 Natasha는 메타무르이다.

Mono/Poly Relationship ; 모노/폴리 관계

파트너쉽의 한 사람은 모노이고 다른 이는 폴리인 관계. 폴리인 사람은 여러 사람과 로맨틱하고 섹슈얼한 관계를 유지할지 몰라도 모노인 파트너는 절대 그렇지 않다.
예) 모노인 Bob은 폴리인 Bobbie와 장기간 연애중이다. Bobbie는 폴리인 Ben과도 사귀고 있고 모노인 Brenda와도 사귀고 있다. Brenda와 Bob은 Bobbie하고만 데이트하지만 Bobbie는 그들 모두와 데이트하며 Ben 또한 다른 사람들과 데이트한다.

Monogamish : 모노가미쉬

자기들을 모노가미쉬라고 여기는 커플들은 사회적으로는 한 쌍의 헌신적인 파트너쉽을 가질지 모르지만, 한 쪽만이든 둘 다든 관계 밖에서의 어느 수준의 성관계는 해도 된다는 것에 동의를 한다.

Monogamy : 모노가미

두 사람에게 있어서 오직 서로만이 섹슈얼하거나 로맨틱한 관계임을 합의한 관계 양식을 말한다.

New Relationship Energy : 새로운 (연애)관계 에너지

새로운 연애가 시작될 때 많은 사람들이 경험하는 호르몬의 분출을 말한다. 인간이 새로운 파트너와 성적으로 혹은 로맨틱하게 처음 연결될 때, 도파민, 옥시토신, 아드레날린 등과 기타 즐거운 신경전달물질들이 증가하여 황홀경으로 묘사될 정도의 효과를 주기도 한다. 이는 SNS 몰두 단계, 격정적 단계, 조마조마/안절부절 단계, 생각을 떨쳐버리지 못하는 수준의 집착단계 등을 거친다. 모든 사람이 이런 경험을 하는 것도 아니고 모든 관계가 이런 단계를 거치는 것은 아니지만 많은 경우는 그렇다. 이런 감정은 어디든 6개월부터 3년까지 지속될 수 있으며 충동조절에 제약이 될 수 있고 혹은 사람들이 나중에 후회할 말이나 행동을 야기하므로 충동구매를 조심할 것.

Non-Monogamy : 논모노가미

다수의 연애관계를 말하며, 흔히 성적이거나 로맨틱한 관계가 동시에 이루어지며(연속적 모노가미, 폴리아모리, DADT, 릴레이션쉽 아나키) 윤리적이지 않은 경우도 있다(치팅).

NRE : New Relationship Energy.

One Penis Policy : 원 페니스 폴리시 ; 한 자지 방침 ; 유일음경정책

한 명의 페니스를 가진 파트너(대개 시스젠더 남성이지만 아닌 경우도 있다)만이 관계에서 유일한 페니스인 여성들에게만 관계를 오픈할 수 있다고 정하는 논모노가미의 한 유형을 말한다. (참고 : Unicorn hunters)

Figure 4.2 Polyamory Knowledge 2: Polyamory Terminology
(Source: http://cafe.daum.net/Polyamory)

The image displayed here was part of a post made on the discussion boards of the polyamory community Yŏrŏ's website in October 2017. One of the community members translated 55 different polyamory terms and posted translations for them; a link to the original information is also provided for those who want to see the original information.

The second feature of South Korean polyamory knowledge is its fragmented formation. Given that the production of translated knowledge predominantly focuses on introductory information, it is unsurprising that translated knowledge is also produced in a fragmentary way. American texts often emphasize that polyamory, far from simply having multiple intimate partners, essentially entails the reshaping not only of the way in which one perceives love, sex, and relationships by deconstructing the existing belief in monogamy but also of the way of managing the self in an intimate relationship. With such an approach, American polyamory texts tend to explain polyamory as a journey of personal growth. Having said that, South Korean texts rarely take a structured and holistic approach to polyamory. Instead, South Korean polyamory knowledge tends to be comprised of partial information that deals with particular issues of polyamory—such as mononormativity, consent, and jealousy.

In order to understand the fragmented nature of South Korean polyamory knowledge, it is necessary to look into the contrasting ways in which polyamory knowledge is constructed in the US and South Korea. American polyamory texts, for the most part, are created by individuals who have practiced polyamory for a long period of time. Drawing from lessons they have learnt from trial and error in their own journey of practicing polyamory, these individuals share the ethics, values, and know-hows of polyamory that they believe are important and useful for others learning about polyamory. And the polyamory knowledge that they develop through their experiences offers a blueprint—from what to do to prepare before trying polyamory to how to handle a breakup in a polyamorous relationship—for other polyamorists to follow. In the case of South Korea, there is, by contrast, very little polyamory knowledge built on individuals' firsthand experiences. South Koreans who actively participate in the production of polyamory knowledge tend to have little experience of polyamory themselves. Even while creating polyamory knowledge, they themselves also appear to be still in the process of learning about polyamory. Under this condition, their production of polyamory knowledge heavily relies on the translation of American texts. They form South Korean polyamory knowledge by eclectically choosing parts of American polyamory texts and translating them into Korean. Thus, the translated polyamory knowledge, although a useful resource, hardly shows the whole picture of polyamory, that is, a coherent, thorough illustration of polyamory.

The last feature of South Korean polyamory knowledge is its ambiguous application. As South Korean polyamory knowledge focuses mainly on introductory information at the expense of a comprehensive overview of polyamory, it is more or less inevitable that the guiding principles of how to practice polyamory are left obscure and unexplained in South Korean polyamory knowledge. Going back to the case of the US, American polyamory texts provide a concrete, procedural guideline for polyamory. Specifically, they present techniques for how to dismantle the internalized belief system of monogamy, how to self-explore one's relationship patterns, sexual desires, and emotional dynamics, and lastly, how to own one's self in an intimate relationship by setting personal boundaries and taking care of one's emotions. And with such techniques through which one can soundly develop a polyamorous life, the texts hold that polyamory is a particular way of practicing intimacy that allows individuals to realize the authentic self in their private life against societal and others' control. In stark contrast to American texts, South Korean polyamory texts do not give clear guidance on how one can successfully develop a polyamorous life. While South Korean texts contain some quick and easy tips about different issues of polyamory, those tips appear to be too shallow or unspecified to be applied in practice. For instance, in introducing the culture of monogamy as a big obstacle to the practice of polyamory, South Korean polyamory texts *do not* explain how one can deconstruct monogamous beliefs, that is, there is an *absence* of clear guidance on polyamory (**Figure 4.3**). As such, by using South Korean polyamory texts, individuals feel unclear about how they should practice polyamory, and what a successful polyamory life is remains rather contingent upon individuals' interpretations.

What does ambiguous application signify to South Korean polyamory knowledge? And how is the ambiguous nature of polyamory knowledge linked to South Koreans' asymmetrical participation in the circuits of knowledge? When South Korean polyamory knowledge is characterized by a limited scope and fragmented form of information, I have shown that these two characteristics are intertwined with the specific way in which translated knowledge is produced. While ambiguity appears as an unavoidable result of these two characteristics, here, I claim that the ambiguous nature is essentially embedded in the very practice of translation. When South Koreans translate American polyamory texts, their work is a creative

practice, which requires them to remake American information in a way that is both accessible and applicable to South Koreans by negotiating US-Korea cultural disparities. Also, their work of translation fundamentally entails discerning what is inapplicable or untranslatable information and selecting the *right* information for South Koreans. In this light, when South Koreans do not translate practical guidelines on polyamory from American texts and leave them blank, that blankness is not accidental. Rather, it is the result of the creative work of translation.

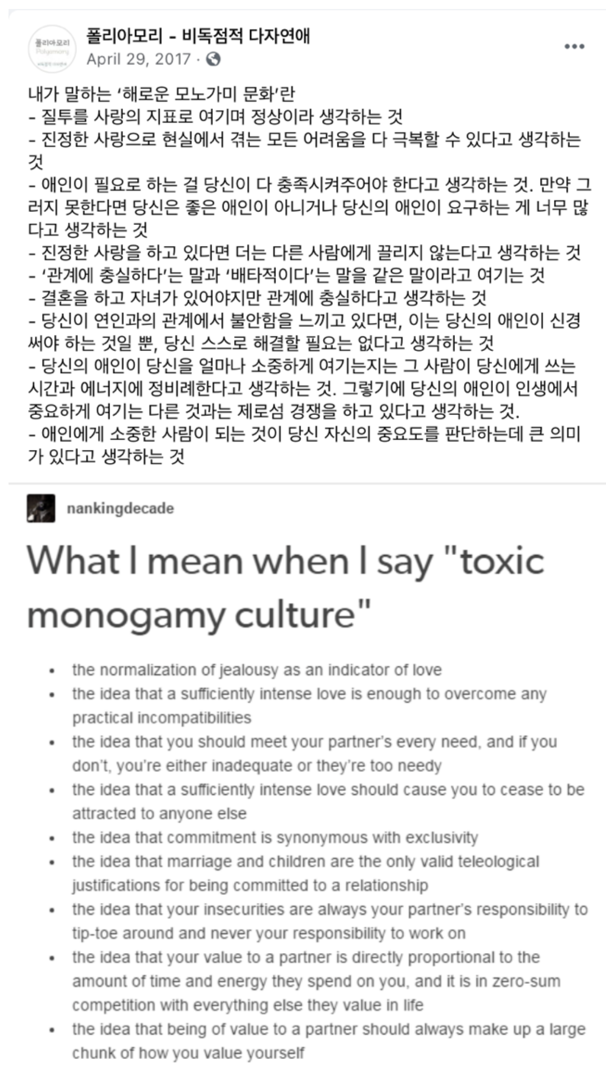


Figure 4.3 Translated Polyamory Knowledge 3: Toxic Monogamy Culture
(Source: https://www.facebook.com/polyamoryINKorea)

Specifically, I point out that practical guidelines on polyamory that American texts provide but are left out in translated knowledge are mainly grounded in psychotherapeutic understanding of the inner self, which are not familiar to many South Koreans. As discussed in Chapter 2, the psychotherapeutic ethos—the prevalent American cultural ethos that emphasizes the understanding and management of the inner self—is entrenched in American polyamory culture. Central to the American practice of polyamory is the psychotherapeutic management of the inner self, which allows individuals to deconstruct the internalized belief of monogamy, discover their own true desires, and deal with inner insecurities and issues of self-esteem. However, psychotherapy is not popular knowledge in South Korea. Many South Koreans are unfamiliar with psychotherapeutic practices, and psychotherapeutic knowledge and techniques are not widely available to the South Korean public. Under this circumstance, the polyamory guidelines that ask individuals to utilize psychotherapeutic knowledge and skills are less likely to be useful to South Koreans, and thus, South Korean polyamorists, instead of translating this American-specific, inapplicable information, tend to *choose* to leave the practical guidelines ambiguous. In such a manner, ambiguous application is the characteristic of South Korean polyamory knowledge that results from the complex and agentic practice of translation.

When the ambiguous nature of South Korean polyamory knowledge is shaped through the process of translation, which involves mediations of the cultural differences between the US and South Korea, that ambiguity importantly signifies the possibility of multiple ways South Koreans can practice polyamory. Even when South Korean polyamory knowledge does not give clear guidance on how to practice polyamory, it does not indicate that it is impossible for South Koreans to practice polyamory. In fact, it is the opposite of an impossibility; it is a new creative space in which South Koreans can develop their own ways of understanding and practicing polyamory.

The Making of South Korean Polyamory Communities

Having discussed how the meaning and value of polyamory remain open to an individual's interpretation in South Korean polyamory knowledge, I now turn to how South Koreans develop the polyamory communities. As Raymond Williams (1961) noted, central to the formation of a culture is the growth of a community. Defining culture as "a description of a particular way of life which expresses certain meanings and values," Williams (1961, 58) argued that community-building essentially entails "the discovery of common meanings and common means of communication". In point of fact, I demonstrate that, as South Korean individuals have developed the subjectivity of polyamory via engaging with the circuits of polyamory knowledge, they have also started to come together as polyamorous subjects and form their own communities. Through organizing polyamory communities, these individuals affirm their subjectivity as polyamorists and seek out social recognition for their polyamorous desire; and importantly, they share and discuss their own interpretations of polyamory with others, thereby establishing the meanings and values of polyamory at a communal level. On this basis, this section scrutinizes the process of polyamory community building to explain how South Koreans develop the shared meanings of polyamory, that is, South Korean polyamory culture.

However, to analyze the development of polyamory communities in South Korea, this section also brings forth *South Korean heteropatriarchal gender relations and norms* as an important consideration for understanding the internal dynamics of polyamory communities and their members' relationships. As shown in Chapter 3, South Korean young feminists played a critical role in the development of polyamory discourse in the 2010s. Rather than being a Western, experimental sexual lifestyle, young feminists have established a new meaning of polyamory: that it is a healthy and egalitarian anti-patriarchal practice of intimacy based upon individual freedom and agency. Feminism, as I observed, also appears to be one of the key forces that has shaped South Korean polyamory communities. Yet, the fact that feminism, or anti-heteropatriarchy, serves as a crucial element informing polyamory communities does not mean that all South Korean polyamorists advocate feminism and consider polyamory to be a feminist practice. Rather,

in South Korean polyamory communities, feminism operates as a critical driving force to create contesting meanings of polyamory and conflicts within polyamory communities. In this respect, this section analyzes how polyamorists reflect contesting interpretations of the feminist values of polyamory and how South Korean polyamory culture has been shaped through contestations over feminist values.

In doing so, I draw on the details of two South Korean polyamory communities: Yŏrŏ: Polyamory Network (여러: 폴리아모리 네트워크, hereafter 'Yŏrŏ') and Taae (다애, 多愛). While showing contrasting styles of community organization, membership, and communication, these two communities have played crucial roles in the development of South Korean polyamory culture. In what follows, I first explore how Yŏrŏ has been shaped to promote the feminist and anti-heteronormative values of polyamory. I then describe how Taae, in contrast to Yŏrŏ, has developed into an open polyamory forum in which the patriarchal and heteronormative understanding of polyamory is dominant. Ultimately, I discuss how the culture of polyamory grows in response to South Korean heteropatriarchal culture.

The First South Korean Polyamory Community: Yŏrŏ

Yŏrŏ, established in 2017, is the first South Korean polyamory community. Organized through an online discussion website and offline meetings, it is also the biggest polyamory community in South Korea thus far, with more than 600 members as of the end of 2019. With the aim of forming a social network of polyamorists as well as promoting polyamorists' rights and interests, Yŏrŏ stipulates the community rules about its members' rights and duties, as described below:

> **Chapter II - Article 6. (Members' Rights and Duties)** (1) Members of the community have a right to participate in community decision-making activities, and in the process, they have a responsibility not to discriminate on the grounds of gender, age, level of education, medical conditions, family type, sexual orientation, relationship orientation, race, ideology, religion, and disability as well as a right not to be discriminated [against]. (2) Members of the community have a right to be informed of the management of the community's operation and activities as well as a right to express their opinions for the community. Also, members have a right to ask staff members to process their affairs in a fair and timely manner. (3) Members of the community have a right as well as a duty to

resist any violation of the rights and interests of polyamorists both inside and outside the community.[93]

While the excerpt clarifies specific rights that Yŏrŏ members enjoy in the community, I indicate that this excerpt also showcases how the Yŏrŏ community envisions an ideal culture of polyamory, which is *a democratic culture of polyamory based on the values of diversity, equality, and freedom*. By looking into the process through which Yŏrŏ has developed, I will illustrate how the Yŏrŏ community has formed a democratic culture upholding the feminist, anti-heteronormative values of polyamory.

The establishment of Yŏrŏ, above all, can be traced back to the first-recorded South Korean polyamorists' offline meeting held in 2017. The meeting was initially proposed by polyamorist T'aera, who wanted to have a small gathering of polyamorists. While planning the meeting, T'aera contacted Hyesu, the administrator of the Facebook page *Polyamory*, and they worked together to organize the meeting. By using Twitter and the Facebook page *Polyamory*, they recruited polyamorists who were interested in joining the meeting. Far exceeding their expectation of having a small gathering, more than 60 people expressed interest, and T'aera and Hyesu successfully held the first South Korean polyamorists' meeting, which led to the development of the polyamory community, Yŏrŏ.

As a starting point for the formation of the Yŏrŏ community, the polyamorists' meeting held by T'aera and Hyesu laid the foundation for the democratic culture of Yŏrŏ. In particular, I illustrate that T'aera and Hyesu, in organizing the polyamorists' meeting, developed a screening process for its participants.

[93] The rules of the Yŏrŏ community are posted on the Yŏrŏ community website (https://cafe.daum.net/Polyamory). The rules were officially announced five months after the community opened its website and started to accept new members in December 2017. The rules consist of five chapters, which cover general rules, members, staff, disciplinary actions, and the revision of the rules, respectively. The excerpt is from chapter two, as follows:
제 2-6 조 (회원의 권리와 의무) (1) 본 커뮤니티의 회원은 커뮤니티의 모든 자치활동에 참여할 권리를 가지며, 이 과정에서 성별, 나이, 학력, 병력, 가족 형태, 성적 지향, 성 정체성, 관계 지향, 인종, 사상, 종교, 장애 등 어떠한 이유로도 차별을 하지 않을 의무가 있으며 차별을 받지 않을 권리가 있다. (2) 본 커뮤니티의 회원은 본 커뮤니티에 대한 활동과 운영 전반에 관하여 보고받을 권리와 의견을 개진할 권리를 가진다. 또한, 본 커뮤니티의 회원은 staff 에게 자신의 사무를 적정한 시간 내에 공정하게 처리해 달라고 요구할 권리를 가진다. (3) 본 커뮤니티의 회원은 대내·외적으로 폴리아모리의 권익을 침해 받지 않도록 저항할 권리와 의무를 가진다.

Identifying themselves as queer and queer-friendly, respectively, T'aera and Hyesu sought to create an atmosphere for the polyamorists' meeting that was not just safe and polyamory-only but also non-discriminatory. Through a google form (**Figure 4.4**), they required polyamorists who wanted to attend the meeting to submit an application form that consisted of a collection of questions. And after reviewing applicants' answers, they gave permission to join the meeting. The questions in the application form included the following. How did you come to realize your polyamorous desire? What is your understanding of polyamory? What has your experience of polyamorous relationship(s) been like? What is your gender identity? What is your sexual orientation? What topics would you like to discuss in the meeting? What is your opinion of building a polyamory community?

폴리아모리 서울 모임 (~7월 18일 신청)

폴리아모리란 두명 이상을 동시에 사랑할 수 있는 성지향성이자 연애 형태를 의미합니다. 이번 폴리아모리 서울 모임에서는 다자 연애를 경험해보지 않았더라도 성지향성으로서 자신이 폴리아모리임을 자각한 분들과 실제로 다자 연애를 경험한 폴리아모리분들을 초대하고자 합니다.

이번 모임에서 모노아모리분들은 참석이 불가합니다. 다자 연애 파트너로서의 경험이 있다하여도 본인의 성지향성이 모노아모리인 경우 이번 모임은 참석이 불가능합니다만, 추후 참석 가능하신 관련 모임이 생긴다면 연락을 드리고자 합니다.

모임은 7월과 8월에 각 1회씩 총 2회 진행될 예정이며, 아웃팅의 문제로 인하여 모임 장소 및 시간은 참석자에게만 공지가 됩니다. 모임 참가를 신청한 폴리아모리의 경우, 주최자가 전화로 개별 연락을 드려 확인 절차를 거치는 점 유의하여 주십시오.

신청 기한은 7월 18일까지입니다.

* Required

당신은 폴리아모리이십니까? *

- 성지향성으로서 폴리아모리이며, 다자 연애를 경험한 적이 없음
- 성지향성으로서 폴리아모리이며, 다자 연애를 경험한 적이 있음(현재 진행형)
- 성지향성으로서 폴리아모리이며, 다자 연애를 경험한 적이 있음(과거)
- 성지향성은 모노아모리이나, 다자 연애 파트너로서의 경험이 있음
- Other:

연락처를 남겨주십시오 *

폴리아모리 : 개인 확인 및 모임 연락을 위한 전화번호(ONLY) / 모노아모리 : 추후 모임 관련 연락을 위한 이메일, 전화번호, SNS 계정 등. 폴리아모리의 경우 이번 모임에 참석이 불가하더라도 추후 모임 관련 연락을 드리게 되며, 개인 확인을 위하여 전화 연락이 불가피함을 양해부탁드립니다.

Your answer

이번 7~8월 2회의 폴리아모리 모임(토요일)에 1회 이상 참석이 가능하십니까? *

- 날짜에 따라 참석이 가능함
- 이번 모임은 참석이 어려울 것 같으나, 현재 활동지가 서울이며 추후 모임에 참석하고 싶음
- 이번 모임은 참석이 어려우며, 현재 활동지가 서울이 아니나, 관련 모임에 온라인으로라도 참석하고 싶음
- 모노아모리이기에 이번 모임 참석이 불가능함
- Other:

본인의 성별 정체성을 설명하여 주십시오 *

예 : 시스젠더 여성

Your answer

본인의 성지향성을 설명하여 주십시오 *

예 : 헤테로 모노아모리

Your answer

모임/연락시 사용될 본인의 이름을 제시하여 주십시오 *

만약의 경우의 아웃팅의 문제 또한 고려하여 주십시오. 물론 본명을 사용하셔도 무방합니다.

Your answer

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Figure 4.4 The Application for the First Polyamorists' Meeting in 2017 in South Korea
(Source: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdyYCpDm0sQuW08bkW-fkTUirM2SpazLMKFrxReXPIrUvv8ng/viewform)

It appears that the application form, as T'aera and Hyesu intended, effectively served to generate a safe, polyamorists-only, and non-discriminatory environment for the meeting. One of the participants in the meeting, Chian, stated that she could get a basic sense of the meeting through the application form, which included questions about sexual identity and sexual orientation. In the South Korean context, it is very rare to see questions about an individual's sexual orientation and gender identity, so much so that many South Koreans are not acquainted with the vocabulary to describe these categories. That being said, when the form asked participants whether they were cisgender or transgender and whether they were heterosexual, homosexual, or pansexual, these questions gave applicants the clear impression that the meeting would have a LGBTQ-friendly, non-discriminatory environment. And people who were either troubled by LGBTQ or unfamiliar with the questions were effectively ruled out from the meeting. In such a way, the application form essentially shaped the qualities of participants and thereby contributed to creating a non-discriminatory environment for the meeting. Put another way, consisting of mainly young South Korean polyamorists who are liberal and LGBTQ-friendly, the meeting, as participants remembered, was indeed a safe and fun gathering where individuals could openly share not only their polyamorous desires but also their different gender and sexual experiences.

In this respect, when the participants decided to build a polyamory community, the liberal, non-discriminatory characteristics of the meeting served as the basis for the formation of the Yŏrŏ community. To form a polyamory community, the participants first organized a task force team—including T'aera, Hyesu, Chian, Minsu, and four other polyamorists—who would take charge of the initial setup. Though each member had a different vision for the community, all of them, as Chian mentioned, agreed on one basic principle for community building; that is, the polyamory community should be a democratic space where human rights, especially the rights of minorities, are well-respected:

> The protection of minority rights was initially T'aera's intention [for the polyamorists' meeting], and we kind of all agreed with that while setting up the community. It was not like all TF [task force] team members shared the exact same intent, but it was an overall agreement among us. We all believe in the importance of the rights of minorities and basic human rights. … I think that we believed that if someone's rights are violated or someone

is discriminated against [in the community], the community should be dissolved. What's the importance of polyamory?[94]

With that underlying principle, the task force team put great effort into constructing Yŏrŏ as a polyamory community grounded in the democratic values of diversity, equality, and freedom. Specifically, through multiple discussions, workshops, and polls among the meeting's participants, they developed objectives of the community, its management system, and rules in a way that cultivated a democratic community culture. One distinctive example of this is the Yŏrŏ community's membership application process. Building upon the application form that was created by T'aera and Hyesu for the meeting, the team formulated a two-step membership application process to ensure members' understanding of the democratic principle of the Yŏrŏ community. According to this process, for full membership, which allows them to participate in community activities, individuals have to attend an orientation meeting that is held quarterly by staff members. That said, I point out that Yŏrŏ's orientation meeting mainly serves to introduce the democratic principles of the Yŏrŏ community to its new members. In the meeting, members learn the community rules that mandate anti-discrimination and the protection of minority rights, and they are informed what measures will be taken if the rules are violated. Also, members have a short discussion session in which they are asked to think about the issue of discrimination and ways to develop equal relationships inside and outside the community.

Trying to foster a democratic culture grounded in the values of diversity, equality, and freedom, the Yŏrŏ community also pays special attention to feminist principles. One of the task force team members, Minsu remembered that the task force team spent a great deal of time discussing how Yŏrŏ could incorporate feminist values into its community rules. Under the social context in which feminism has arisen

[94] Chian, interviewed by author, Seoul, July 25, 2019.
소수자의 권리를 지키자 하는 게 원래 처음 태라님의 뜻이고 전반적으로 그런 의도를 가지고 했던 것 같아요. 전반적으로 그런 무드를 띄었는데 TF 팀이 다 똑같았던 건 아닌데 그런 뜻을 가진 사람들이 다 모였던 것 같아요. 다 약간 어느 정도 사회적 소수자에 대한 것이 중요하다 인권적인 게 중요하다. …제가 생각하기엔 그런 것 같아요. 그렇게 문제가 생기느니 없어도 돼. 정말 [이 커뮤니티에서] 누군가의 인권이 침해 받고 차별 받느니 그런 거면 없어지는 게 맞지. 뭐 폴리가 중요해?

as an important social movement in South Korea, Minsu stated that the team was concerned about issues of sexual harassment within the community and sought to build an anti-sexist, safe environment. All of the task force team members agreed that Yŏrŏ should not tolerate misogynistic and discriminatory remarks about women. As a result of these concerns and thoughts, the Yŏrŏ community has in fact developed strict anti-sexist community rules and system; not only are any postings made on the website that contain sexist content immediately deleted by staff members, but the community also runs a hotline for issues of sexual harassment between members.

The Yŏrŏ community has somewhat successfully shaped a democratic culture through its community system, rules, and activities. During my fieldwork, I observed that, in the community gatherings, Yŏrŏ members interact with each other equally regardless of age, gender identity, and occupation, and tend to be careful not to make discriminatory comments that, for example, stereotype minority groups or any other groups. (When any member makes such comments, staff members immediately point out the anti-discrimination rules and issue a caution to the member.) But why is it so important for the Yŏrŏ community to form a democratic culture through all these efforts? What does the democratic culture of the Yŏrŏ community signify?

The democratic culture of Yŏrŏ, I argue, is fundamentally interlaced with the way in which the community understands polyamory. With the purpose of promoting polyamory, the Yŏrŏ community in fact does not perceive polyamory merely as a non-monogamous practice. Instead, it appears that the Yŏrŏ community considers polyamory as a new, alternative way of practicing intimacy that changes the existing possessive patriarchal culture of intimate relationships. Among Yŏrŏ members, it is widely assumed that polyamory is a democratic practice of intimacy that allows individuals to practice intimacy in an equal and free manner. Although not every member agrees with such an understanding of polyamory, the democratic value of polyamory is predominantly and widely accepted among the members.[95] In this regard, I indicate

[95] In *Queer Activism in India: A Story in the Anthropology of Ethics* (2012), Naisargi Dave argues that the formation of a queer community, which necessarily entails the normalizing practices of the community, provides both new possibilities and limitations. Dave (2012, 56) states that, as a queer community grows through building its own normative values and practices, other potential possibilities are foreclosed, and individuals who cannot abide by the

that the Yŏrŏ community's approach to polyamory corresponds to feminists' arguments for polyamory, which started to appear in the South Korean public discourse in the late 2010s. As I have discussed in chapter 3, there have been increasing South Korean feminists who advocate polyamory as a way of resisting the patriarchal and heteronormative culture of intimacy. These feminists signify polyamory not as being about the number of intimate partners one has, but as being an anti-heteronormative, non-possessive, and feminist practice, which enables individuals to exercise agency in their intimate relationships. In line with feminists' arguments, Yŏrŏ members also tend to understand that polyamory is essentially a democratic practice, entangled with feminism and queer activism. For instance, there is a popular seminar group of Yŏrŏ members, which is named "Queer, Feminism, and Polyamory." The aim of this seminar is for members to share their experiences as queer feminist polyamorists and to find ways to support their queer, feminist, and polyamorous lives altogether. In this seminar, being a queer feminist polyamorist is discussed as an interconnected experience. Also, it appears that Yŏrŏ members, through the community website, share information about queer activism and feminism, and sometimes they participate together in feminist and queer events. To put it briefly, the formation of the Yŏrŏ community, at the embryonic moment of multiple possibilities of understanding polyamory in South Korea, showcases that South Korean polyamorists have established a shared meaning of polyamory: a democratic practice of intimacy against the patriarchal and heteronormative culture of intimate relationships. And the democratic culture of the Yŏrŏ community epitomizes its members' shared understanding of polyamory.

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community norms are left out. In light of Dave's illustration, the Yŏrŏ community, while fostering a democratic meaning of polyamory, appears to preclude polyamorists who cannot follow or do not agree with its democratic culture of polyamory, advertently or inadvertently. For example, its membership application process, which was created to ensure a democratic environment for Yŏrŏ, operates as a significant obstruction to accessing the Yŏrŏ community. There are polyamorists who are rejected from Yŏrŏ because of their failure to complete the application form, and there are also associate members who have trouble with attending the orientation meeting required to become full members. At the same time, some polyamorists withdraw from the Yŏrŏ community since they do not share the democratic values of polyamory. When the Yŏrŏ community actively promotes a feminist and anti-heteronormative meaning of polyamory, polyamorists who do not agree with such values of polyamory tend not to participate in community activities or leave the community.

Polyamory Online Chat Room: Taae

I remember the first time that I met an organizer of the Taae community, Chinun, who has become one of the key informants for my fieldwork in South Korea. It was at Taee's monthly meeting, which was held in a Chinese restaurant in the winter of 2019. After giving me a warm welcome, Chinun talked to me about the Taae community. In the talk, Chinun also mentioned Yŏrŏ, describing it as a "queer" polyamory community. And he said that compared to Yŏrŏ, Taae is more "straight." As interesting as his contrast between Yŏrŏ and Taae was, I have later found that his account does somewhat accurately represent different characteristics of the two polyamory communities. While Yŏrŏ highlights polyamory as a democratic, feminist practice that challenges the existing heteropatriarchal culture, Taae tends to perceive polyamory as separate from either feminism or queer activism.

Here, I illustrate how the Taae community has developed into a public (open) polyamory forum, where a range of polyamorists get together and freely discuss polyamory. And, as an open forum for polyamorists, Taae underscores heterogeneous interpretations of polyamory rather than promoting particular meanings of polyamory. However, while upholding individuals' freedom to develop their own way of interpreting polyamory, I argue that Taae is significantly involved in, if not supportive of, the patriarchal and heteronormative understanding of polyamory.

Above all, the Taae community has developed into an open polyamory forum based on its distinctive way of organizing its community—particularly, its usage of an online chat room as its main communication channel. Unlike Yŏrŏ, which uses a website for its members' communication, Taae is organized on the basis of an online chat room. Although Taae does have a community website, it is rather secondary. And members' interactions mostly happen through an "open chat room" serviced by the mobile messenger application KakaoTalk. An open chat room is a form of online chat service that allows people to chat with unknown others about particular topics. As someone creates a chat room for a certain topic, other people who are interested in the topic can find the chat room via a keyword search and join the chat. After Chinun opened a chat room for polyamory in November 2017, the chat room has grown into the polyamory community Taae. As Chinun remembered, there were initially only a few participants, but the

number of participants has steadily increased, and as of 2019, there were around 50 to 60 members who regularly participated in the chat room.

Operating as the primary communication platform of Taae members, the open chat room, I point out, shapes the two essential characteristics of the Taae community. The first one is open and free access. As described earlier, the Yŏrŏ community has a two-step process for membership application. To partake in the Yŏrŏ community, individuals need to submit an online application form and attend a quarterly offline orientation meeting. On the contrary, the Taae community does not have such a complex application process. To join the Taae chat room, an individual needs to enter a password, but the password is readily available on Chinun's personal blog or on Taae's website. Once the individual enters the chat room, all they need to do is to introduce themselves briefly in the chat room.[96] Then, they can freely take part in the community. Under this condition, anyone who has an interest in polyamory can easily access Taae. The second characteristic is instantaneous and casual communication among members. Because they use a website, Yŏrŏ members need to post writings of a certain length, images, or news on the community website to interact with others. Taae members, by contrast, can simply initiate a conversation via their messenger application. Seemingly trivial, their different communication platforms create a huge difference in the way in which Yŏrŏ and Taae members interact. Free from the burden of writing a post and waiting for others to reply to the post, Taae members enjoy instantaneous communication without constraint about varying topics, including not only polyamory but also many other everyday issues. Taae members also tend to share their thoughts and experiences of polyamory in a more casual manner. In such a way, drawing from these two essential characteristics, the Taae community has developed into an open forum for polyamorists.

As I have observed, the Taae chat room is indeed a vibrant space as a public polyamory forum, where various individuals come together over their shared interest in polyamory and freely exchange their thoughts. Primarily, Taae community consists of a wide range of participants. Compared to Yŏrŏ which is mainly composed of single people who are in their late twenties and thirties, Taae includes people in more

[96] People who do not introduce themselves are blocked from the chat room. Chinun mentioned that this is because there are some people who join the chat room only to voyeuristically observe conversations among polyamorists.

various age groups, from their early twenties to their late forties. There are more married people, especially married men, as well. The Taae chat room also shows more diversity in terms of levels of interest in and experience of polyamory, including people who have just discovered polyamory, people who feel doubtful about practicing polyamory in reality, and people who firmly self-identify as polyamorists.

Along with a variety of participants, its open and free form and topics of conversation are also noticeable in the Taae chat room. Without any preset formats or given topics, members freely bring up subjects to talk about in the chat room, and others who feel interested in the subjects participate in the talk. Turn-taking happens naturally, and during the conversations, members share links, images, and other files related to the topics they are discussing. Normally, there are several members who tend to facilitate the talk, but, depending on the topic, any members can lead the talk. While staff members are there to manage the chat room, they do not intervene in the conversations unless members use curse words or make personally offensive remarks. (Most of the time, staff members enjoy talking like other members). Conversation topics vary from day to day. Sometimes members address heavy issues of polyamory, such as social oppression of polyamory or the history of monogamy, other times they share trivial episodes in their practice of polyamory. The tone of their talk also changes according to topics—from light and humorous to serious and argumentative. In short, the number of Taae members' conversations and the range of topics that their conversations cover are incomparably more expansive than Yŏrŏ members' conversations.

In this regard, I indicate that the Taae community, in contrast to the Yŏrŏ community, unveils the complex or contradictory dynamics of polyamory. Taae members, while freely talking about polyamory, showcase multiple heterogeneous ways of interpreting and practicing polyamory. Except for the basic definition of polyamory, it is in fact hard to find a single polyamory issue on which every Taae member has the same opinion. What is the relation between monogamy and polyamory? How different are they except for the number of partners? What is the right time to disclose polyamory to a new date? When polyamory requires open communication, to what extent does one need to be open to their partners? What is consent for a polyamorous relationship? What are the requirements to give/obtain sound consent for polyamory? In the Taae chat room, there do not seem to be any consistent or uniform answers to these

questions. Having said that, one of the contentious issues in the Taae chat room is the values of polyamory—especially, what are the values of polyamory in relation to feminism and queer activism. One of the most frequently-discussed topics, the social significance of polyamory is the subject upon which members show the most divergent or opposing opinions.

When multiple, conflicting understandings of polyamory are exchanged in the Taae chat room, what is interesting is the way the Taae community deals with members' conflicting opinions. When they face discordant opinions on different polyamory issues, Taae members tend not to seek for agreement, but to respect each other's differences. They, in other words, appear to be respectful of others' contradictory understandings of polyamory, as long as they do not violate the very notion of polyamory—non-monogamous intimate relationships with one's partner's consent—which Taae stands for. Since every member is practicing polyamory under different circumstances with different value systems, it is generally claimed in the Taae chat room that no one can easily judge another individual's way of interpreting and practicing polyamory. Concerning this, one of the staff members, Kihun, often mentions that polyamory is "*kakchadosaeng* (각자도생) " meaning that individuals have to find a way of surviving a polyamorous life on their own. According to him, "when there are a hundred polyamorists, there must be a hundred forms of polyamory." In such a manner, Taae members, rather than arguing for a uniform meaning of polyamory, promote an individual's freedom to develop their own way of understanding and practicing polyamory based on their personal values and circumstances, unless their way of practicing polyamory engages in deception or violence.

Even though the Taae community encourages each individual's own way of understanding polyamory, I however claim that, amid multiple, heterogeneous interpretations of polyamory, the Taae chat room significantly reveals a patriarchal and heteronormative perspective on polyamory. Although it does not reject the feminist and anti-heteronormative values of polyamory, Taae tends to dissociate itself from feminism and queer activism. During the time that I observed the Taae chat room, feminism and queer activism appeared to be popular topics of members' conversations, either related to polyamory or separate

from polyamory. Under the context in which feminism has emerged as a controversial subject in South Korea since the mid 2010s, Taae members often talked about feminist issues, such as dating violence and sexual abuse. Among various issues regarding feminism, the topic that Taae members showed the most interest in was undeniably the relation between polyamory and feminism: How is polyamory connected to feminism? Or, is it connected to feminism at all? These questions are repeatedly raised in the chat room, and members tend to have intense discussions whenever they are brought up. By looking into one of the discussions that Taae members had on this topic, here, I describe how Taae operates to bolster an approach to polyamory that is reliant on patriarchal and heteronormative logic.

One day in May 2019, Taae members were talking about books in a casual and lively manner. As one of the members mentioned a book on feminism, Hachun, who was relatively new to Taae, said that he believed polyamory should go hand in hand with feminism. Responding to Hachun, Chongho questioned the relation between polyamory and feminism, which resulted in a heated debate among Taae members. Hachun at first illustrated that, under the current condition of hierarchical, unequal gender relations, polyamory is in most cases, put into practice by men, and women are compelled to participate in it by men. Hachun thus argued that, to fulfill its basic requirement of mutual consent between partners, polyamory should entail feminism, which helps men and women build an equal relationship. Chongho, by contrast, stated that he does not see the connection between polyamory and feminism; though he acknowledged that an equal relationship should be the basis of polyamory, Chongho still disagreed that feminism is necessary for polyamory.

While Hachun and Chongho pitched contrasting opinions on feminist values of polyamory, others also added their different thoughts. Similar to Hachun, Yŏnchu argued that feminism, although it is not necessary for polyamory, is in close alliance with polyamory because both are grounded on the values of tolerance for social minorities, diversity, and equality. Contrastingly, T'aechin and Kihun, in line with Chongho's claim, stated that, while polyamory requires equality and consent, these things are personal matters between individuals, and unequal power dynamics cannot be generalized by gender. As two opposite opinions on the relation between polyamory and feminism went face to face against each other,

the conversation turned into an intense debate. But Taae members, as soon as they realized that their chat room had become too contentious, appeared to try to deescalate the debate by making such comments as, "Let's respect individuals' different values," "Let's try not to be argumentative," "Please be respectful of each other in the chat room." And they gradually quieted the debate.

While Taee members showed two contradicting opinions on the relation between polyamory and feminism in the debate, I however point out that the debate unmasked the Taae chat room's patriarchal and heteronormative view on polyamory. Chongho, T'aechin, Kihun, and others asserted that feminist values do not appertain to polyamory. Arguing that consent and equality are individual issues that should be negotiated and accomplished with one's partner(s), they tacitly denied or belittled structural gender inequality and violence. Under the patriarchal nuclear family system and the gendered labor market, it is an undeniable fact that South Korean women are in a more economically vulnerable position compared to men. Particularly, as many women experience interrupted careers due to marriage or childbirth, married women tend to be economically dependent on their husbands, either partially or fully (Eun 2018; S.Y. Kim 2017; E. Moon 2016). And in heterosexual married relationships, women, as Hachun rightly pointed out, are less likely to have an equal standing to their partner such that they can negotiate or create consent for their practice of polyamory. Nevertheless, these Taae members, in their practice of polyamory, showed no consideration for the existing patriarchal heteronormative order. For them, polyamory is simply a particular form of intimate relationship that grants them freedom to have multiple intimate partners.

With respect to this, it is also important to note that many anti-feminist comments were made during this heated debate. In rejecting the association between polyamory and feminism, these members, were not just dismissive of feminism. They clearly expressed their antipathy toward feminism. For instance, Chunsang, another Taae member who took part in the debate, stated that feminism has created "conflicts between men and women far away from equality," while also describing South Korean feminists as dangerous female chauvinists. T'aechin and Kihun appeared to conform to Chunsang's comments by saying "Let's not create conflicts. We are not that kind of people," and "Just because there is no feminism, it does not mean [there is] no care for women," respectively. Consequently, as the refusal of and hostility toward

feminism were blatantly shared in the chat room, I claim that the debate laid bare the patriarchal and heteronormative logic whereby the Taae community approaches polyamory.

To be clear, my argument here is not that all of Taae members oppose feminism and uphold an understanding of polyamory that is patriarchal and heteronormative logic. On the contrary, the reason that this heated debate happened in the chat room in the first place is because some Taae members believe that the practice of polyamory is essentially tied to feminism. But notwithstanding the existence of those members, I assert that the Taae community, compared to the Yŏrŏ community, predominantly displays the patriarchal and heteronormative approach to polyamory, mainly due to its function as an open polyamory forum. Put another way, since the Taae chat room serves as a public forum in which any polyamorists can come together and freely discuss polyamory, the chat room tends to be overrun with patriarchal and heteronormative logic. I above all point out that the Taae community, unlike the Yŏrŏ community, which has strict rules restricting prejudiced and discriminatory comments, does not regulate its members' comments. In the Taae chat room, discriminatory remarks are freely shared without constraints. Indeed, when Chunsang depicted feminists as dangerous female chauvinists in the debate, staff members did not take any actions against him, although other members did try to correct his comments. Under the circumstances, it is not uncommon to observe sexist comments in the Taae chat room. When sexist comments are made, there are usually members who raise objections to the sexism. Yet, since there are no community rules to regulate discriminatory comments, individuals who cannot stand sexist or other discriminatory remarks tend to leave the chat room.

At the same time, I indicate that the Taae chat room's atmosphere, which respects individuals' heterogeneous understandings of polyamory, contributes to reinforcing the patriarchal and heteronormative view on polyamory. As the Taae chat room promotes individuals' different ways of interpreting and practicing polyamory, critical and incompatible differences among members are neglected. The disparity between an individual who considers polyamory as a feminist practice that resists the patriarchal culture and another individual who believes that men are more non-monogamous by nature than women is as irreconcilable as the difference between monogamists and polyamorists. Yet, in the Taae chat room, these

two individuals, while accepting their differences, are expected to be united under the name of polyamory. In point of fact, as the debate was getting intense between the contrasting opinions on the necessity of feminism for polyamory, Yŏnchu tried reconciling the divide by mentioning that "The men in this chat room as far as I am concerned are not on the opposite side of feminism, since they are here to think seriously about how to practice polyamory unlike men in the old days who just cheated on their wives or took concubines."[97] This comment exemplifies how the Taae community undermines the difference among members and emphasizes members' affinity as polyamorists. And importantly, while members, regardless of their critical differences, are encouraged to form an alliance as polyamorists, the Taae chat room reinforces the understating of polyamory that is patriarchal and heteronormative logic, which operates as the hegemonic ideology in South Korea.

Therefore, I argue that the Taae community, while operating as an open polyamory forum, has upheld the patriarchal and heteronormative understanding of polyamory. In what precedes, I have illustrated that the Yŏrŏ community has built a democratic culture drawing upon its understanding of polyamory as a democratic practice of intimacy to oppose the existing heteropatriarchal order. Yŏrŏ presumes that polyamory is essentially entwined with feminism and queer activism in its challenge to the patriarchal and heteronormative culture. However, Taae represents a contrasting view on polyamory. Taae does not suppose that feminist and anti-patriarchal values are integral to polyamory. Although it is admitted that some may find feminist and anti-heteronormative values from their practice of polyamory, Taae rather considers those as the personal values of some polyamorists. That said, Taae does not connect polyamory with opposition to the patriarchal and heteronormative culture of intimacy, and challenging the heteropatriarchal culture is not an objective of Taae members.

Detaching the meaning of polyamory from feminist and anti-heteronormative values, Taae instead understands polyamory through the values of individual freedom and choice. That is, polyamory is perceived as a form of non-monogamous relationship, which enables individuals to exercise freedom in

[97] Yŏnchu, online conversation, May 23, 2019.

their practice of intimacy. And in the Taae chat room, as polyamory is signified mainly as a practice of individual freedom, one's partner's consent appears to be the necessary cost for one's freedom. In this sense, I have noted that one thing the Taae community does not tolerate is people who are cheating on their partner(s) under the name of polyamory. Despite its atmosphere of respect towards others' different ways of practicing polyamory, the Taae community shows strong and explicit disapproval for those who are in a non-monogamous relationship without (or without intention to gain) their partners' consent. Those people are denounced as irresponsible, self-indulgent, and deceptive cheaters. In such a way, I claim that the Taae community, in accordance with the existing patriarchal and heteronormative order, values polyamory for the way that it seems to emphasizes the exercise of individual freedom and choice in the practice of intimacy.

Conclusion: What is Polyamory in South Korea?

My analysis of the two communities indicates that, among South Korean polyamorists, there are mainly two contrasting understandings of polyamory with regard to how to situate polyamory within the existing patriarchal and heteronormative culture; while polyamory is promoted as a new, alternative practice of intimacy that has feminist and anti-heteronormative values on the one hand, there is an understanding of polyamory that is patriarchal and heteronormative on the other hand, one which perceives of polyamory as a non-monogamous intimate relationship that allows individuals to exercise freedom to practice intimacy without constraints. While showing the contrasting views of what polyamory implies to the existing patriarchal and heteronormative culture, what underlies both understandings is the assumption that polyamory is a form of intimate relationship that helps individuals exercise agency in their practice of intimacy. That is, instead of oppressing intimate desires and pleasures, South Korean polyamorists, by means of polyamory, seek to exercise freedom to express and realize their intimate desires.

Above all, this chapter demonstrates that American cultural hegemonic power is ingrained in the way South Korean polyamorous subjects have emerged. While South Koreans form the subjectivity of polyamorists by renaming, reshaping, or rediscovering their desires for non-monogamy in accordance with

the American polyamory culture, polyamorous subjectivity is acclaimed as a legible sexual subjectivity that originated in the US. In this way, American cultural values such as democracy and individualism are inherently attached to the way South Koreans accept polyamory as a more "democratic" or "ethical" practice of intimacy.

However, the emergence of South Korean polyamorous subjects has not been a simplistic acceptance of the American subjectivity of polyamory. This chapter unveils that South Koreans have formed their own particular subjectivities as polyamorists through a complex yet active journey by which they search out and interpret American polyamory knowledge and mediate between the American culture of polyamory and their own social circumstances. Although American texts serve as the "original" polyamory knowledge to educate South Korean polyamorists, American knowledge is not the only way that South Koreans can explore polyamory. It is neither a "superior" nor the only "correct" form of polyamory knowledge. That is, amidst the asymmetrical and heterogeneous circuits of polyamory knowledge, South Korean polyamorists recreate American polyamory knowledge in ways that consider cultural disparities between the US and South Korea and form new meanings of polyamory.

Claiming that South Korean polyamory culture is shaped through intricate, agentic practices of translating the American subjectivity of polyamory into South Korean, this chapter ultimately showcases that the meanings of polyamory in South Korea have been established in interaction with its patriarchal heteronormative culture. In essence, polyamory is a consensual non-monogamous intimate relationship that allows individuals to build multiple intimate and sexual connections as they desire. By rejecting the sexual norm of monogamy, polyamory, in other words, is a way of practicing intimacy based on individual freedom and agency. Given that basic understanding of polyamory, in South Korea, two divergent meanings of polyamory have appeared according to how polyamory is situated within the patriarchal and heteronormative culture. The first one is the understanding of polyamory as a feminist practice which challenges the patriarchal and heteronormative order of intimacy, and the other one signifies polyamory as a practice of individual freedom, which does not directly oppose the existing patriarchal system. These two meanings of polyamory are derived from different standpoints on the patriarchal and heteronormative

system—whether or not the deconstruction of the heteropatriarchal system is necessary for individuals to exercise freedom and agency in their practice of intimacy. And importantly, the coexistence of these two meanings of polyamory suggests South Korean polyamorists' contrasting positions within the heteropatriarchal system. With that in mind, the next chapter explores how individuals manage the practice of polyamory within their different positions of gender, class, marital status, and sexual orientation.

Chapter 5 Becoming a Polyamorist, Crafting a Private Self
: An analysis of South Korean polyamorists' experiences of polyamory

In Chapter 2, I discussed American individuals' experience of polyamory as a means of actualizing the authentic self by liberating themselves not only from society's and others' influences but also from their own emotional, inner complexities. Importantly, I have shown that polyamorists' actualization of the authentic self is essentially entangled with their racial position. As a complement to Chapter 2, this chapter explores individuals' experience of polyamory with a focus on their construction and management of selfhood through polyamory. That is, just as Chapter 2 examined American individual's practice of polyamory within the process of subjectivation, this chapter scrutinizes the role that polyamory plays in the process in which polyamorists constitute themselves as "a certain mode of being characteristic of the ethical subject" (Foucault 1990b, 28).

To examine individuals' experience of polyamory in South Korea, this chapter draws upon the ethnographic data that I collected from 2018 to 2019 by conducting participant observations in polyamory communities and interviewing polyamorists. Specific questions that I consider in this chapter include: How did individuals decide to practice polyamory? What difficulties do these individuals encounter and how do they deal with these difficulties in order to maintain their polyamorous lifestyle? What do individuals' experiences of polyamory signify with regard to the way they perceive and manage themselves? Finally, what does these individuals' practice of polyamory tell us about the changing social values of the self and intimate, private life in post-crisis, neoliberal South Korean society?

To answer these questions, I approach indidviduals' practice of polyamory in conjunction with the changing notion of selfhood in post-crisis, neoliberal South Korean society. In Chapter 3, I showed that South Koreans' reconstruction of their social and personal lives after the neoliberal reform of the socioeconomic system in 1997 was central to the development of the media discourse of polyamory in the 2000s and 2010s. To examine polyamorists' construction and management of their selfhood through polyamory, this chapter also carefully considers the increasing social emphasis on individuality as a logic for constructing one's life since the 2000s and 2010s in South Korean society. Many scholars have indicated

that, with the prevalence of the neoliberal ethos, which stresses individual freedom, choice, and self-realization, in post-crisis South Korean society, a social trend has emerged in which individuals seek to organize not only their public, economic lives but also their private, familial lives in ways that emphasize their individual freedom and self-realization. In line with this, I analyze how the way in which polyamorists construct and manage their selfhood through polyamory manifests the growing social values of individual freedom, choice, and self-realization. Specifically, I showcase how polyamorists, with the principle of self-realization, define, foster, and express a private, or inner self—the self which is untethered from social expectations and their roles in social and familial relationships—through the practice of polyamory.

Equally important to my analysis of South Koreans' practice of polyamory is their gendered position. As I showed in Chapter 4, an individual's positionality and relationship to the heteronormative patriarchal system is essentially connected to their understanding of polyamory. Building on that account, this chapter describes how individuals' experience of polyamory is essentially entangled with their gendered position within the South Korean heteropatriarchal family system. While polyamory serves as a means by which individuals can envision and cultivate their private selves detached from social and familial relations, the cultivation of a private self through polyamory is not equally available to everyone depending on their gendered position in the heteropatriarchal family. In this chapter, I hence showcase how the way individuals construct and manage themselves is shaped through their gendered position.

This chapter is comprised of four sections. First, "Polyamorists in South Korea" provides contextual information about the South Korean polyamorists that I met—their demographic characteristics and their experience of polyamory—before I begin my analysis of South Koreans' practice of polyamory. Second, "Choosing to be a Polyamorist" examines South Koreans' motivations for practicing polyamory, while illustrating how individuals articulate the practice of polyamory as their own agentic choice for themselves. Third, "How to be a Polyamorist" depicts how individuals struggle to live as polyamorists in South Korean society. It illustrates that being a polyamorist requires individuals to acknowledge and express their inner desires, thoughts, and feelings in opposition not only to societal norms but also to their roles in familial or intimate relationships. Finally, the last section, "Toward Cultivating the Private Self"

scrutinizes meanings of polyamory with regard to the ways in which polyamorists manage their selfhood. Altogether, this chapter elucidates how polyamory, in South Korean society, essentially operates as the process through which one can cultivate the private self and how one's gendered position is intertwined with that process. Ultimately, this chapter argues that while the notion of the private self that is untethered from social duties and familial roles has developed in the post-crisis, neoliberal contexts of South Korea, unequal gender dynamics within the heteropatriarchal family are fundamentally embedded in the cultivation of the private self.

Polyamorists in South Korea

This section aims to provide a broad view of the polyamorists that I met and interviewed during my fieldwork in South Korea. In Chapter 4, I already introduced some polyamorists' stories to illustrate the emergence of polyamorous subjects and circulation/production of polyamory knowledge in South Korea. Yet, unlike Chapter 4, which mainly focuses on the development of South Korean polyamory culture, this chapter unearths how individuals practice polyamory in their everyday lives. To that end, it is important to provide contextual information about the individual polyamorists that constitute the basis of my analysis of South Koreans' experience of polyamory. While admitting that my data does not and cannot include all polyamorists' experiences in South Korea, in what follows, I describe the basic nature of my ethnographic data—who the polyamorists are that I worked with during my fieldwork in South Korea as well as how I met and interviewed them.

Similar to my work with polyamorists in Southern California, I met most of the South Korean polyamorists that I will be discussing through South Korean polyamory communities.[98] I mainly observed two South Korean polyamory communities—Yŏrŏ and Taae—to conduct fieldwork on South Korean

[98] I separately contacted a few polyamorists. For example, I emailed Sim Kiyong, co-author of the polyamory book *We Practice Polyamory* at the preliminary stage of my field research. He became a good informant and friend who helped me navigate my fieldwork in South Korea. He also introduced me to some of his polyamorous friends so that I could interview them. Another individual whom I contacted separately is Kakyŏng, one of the presenters at the colloquium *Escape from Normative Intimacy* held by the T'aryŏnae Sŏnŏn team (Chapter 3). By attending the colloquium, I came to know her and interview her.

individuals' polyamorous lives (see Chapter 4 for descriptions of Yŏrŏ and Taae). By attending their online discussions, offline meetings, and members' informal social gatherings from 2018 to 2019, I built good rapport with them, and some of them happily participated in my research as interviewees (total 38 individuals).

One of the most distinctive demographic characteristics that I noticed about polyamorists in South Korea is *their small range of age groups* compared to those in Southern California. Whilst polyamorists in Southern California consist of a wide range of age groups, from young people in their 20s to older adults in their 70s, the polyamorists that I met in South Korea are mostly young adults in their 20s and 30s, and very few individuals in polyamory communities are over 40.

When it comes to gender identity, all of the South Korean polyamorists I encountered self-identify as cisgender except for one person who identifies as non-binary. Between men and women, there is a slightly higher proportion of polyamorous men. In regard to marital status, dissimilar to polyamorists in Southern California, where almost half of the community members are married, only a small portion of polyamorists in South Korea are in a marital relationship. The majority of married polyamorists are men, and it is not common to see married women in South Korean polyamory communities. Though there are, overall, more polyamorous men than women in South Korea, the heavily-skewed gender ratio among married polyamorists is noteworthy. (I will discuss this in detail in the last section.) On top of that, the South Korean polyamorists I met are predominantly heterosexual. While there are some polyamorous women who identify as bisexual or pansexual, I have rarely seen any non-heterosexual men in polyamory communities.[99]

South Korean polyamorists tend to have various occupations such as white-collar office workers, programmers, salespeople, teachers, musicians, counselors, writers, and students. Most of the polyamorists I met and interviewed in South Korea reside in Seoul or the Seoul capital area, though I did interview

[99] Separate from my work in polyamory communities, I was able to meet and interview three gay men practicing polyamory during my field research. While all three men are actively involved in queer activism, they do not participate in any polyamory communities. They asserted that they did not feel that it is necessary or comfortable to join polyamory communities because they think the communities are not gay-friendly.

several polyamorists living in provincial cities including Daejeon, Daegu, or Pohang. The reason my interviewees are concentrated in the Seoul capital area is not just because Seoul is the most densely-populated city in South Korea, but because polyamory communities' meetings are usually held in Seoul. Polyamorists who live far from Seoul have low accessibility to community meetings and are less likely to be active in community activities. In terms of social status, most of my interviewees are middle-class and well-educated, and a few of them have a postgraduate degree.

As far as ethnicity is concerned, the polyamorists that I met in South Korea are quite a homogenous group. Almost all of them were born and grew up in South Korea, but a few individuals have lived abroad. Two exceptions are Andrew and Suchŏng, who are US citizens. Andrew is a second-generation Korean American. Having grown up in California, he currently lives in Seoul to work as an English teacher. Speaking minimal Korean, Andrew usually communicates with people in English. In the case of Suchŏng, she was born in the US and moved back and forth between the US and South Korea during her childhood. She now lives in Seoul.

Given the demographic characteristics of the polyamorists I met in South Korea, what do their experiences of polyamory look like? One of the basic features of their polyamorous experiences is *the relatively short period* they have been practicing polyamory, especially compared to polyamorists in Southern California. Among the South Korean polyamorists that I encountered during my fieldwork, the majority of them had less than two years of experience with polyamory as of 2019. Since the year 2017 marked a turning point for the growth of South Korean polyamory culture (discussed in Chapter 3), many people came to learn about polyamory after 2017. Under the circumstances, people who have practiced polyamory for more than two years are regarded as highly experienced polyamorists in South Korean polyamory communities. I met four people with more than five years of polyamory experience, Mujin, Kakyŏng, Kihun, and Hyesu. All of them started to identify as polyamorists in the early 2010s when there were neither polyamory communities in South Korea nor polyamory books published in Korean. Among them, Mujin, Kakyŏng, and Kihun still practice polyamory, but Hyesu recently settled into a monogamous relationship with her long-term primary partner (although she still advocates polyamory).

Another important fact that marks South Korean polyamorists' experience is that few have actually been in a polyamorous relationship with their partners' full consent. Although polyamorists certainly exist who have successfully developed a polyamorous relationship with their partners' consent, a large portion of polyamorists have not yet been able to actually experience being in a polyamorous relationship. In many cases, this is mainly because they cannot find an intimate partner who agrees to their practicing polyamory. For instance, Kihun, while pursuing polyamory for eight years, has never been in a stable polyamorous relationship. Kihun stated that, after he reveals that he is polyamorous, his dates often turn him down or try to make him abandon his pursuit of polyamory. In other cases, I have also observed polyamorists who cannot initiate a polyamorous relationship because they have not yet created consent for polyamory with their existing partner. These polyamorists realize polyamory is an option for intimacy, yet, since they are already in a monogamous relationship, they must first communicate with their existing partner about their desire to pursue polyamory. Lastly, among the South Korean polyamorists I met, a few people have multiple intimate partners without their partners' consent. Though they acknowledge that consent is a crucial part of polyamory, they label their intimate relationships as polyamorous and consider themselves polyamorists without it.

During one year of fieldwork in South Korea, I tried to meet as many polyamorists as possible by actively engaging in polyamory communities. I also consciously chose interviewees with various types of polyamorous experiences and different personal backgrounds. That notwithstanding, there is a critical limitation to my ethnographic data in representing South Korean polyamorists' experiences. Since my fieldwork was conducted via participating in polyamory communities, my data is primarily based on polyamorists who actively participate in polyamory communities—either Yŏrŏ or Taae. In other words, while there are South Korean polyamorists who do not or cannot take part in polyamory communities for various reasons—for example, physical distance, lack of time, fear of being outed as a polyamorist—my data does not contain their experiences of polyamory. With respect to this, I carefully take this limitation into account while analyzing South Koreans' experiences of polyamory. By paying attention to which groups of people are visible or invisible in polyamory communities, my analysis illustrates how different

groups of people tend to have dissimilar relationships to polyamory communities and even to *polyamory itself*.

Just as I conducted interviews with polyamorists in Southern California, I asked South Korean polyamorists if they would be willing to be interviewed after building trusting relationships with them by meeting them a few times. Considering the private and intimate topics under discussion, I allowed interviewees to choose an interview location where they would feel secure enough to talk. Interview locations included various places such as restaurants, coffee shops, bars, and parks. Having a set of interview questions, I conducted the interviews in the form of a casual conversation so that interviewees could feel comfortable talking about themselves freely. Having provided a brief description of the South Korean polyamorists who comprise the basis of my ethnographic data, I now turn to an analysis of how South Koreans have come to practice polyamory. I argue that many polyamorists consider the practice of polyamory to be the result of their agentic choice for individual freedom. That is, *they themselves—their expressions of the self*—are at the center of the way they narrate their decision to practice polyamory.

Choosing To be a Polyamorist

As a matter of fact, individual polyamorists all have unique stories of how they came to be polyamorists: there are different ways they got to know about polyamory and different circumstances under which they started practicing polyamory. Considering individuals' various trajectories toward polyamory, the goal of this section is *not* to describe various situational motivations, or immediate reasons, which made individuals decide on polyamory. Rather, my focus is how individuals relate crucial aspects of their lives—their values and purposes—to their choice of polyamory. While this chapter scrutinizes South Koreans' experiences of polyamory within the process of their self-formation as ethical subjects (subjectivation), this section analyzes how individuals conceive and articulate their choice of polyamory in their lives.

I undertake this analysis by turning to the changing social contexts of South Korea in the 2000s and the 2010s. As discussed in earlier chapters, there has been a growing social value on individual choice and

freedom since South Korean society went through the neoliberal reconstruction of the socioeconomic system after the Asian financial crisis in 1997; under the duress of endless self-development for survival in the neoliberal labor market, South Koreans have had to focus on themselves and construct their lives in ways that maximize their individual freedom. Here, I utilize the specific South Korean social context to address how polyamorists emphasize self-realization in their choice to practice polyamory.

In what follows, I present two main narratives of how South Koreans portray self-realization through their practice of polyamory. In the first narrative, individuals become polyamorous to build *their own life against a socially prescribed way of living*. In the second narrative, polyamorists signify polyamory as *the pursuit of their own desires*. While both narratives highlight polyamory as an individual choice to realize the self, they each showcase different ways that South Korean polyamorists contextualize the self in relation to the existing social order of the heteropatriarchal nuclear family. Ultimately, my claim is that, while the value of self-realization lies at the core of how South Koreans understand their choice of polyamory, contesting views on self-realization exist according to individuals' gendered position in the heteropatriarchal family system.

Against a Socially Prescribed Way of Living

Tohun is a heterosexual polyamorous man in his mid-thirties. Being in a relationship with two partners—his long-term partner who he has been seeing for eight years and another partner who he has recently started dating—he mentioned at the time of our interview that it had just been two years since he first learned about the word, polyamory. Instead, his choice for a polyamorous life grew out of his doubts about marriage that began in his mid and late teenage years:

> In South Korea, marriage is just so inevitable. Marriage is believed to be a major milestone in one's life. Initially, I had skepticism about marriage. Should I have to get married? Is marriage necessary to maintain a relationship? I had constantly been pondering over it. And ultimately, [I reached the conclusion that] marriage is not a necessary task but what people can do based on their needs. Rather than the natural law, which my father always argues, marriage is what I can do if I want. And in my case, I'm a person who doesn't need marriage.[100]

[100] Tohun, interview by author, Seoul, May 26, 2019.

Having decided that marriage is merely one's choice rather than a necessary task in one's life-path, Tohun started dating in his early twenties and pursuing conventional monogamous relationships. After being in a few monogamous relationships, however, he began to feel that relationships were exhausting and time consuming. He said that intimate relationships, in spite of their initial excitement, required him to sacrifice many of his choices:

> In an extreme manner, I would say that a [South] Korean typical form of intimate relationship makes a heterosexual couple be drowned together. For instance, a man has to give up a lot of things to maintain a relationship. It is the same for a woman. So, I felt like I was being drowned in a relationship. It's like, let's drown together. When I try out a new thing, my partner should encourage and support me and be happy for me, which is a mutually complementary and supportive relationship. But it's not [like] that, and I hate how a couple needs to give up everything for the sake of the relationship.[101]

Feeling discontented with the conventional form of an intimate relationship, Tohun hence began to ponder over the meaning of a "healthy" relationship. He envisioned an intimate relationship in which he and his partner are mutually complementary and supportive of each other: "I was thinking of a relationship that assures an individual's exercise of agency and independence similar to the way a salad bowl works rather than a melting pot."[102] And when he first started dating his long-term girlfriend eight years ago, he suggested to her that they could build their own kind of relationship without following the conventional rules. She agreed to his suggestion, and they have been together in an unconventional relationship ever

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어쨌든 그 항상 한국 사회에서는 결혼은 너무나 당연한 것이기 때문에. 결혼이란 건 항상 인생의 주요한 마일스톤으로 생각 되잖아요. 결혼이라는 것에 대한 회의가 처음에 좀 있었고요. 과연 내가 결혼을 해야 되는 것일까. 결혼이 정말 그 관계 유지를 위한 필수적인 조건인가. 그런 것들에 대한 고민을 계속 끊임없이 했었고, 결국에는 이제 결혼은 필요해서 하면 하는 것이지, 그게 필수적으로 해야 되는 게 아니다. 저희 아버지의 말을 빌리자면 결혼은 그 자연의 순리가 아닌, 내가 필요하면 하는 거고 아니면 안 하는 거고. 근데 나는 그런 건 필요 없는 사람인 것 같아.

[101] Tohun, interview by author, Seoul, May 26, 2019.
한국 관계 같은 경우에는, 약간 극단적으로 말하면 서로 같이 물에 빠져서 죽는 느낌. 이성애자 커플들. 예를 들어, 연애할 때 남자도 그 관계를 유지하게 위해서 많은 걸 포기하고, 여자도 마찬가지고. 그런 것들이 너무 물에 빠지는 것 같은 그런 느낌. 같이 죽자 이런 느낌. 내가 뭔가를 하고싶어 할 때, 옆에서 응원해 주고, 지원해주고, 그렇게 이 사람이 더 즐거워해주고, 그런 상호보완적이고 서로 지지해주는 그런 관계가 아니라, 관계라는 것 자체, 이걸 유지하기 위해서 서로가 다 포기하고 그런 게 좀 싫은 거에요.

[102] Tohun, interview by author, Seoul, May 26, 2019.

since, which, he believes, has allowed them to live as more independent individuals. Later, as he learned about polyamory, he and his girlfriend decided to make their relationship polyamorous a few years ago.

Consequently, for Tohun, polyamory does not merely mean a form of intimate relationship that allows him to have multiple partners. More fundamentally, it signifies his own way of living, which he has chosen for himself against social conventions.

Tohun's narrative, which describes polyamory as his own choice for his life in opposition to a conventional way of living, appears similar to many other South Korean polyamorists' accounts. Suchŏng's story is one of them. As a heterosexual woman, Suchŏng had been in a polyamorous relationship for less than a year at the time of our interview. She began practicing polyamory when her partner wanted to try it out with her. However, when Suchŏng talked about her trajectory of deciding on polyamory, her story traced back even further to a breakup that she experienced three years ago. Suchŏng had long believed that she would get married in her mid-twenties. She felt that the boyfriend whom she broke up with three years prior was a man with good qualities for a husband and one whom her parents would like. Though she thought that her relationship with him would lead her to marriage, it ended because of his mother's intervention. Going through that breakup, Suchŏng came to realize that the life she imagined she was building through the relationship was *not* what she really wanted *but* what her parents and society expected her to want. She stated that she had just been following "their [her parents'] dream" to "be recognized by [her] parents" and "prove her value in society."[103] Suchŏng, in this sense, argued that the breakup pushed her to let herself be free from her parents' and society's expectations and to question what life she wanted to build. In such a way, Suchŏng deemed her choice of polyamory to be part of her journey to pursue what she wants because it allowed her to break away from a socially determined way of living.

In this respect, Tohun and Suchŏng's stories exemplify one of the main narratives of how South Korean polyamorists make sense of their choice of polyamory: polyamory is one's own way of living that is opposed to a conventional way of life. Importantly, this narrative points to many polyamorists' belief

[103] Suchŏng, interview by author, Seoul, May 20, 2019.

that one should not follow social conventions or expectations without knowing what they want for their own lives—that is, an individual should construct their life *according to their own choice*.

Towards My Desires

The second major narrative I found in South Korean polyamorists' accounts is that polyamory is a way of living that allows individuals to express their desires. The first and second narrative are neither conflicting nor mutually exclusive. However, the second narrative differs from the first since it does not necessarily consider polyamory as the opposite to a socially prescribed way of living. I will detail the second narrative based on the stories of Chŏnghyŏk and Chaemin.

Chŏnghyŏk is a heterosexual married man in his mid-thirties. He married his wife Yumi when he was in his early thirties. After four years of monogamous marital life, Chŏnghyŏk for the first time told Yumi that he wanted their relationship to be polyamorous; and after discussing polyamory for an entire year, he and his wife agreed to try it. At the time that I interviewed him, Chŏnghyŏk had been practicing polyamory for a year.

Chŏnghyŏk developed his thoughts on polyamory in the wake of a few trivial yet significant experiences. He and Yumi had been in a relationship for eight years before their marriage. By the time they got married, he said that they were more like intimate friends than lovers; they felt secure together, but sexual or romantic passion between them had faded away. Meanwhile, while preparing for their marriage, Chŏnghyŏk found himself developing a crush on another woman. Though it was not serious, that experience first made him feel constrained in having a relationship with just one person. Yet, the marriage went ahead as planned, and Chŏnghyŏk forgot about that feeling. He was very satisfied with his new marital life. Marriage, according to him, has brought him more comfort and security than he expected. However, Chŏnghyŏk began to develop thoughts on polyamory as he happened to run into the same woman he felt interested in before his marriage. Seeing her again for the first time since his marriage reawakened the excitement that he felt for her in the past. But Chŏnghyŏk was also struck by the thought that his feeling was wrong. This encounter subsequently led him to serious contemplation on marriage: "Why can't it be

natural? Why should it be either one or the other? If I want to see one, do I have to break up with the other? Yumi is such a precious person to me. Why should I abandon my relationship with her just because I want to be a little bit intimate with another person? It's so irrational. It's too huge a cost to pay."[104]

Happy with Yumi, Chŏnghyŏk did not want to end his marriage. Yet, he also did not want to continue his marital relationship in the same way, so he started exploring polyamory. He then told his wife about his desire for polyamory. Although it was not easy, he had to be honest with her about it because polyamory, as he thought, would allow him to live his life without hiding or suppressing his desires or feelings.

Though he has practiced polyamory for a year, Chŏnghyŏk has neither dated many women nor developed deep intimacy with anyone. He nevertheless believed that polyamory changed his life significantly:

> Above all, I feel freer in my mind. I can meet other people. In the past, when I felt attracted to someone, I'd feel bad or think that it was wrong. But now, I can personally accept it as it is, regardless of whether I express that feeling to that person or not. And I don't feel guilty that I have such a feeling. I might just like that kind of feeling itself. It's actually a good feeling. It's neither bad nor wrong. I might get into trouble if my feelings become too big to focus on my work. But for now, [I like] that frame of mind of being okay with such feelings.[105]

As mentioned above, Chŏnghyŏk indicated that the significance of polyamory lies *not* in the fact that he can have multiple partners *but* in the fact that he does not need to judge and suppress his desires. For Chŏnghyŏk, polyamory is a lifestyle that enables him to appreciate his own desires as freely as he experiences them.

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[104] Chŏnghyŏk, interview by author, Seoul, May 24, 2019

[105] Chŏnghyŏk, interview by author, Seoul, May 24, 2019.
일단은 머리 속은 좀 자유로워요. 내가 다른 사람을 만날 수도 있다. 어떤 사람을 만났을 때 그 사람이 느껴지는 매력이나 그런 것들을 예전 같으면 오히려 그럴 수도 있는데. 그걸 온전히 받아들일 수 있는 거죠, 저 개인적으로. 그걸 뭐 얘기하고 그런 거 이전에. 그리고 누군가를 좋아하는 마음이 든다고 해서 거기에 대해서 죄책감을 느끼기 보다. 그냥 그 좋아하는 마음을 좋아하는 걸 수도 있어요. 이건 좋은 감정이야. 나쁜 감정, 잘못된 게 아니야. 물론 그 감정이 막 커지고 그래서 뭔가 일이 아무것도 안 되고 이런 답답하고 힘들 수 있지만. 어쨌든 그런 감정에 대해서 스스로가 오케이 하는 상황[이 좋아요].

Chaemin is another married polyamorous man who describes polyamory as a lifestyle for pursuing one's natural desires. Being married for twelve years, he and his wife both agreed to practice polyamory less than a year ago. Chaemin's trajectory for practicing polyamory is distinctive from other polyamorists. He became interested in polyamory while he was trying to repair his marriage after his wife's infidelity. A year ago, Chaemin found out that his wife was having an extramarital relationship. Feeling betrayed and devastated, he was considering getting a divorce and starting a new life. Nevertheless, he decided to give his marriage a second chance. As he stated, one of the main reasons for his decision was his children: "If my wife and I got divorced, it would deeply hurt my children. So then, I was thinking that if I bear this situation, nobody would suffer except myself."[106]

Another important reason Cheamin changed his mind about getting a divorce is that he thought romantic feelings or sexual attraction to other people is natural, although infidelity itself is wrong:

> As I rationally thought about it [my wife's infidelity], I could have done the same [thing my wife did] if I were in the same situation. This also came from the scene of the TV show titled *Ibŏn Ju, Anaega Paramŭl P'imnida (This week, my wife cheats on me)*, where a husband and his unfaithful wife are having a conversation. As he was being questioned [by his wife] if he had never cheated on her ever, he couldn't answer immediately. And later, he was talking with his friend about why he couldn't answer. When his friend asked whether he had actually cheated on his wife, he said that there were times that he was closer to somebody else than his wife or had a crush on others. Though it is not like he was sleeping with someone else, which is socially considered as an act of infidelity, he has experienced having feelings for others. … I mean, I didn't cheat on my wife because I did not have a chance. [If I had a chance,] I could have been in the same situation as my wife.[107]

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[106] Cheamin, interview by author, Seoul, May 10, 2019.
[107] Cheamin, interview by author, Seoul, May 10, 2019.
좀 이성적으로 생각을 하면은 나도 만약에 뭐 그런 상황이 있으면 그럴 수도 있을 것 같기도 하고 그런 생각이 들기도 하더라고요. 그리고 이것도 또 드라마에서 본 건데 *이번 주, 아내가 바람을 핍니다* 거기에서 이런 이야기가 나와요. [부인이] 당신은 바람 피운 적 없냐고 얘기 했는데, [남편이] 거기에 대해서 즉답을 못해요. 근데 거기에 대해서 왜 그랬을까 생각을 하면서 친구들이랑 이야기를 하거든요. 너 바람 핀 적 있냐 친구가 얘기하는데 없는 거 같긴 한데 누구하고 친했고, 누구한테 좋아하는 감정이 있지 않았나 그런 얘기를 하더라고요. 직접적으로 뭐 사회적으로 말하는 바람, 누구와 같이 자고 이런 건 아니지만 그래도 누군가한테 마음이 간 적은 있고 그러지 않나. … 그러니까 저한테는 그럴 기회가 없어 가지고 안 그랬을 뿐인데, 아내같은 상황도 나에게 있었을 수 있고 그런 생각이 들었어요.

Although he could understand his wife rationally, it was not easy to get over his wife's infidelity. Struggling with low self-esteem and depression, he tried various ways to heal. In that process, Cheamin became aware of polyamory, and he and his wife decided to practice polyamory as a way to reshape their marital relationship: "I thought that instead of distrusting my wife for the rest of my life, it would be more rational that we are open to possibilities [of meeting other people], and then, I can also have freedom [to do that]."[108]

After starting to practice polyamory, Chaemin is now satisfied with his marital relationship. As he stated, not only is he no longer feeling like he is sacrificing himself for his family, but he is also excited about the possibility of meeting other people. Most importantly, Chaemin has come to recognize and affirm his own desires and feelings for other people: "In the past, I thought I should not have such feelings because I am married. But now, I can openly talk about it to my wife. For example, [I talk to my wife about] who I like most at work, and [tell her] that I am attracted to my female colleague playing guitar in a band. I don't have to hide my feelings. I don't have to suppress my natural desires."[109]

Polyamory as My Choice for My *Self*

Based on these two major narratives, my argument is that *the realization of the self* lies at the core of South Koreans' descriptions of how they have come to choose polyamory. The first narrative illustrates that polyamory is a lifestyle that individuals choose for themselves, free from the constraints of a socially prescribed or recognized lifestyle. Based on the belief that an individual should construct their life according to their own choices, this narrative appraises polyamory as one's choice for their own life that defies social conventions. The second narrative perceives polyamory as a lifestyle that allows individuals to freely express their own desires. Considering that an individual's desires and feelings are a natural yet significant part of the self, this underscores polyamory as an unconstrained expression of the self.

[108] Cheamin, interview by author, Seoul, May 10, 2019.
[109] Cheamin, interview by author, Seoul, May 10, 2019.

How can we then understand the realization of the self which South Korean polyamorists narrate as being at the core of their choice of polyamory? Giddens (1992) illustrated that the modern individualistic value of freedom has been fundamentally entangled with the emergence of romantic love int the late eighteenth century. He indicated that romantic love was inserted "directly into the emergent ties between freedom and self-realization," allowing modern individuals to construct their own personal narratives apart from family, community, and other existing institutions (Giddens 1992, 40). In line with Gidden's illustration of romantic love, South Korean polyamorists' claims about self-realization through their polyamorous, intimate relationships seem inevitable or natural. By choosing the intimate practice of polyamory, South Koreans seek to build a personal life that expresses and realizes the self, free from existing social rules, duties, and relationships.

Bearing that in mind, I claim that it is crucial to situate polyamorists' emphasis on self-realization within the post-crisis, neoliberal social contexts of South Korea after 1997. It was in the early twentieth century that the provoking concept of romantic love (*Yŏnae*) was first introduced and gained popularity in Korea, instigating new ways of imaging love, marriage, and family-building among Koreans (J Kim 2012). Yet, within the strong Confucian tradition, the idea that one could choose their spouse based on romantic attraction had long been seen as unrealistic and unattainable (E Seo 2013). While courtship, love, and marriage based on romance certainly came to be more common in the mid and late twentieth century than they had been before, the influence of the family was still predominant in individuals' experiences of marriage, so much so that South Koreans were hardly permitted to perceive their practice of romantic love as a part of their individual project of realizing the self (Kendall, 1996). Besides, since forming a heterosexual nuclear family remained an indispensable responsibility for all adults, individuals' recognition as citizen-subjects and their economic survival were dependent upon it (see Chapter 3). Therefore, South Koreans could hardly connect their practice of romantic love to the values of individual freedom and self-realization.

However, as I have pointed out, there has been a significant change in South Korean society through the neoliberal reconstruction of the socioeconomic system after the Asian financial crisis in 1997. In *The*

Will to Freedom, The Will to Self-Development (2009), Seo Dongjin discussed the self-developing subjects who emerged in South Korean society after 1997. According to Seo, self-developing subjects are neoliberal, entrepreneurial South Korean individuals who constantly and actively reform, improve, and manage themselves in order to increase their human capital. Seo (2009, 367) argued that, working in conjunction with South Koreans' overdue desire for freedom, which had been repressed in the authoritarian disciplinary society, neoliberalism has given birth to self-developing subjects, who "examine, interpret, and take care of their lives through their exercise of freedom." While his analysis illuminates the emergence of a new type of economic subject in the wake of the neoliberal reforms after 1997, the impact of neoliberalism cannot be confined to one's economic life.

In South Korea, individuals have also come to reframe their intimate and/or familial lives through the neoliberal ethos, which stresses individual freedom, choice, and self-development. As we saw in my discussions about samp'osedae in Chapter 3, this change has been especially distinctive among young generations; facing a precarious neoliberal labor market and insecure future, young individuals emphasize the importance of individual freedom, choice, and self-realization in their practice of intimacy (Yang at el. 2020). Without assuming that heterosexual marriage is the absolute goal of their lives, they tend to signify their intimate relationships as projects of the self, which lead them to personal growth (Kim at el. 2014). The emphasis on individuality has also appeared in familial relationships. As Kang (2014) noted in his analysis of cultural representations of the relation between individuals and the family, there has been increasing stress on individuality in familial relationships. As free, individualistic neoliberal subjects, South Koreans are required to pursue self-realization separate from their roles in the traditional, patriarchal family. With respect to this, I contend that polyamorists' argument for self-realization is closely entwined with the broader social trends in South Korea, which increasingly highlight *the value of the self* in an individual's intimate or familial life.

Considering polyamory as an intimate practice by which one can realize the self in one's private life, I argue that South Korean polyamorists demonstrate contrasting understandings of the relationship between self-realization and the heteropatriarchal family system. First, some polyamorists, such as Suchŏng,

understand self-realization and the heteropatriarchal family system to be inherently conflicting. Regarding polyamory as an alternative way of living against the normative life path, these polyamorists indicate that individuals cannot exercise freedom and agency in the heteropatriarchal family. Rather than trying to fit themselves into existing social and familial roles, they seek to construct their own intimate lives in ways that realize the self. These polyamorists usually include young single polyamorists, both women and men. On the contrary, not every polyamorist thinks that polyamory is conflicting or incompatible with heteropatriarchal family life. As shown in Chŏnghyŏk and Chaemin's stories, some polyamorists believe that the practice of polyamory can complement the existing marital or family system. In other words, by practicing polyamory, these polyamorists strive to have a happier marital or familial life without repressing themselves. Many married polyamorists and single polyamorous men have such an understanding. To put it briefly, while emphasizing self-realization in their choice of polyamory, South Korean polyamorists, according to their different marital and gender positions, tend to display conflicting understandings of the meaning of the heteropatriarchal family system in relation to their project of self-realization.

How to Be a Polyamorist

In this section, I examine how individuals experience the practice of polyamory in ways that recognize and express the self. Compared to the US, one of the most distinctive observations I had about polyamorists in South Korea, as mentioned earlier, is the very small number of polyamorists who actually manage to develop polyamorous relationships. I found that less than half of my interviewees have been in a polyamorous relationship, meaning that either they themselves or their partners have had multiple intimate partners. Why cannot more South Korean polyamorists have the polyamorous relationships that they wish for? To examine the social conditions that make it hard for South Koreans to practice polyamory is certainly beyond the scope of this chapter. But, in order to understand South Koreans' experience of polyamory, it is important to note that practicing polyamory is an excruciating task in South Korea, and there are only a few people who have successfully developed a polyamorous relationship with their partners' full consent.

With this understanding in mind, this section examines South Koreans' *experience of being a polyamorist*. While my analysis of Americans' practice of polyamory addresses the dynamics of how individuals manage various situations or issues within their polyamorous relationships (Chapter 2), in the case of South Koreans, my focus is what situations or issues South Koreans have to encounter to become polyamorists and how they cope with them.

My analysis mainly centers on two different issues: confronting society and struggling for consent. In the first part, I showcase how South Koreans find society—including public criticism, discrimination, and punishment—to be the main obstacle to their practice of polyamory and how they oppose society by confirming and justifying their polyamorous desires. In the second part, I tell a story of how polyamorists struggle for their partners' consent; as one of the biggest challenges to the practice of polyamory, creating consent entails individuals' constant efforts to recognize their desires and clearly communicate about them. Through looking at these two issues, I ultimately argue in this section that being a polyamorist requires individuals to affirm and express their own desires, thoughts, and feelings—the self—in opposition to their social and familial roles as well as to societal norms and expectations.

Confronting Society

Discrimination and prejudice against polyamorists exist in both the US and South Korea. During my fieldwork in Southern California, I noticed that polyamorists tend to be cautious about disclosing their practice of polyamory to their family members or their colleagues at work. At polyamory community meetings, they often talk about how polyamory can be used against them in various issues, such as housing and legal battles for custody of a child. American polyamorists, in this sense, tend to consider themselves as a sexual minority group that is vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion. At the same time, I did not find that social oppression due to polyamory stood out in Americans' descriptions of their polyamorous lives. Americans rarely described society as a factor thwarting their practice of polyamory. However, this was not the case for South Korean polyamorists. Concerned with social violence and the exclusion of polyamorists, many South Koreans pointed to society as one of the main obstacles to their practice of

polyamory. This raises several questions. How does society operate as an obstacle for South Koreans' polyamorous lives? And how do they confront society to live as polyamorists?

With a bright and outgoing character, Suhyŏn is a cisgender, heterosexual man in his late twenties. He has been pursuing a polyamorous lifestyle for about one year, and he is one of the most active members of the Taae community. Showing an interest in scholarly works and discussions on polyamory, he is also one of the polyamorists who helped me the most in navigating polyamory communities during my fieldwork. That being said, what I heard from Suhyŏn in a one-on-one interview with him was surprising. He said that he would prefer living a monogamous life: "I'm thinking that it'll be better if I don't practice polyamory. I want to do monogamy rather than polyamory. I mean everything is alright if I myself just get stressed in a monogamous relationship. It'll be just me who gets stressed."[110]

Suhyŏn became interested in polyamory when he met a woman who, he thought, was perfect wife material. Developing an intimate relationship with her, he started to think about getting married. Yet, he also felt constrained by the idea of monogamous marriage. Stressed by his conflicting desires to get married and to date other women, Suhyŏn broke up with his girlfriend, thereby deciding to pursue polyamory instead of monogamy. However, living a polyamorous life was not at all easy for him. Not only was there hardly anyone who understood his polyamorous lifestyle, but polyamory also caused excruciating challenges in his intimate life. Thus, Suhyŏn thought that he had better live a monogamous life.

While it appears true that Suhyŏn was tired of having conflicts and arguments due to his pursuit of polyamory, there is a more fundamental reason that he considered abandoning his polyamorous desire—that is, *his fear of being socially condemned*:

> I don't want to do it [polyamory]. I just don't. I mean I can't talk about it to people. If I talk about it, people would call me a piece of shit. To live a normal life that is recognized by others, I should do monogamy. I want to be recognized by other people. Or, rather than being recognized, I don't want to be condemned. No one likes to be criticized. It's not a pleasant experience. I just live my own life, and I don't want to give a reason for people to judge my life. Just pursuing a value that is not accepted in society itself makes me uncomfortable.[111]

[110] Suhyŏn, interview by author, May 30, 2019.
[111] Suhyŏn, interview by author, May 30, 2019.

Suhyŏn, when disclosing his pursuit of polyamory, appeared to face a great deal of criticism and disapproval from many people. Though he did not think that individuals living a polyamorous life are undeserving or harmful, people's hostile reactions led him to question his practice of polyamory. When people denounced and belittled his life because he was a polyamorist, Suhyŏn began thinking about adjusting himself to a monogamous life. As such, the fear of living a life that is socially condemned and devalued was a significant obstacle to Suhyŏn's choice to pursue a polyamorous life.

Such fear is not unique to Suhyŏn. Although the degree to which individuals feel fear is varying, South Korean polyamorists tend to commonly express worry that polyamory could harm their reputation and social worth. South Koreans, for this reason, appear to be very cautious about keeping their practice of polyamory from being exposed in public. Indeed, I still do not know the real names of most of my interviewees in South Korea. While most of the American polyamorists that I met introduced themselves with their real name, many South Koreans used nicknames to not reveal their real names to the polyamory community. And South Koreans' worry is neither baseless nor exaggerated. Here, I showcase how Sŏnu had to confront social violence against polyamorists to live as a polyamorist.

Sŏnu is a non-binary genderqueer person in their mid-twenties.[112] As I introduced in Chapter 4, Sŏnu started to practice polyamory when they started dating a polyamorist, Hari, in 2016. Now, Sŏnu lives with Hari and her other intimate partner, Minsu, forming what they call a "family" (*Shikku*). Saying that polyamory is no longer a subject of deliberation or concern for them but is how they live their everyday life, Sŏnu, nonetheless, appeared to pay a harsh cost for their polyamorous lifestyle.

사실은 안 하고 싶어요. 그냥 안 하고 싶은데. 주변에서 이런 [폴리아모리] 얘기를 할 수가 없잖아요 이런 이야기를 하면 쓰레기라고 해요. 제가 멀쩡하게 누구에게나 인정받는 삶을 살려면 모노[가미]를 해야해요. 누구에게나 인정 받고 싶다고 생각하고, 누구에게나 인정받고 싶다는 생각보다는, 비난 받고 싶지 않다는 생각이 크죠. 비난 받는게 좋지는 않잖아요. 긍정적인 경험은 아니니까. 내가 굳이 그냥 존재만 하는데, 존재만 하는데, 비난을 할 거리를 만들고 싶지 않아서. 이 사회에서 통용되지 않는 가치를 추구하는 자체가 일단 그게 불편해요.

[112] As mentioned earlier, Sŏnu is the only non-binary queer polyamorist among my interviewees in South Korea. In our interview, Sŏnu introduced themself as "nonbainŏri chendŏk'wiŏ (non-binary genderqueer)", meaning that they do not want to identify themself either as a man or a woman and resist a binary gender system.

Sŏnu's practice of polyamory became a critical issue as they organized a feminist lecture on the topic of sex work in their college. The university disallowed the lecture for the reason that it would demoralize students' perceptions on sex, but Sŏnu and their friends pushed ahead with the lecture anyway. The university ultimately sought to punish the students who organized the lecture, and in that process, the university brought up Sŏnu's polyamorous relationship against them. Particularly, the university asked Sonu to write a statement denouncing polyamory. Sŏnu refused to write a statement, and the University eventually put them on an indefinite suspension from school.

> The dean of student affairs, who asked me for a statement, initially sent other professors an email about my [polyamorous] relationship. That email infuriated me. … Revealing my polyamorous relationship to people itself is a problem, but what's worse was the way the email described [my relationship]: a polyamorous relationship is a way for multiple women and multiple men to all live and sleep together. I mean from the way it described polyamory, I felt their gaze, how they looked at me. And facing such attacks, I was just furious. Infuriated. This is too wrong, and I need to fight.[113]

As someone who was participating in feminism and queer activism at a conservative, Christian university, Sŏnu was, to some extent, used to handling the school's oppression and control. Yet, they did not expect that the university would instigate crude condemnations and personal attacks against them by using their practice of polyamory. In this way, Sŏnu encountered uncritical castigations from conservative Christian communities and the university as well as estrangement from students, which initiated a long legal battle against the university to invalidate the indefinite suspension. It was a tough one and half year period before the school's decision was finally invalidated.

If it had not been for their practice of polyamory, Sŏnu would not have faced public criticism and oppression. After being outed as a polyamorist, Sŏnu had to endure a difficult time and mixed emotions

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[113] Sŏnu, interview by author, Seoul, June 14, 2019.
그 강연 직후에 저에게 진술서를 요구했던 학생처장이 저의 [폴리아모리] 관계를 교수 메일로 먼저 보냈어요 그 교수 메일을 보고 저는 분노가 시작되었어요. … 묘사를 어떻게 했냐면, 제가 뭐 폴리아모리 관계를 맺는다는 사실만 알리는 것도 문제지만, 그 폴리아모리 관계를 맺는데 막 여자 여러 명과 남자 여러 명이 함께 사는 것이다. 이렇게 하면서 자는 거야, 남자 여러 명과 여자 여러 명이 자는 거야 뭐 이런 식으로 묘사하는 하는 과정에서 그들의 시선을 드러냈고, 그런 비난들을 접하면서 화가 많이 났죠. 분노가 너무 일었고. 이건 너무 잘못되었다 싸워야 된다.

like anger, frustration, and helplessness. However, while going through outrageous, undue social violence against polyamorists, Sŏnu took the opportunity to deliberate upon and confirm their choice of a polyamorous life:

> After I filed a criminal complaint against a few people who were publicly outing my practice of polyamory, as a complainant, I needed to be questioned by the police. Since I sued them on the charge of outing my sexual identity, my identity as a polyamorist, against my will, I had to explain what polyamory is. It was extremely difficult. I initially decided to briefly define it as an act of loving multiple people. But the police couldn't understand that. I mean, it took so long to explain what it means to love multiple people, although I tried to be concise. To explain polyamory, I had to start from explaining what a monogamous relationship is. Given that people commonly have a monogamous relationship, there are various issues in a monogamous relationship such as possessiveness, control, and ownership. And to avoid those issues, polyamory is a form of relationship in which people agree that their partners can see other people and they themselves can also love other people. By saying something like this, I was trying to explain [polyamory], but [the police kept asking] what is that? How does that work? To explain what polyamory is itself took twenty or thirty minutes.[114]

After deciding to practice polyamory, Sŏnu initially did not give serious thought to it. Sŏnu got to know about polyamory through Hari, and they "naturally" developed a polyamorous relationship. Yet, when encountering social persecution for being a polyamorist, Sŏnu was required to explain to people what polyamory is and what polyamory means to their life. Put differently, while fighting the school's unjustifiable punishment and people's blatant criticisms, Sŏnu had to articulate their thoughts on and desires for polyamory and justify their polyamorous life to society. It was during this process that Sŏnu obtained

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[114] Sŏnu, interview by author, Seoul, June 14, 2019.
실명 언급하면서 폴리아모리 아웃팅했던 사람들을 열댓 명을 형사 고소했는데, 형사 고소하려면 고소인도 경찰 조사를 받아야 되거든요. 근데 핵심이 사람들이 나의 성소수자 정체성, 폴리아모리 정체성을 아웃팅 했다 했다라는 게 고소 내용이 다 보니까, 그럼 폴리아모리는 뭐냐 라는 걸 설명을 해야 되는 시간이 있었어요. 그걸 설명할 때 너무 어려웠어요. 그냥 저는 간단하게 좀 얘기를 하고 지나가려 그랬어요. 뭐 여러 명을 사랑하는 거다 이 정도로 지나가려고 했는데, 그 사람이 이해가 안돼서. 여러 명을 사랑하는 게 뭐냐? 그거를 설명하는 너무 오래 걸렸어요. 이 사람이 물어보니 이걸 정확히 설명하려면, 기존의 일대일 관계가 무엇인지부터 설명을 해야 되니까, 기존에 너네가 맺고 있는 관계는 일대일 관계지 않느냐, 그럼 일대일 관계에서 발생하는 여러 가지 문제들이 있다. 독점, 통제, 혹은 소유로부터 발생하는 문제를 그런 것들을 겪지 않기 위해 [폴리아모리는] 서로의 다양한 사람들을 인정하면서 합의하면서 나도 여러 명을 사랑할 수 있고 상대도 여러 명을 사랑할 수 있고 이렇게 설명을 하는데, [경찰은 계속] 그게 뭐냐 이게 뭐냐. 개념 설명하는 데만 이삼 십분 걸렸어요.

the language to express and defend their own lifestyle of polyamory: "Yes. We're polyamorists, so what about it? I think we ourselves needed to know what polyamory is. I remember trying to find the words I could use to defend myself and the words that we can use to explain ourselves."[115]

Similar to Sŏnu, Cheni, who is a young pansexual, polyamorist in her early twenties, also illustrated how she came to recognize her polyamorous desire as what defines her while facing social persecution and criticism. She mentioned that she was initially shocked and hurt by people's rejection of and outrage over her polyamorous life. But as she was repeatedly subjected to similar condemnations from people, she came to accept her polyamorous desire as part of herself, regardless of people's judgments:

> What I initially expected was something like, "Why do you want to live like that?" or "Why don't you live a normal life?" But people's reactions were much harsher than I thought. They were very painful. [They were more like] personal attacks rather than criticisms. One of the comments that I was initially really shocked by was, "You just want to be a whore without getting paid." … I've just accepted [what I am]. I don't like pondering over how people judge me. People don't have to understand me. They are themselves, and I'm myself. I mean, as I'm being myself, I don't need to change myself to be understood or recognized by them.[116]

As shown in the experiences of Suhyŏn, Sŏnu, and Cheni, society exists as the main obstacle for South Korean polyamorists. To live a polyamorous life, South Koreans face different forms of social oppression, including friends and acquaintances' rejections, public condemnations, and institutional punishments. It appears that social persecution of polyamory has indeed caused great fears and suffering among South Korean polyamorists, and it has also forced polyamorists, such as Suhyŏn, to repress or abandon their polyamorous desires. However, although it is painful, the process in which polyamorists confront social oppression also serves as a critical experience that allows them to recognize and express

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[115] Sŏnu, interview by author, Seoul, June 14, 2019.
[116] Cheni, interview by author, Seoul, June 25, 2019.
제가 생각한 예상들은 그냥 왜 그런 생각을 해, 일반적으로 살면 되잖아 이런 정도의 대화 였는데, 그보다 훨씬 더 커다란 반응들이 돌아오는 게 제일 힘들었던 것 같아요. 비판을 넘어선 비난. 되게 처음 듣고 충격 먹었던 말은 너는 그냥 돈 안 받고 창녀 짓을 하고 싶은 거 아니야 이런 말을 들은 적이 있어요. ... 저는 그냥 인정했어요. 저는 원래 그런 생각을 하는 거를 별로 안 좋아해서. 굳이 나를 다 이해할 필요가 없잖아요.저 사람은 저 사람이고 저는 이런 사람인데. 내가 이런 사람인데, 저 사람한테 이해 받고 잘 보이기 위해서 나를 바꿔야 될 이유는 없잖아요.

their polyamorous desires. In other words, through the process of contesting the society that oppresses and denounces polyamory, polyamorists acknowledge and assert the polyamorous desires that define and construct them. As Kakyŏng described:

> For me, it was very important, the process in which I came to admit my polyamorous desire, although it is a socially unaccepted, seemingly trivial desire, and to embrace that desire regardless of any social disadvantages or oppression that it might bring out. It was a very important experience for me to accept whatever consequences it [polyamory] can cause, such as being rejected by that person [her intimate partner] and any other dates of mine or being ostracized from groups which I belong to. … I felt rather comfortable as I recognized what I needed, [or] what I wanted and decided to achieve it given the current circumstances.[117]

In short, while South Korean polyamorists have to confront social oppression to live as polyamorists, oppression importantly enables them to recognize and claim *who they are*—the self—in opposition to what society expects or requires them to be.

Struggling for Consent

During my fieldwork in South Korea, it was not rare to hear stories of how polyamorists failed to create consent. When sharing their failed experiences, polyamorists complained about how grueling it is to create consent; not only is polyamory still an unfamiliar, foreign concept that few people can understand, but there are also not enough polyamory resources available for South Koreans. They claimed that, under these social conditions, it is nearly impossible for them to convince their partners to consent to polyamory.

In Chapter 2, I discussed creating informed consent as one of the essential parts of polyamory, one which foregrounds Americans' experience of polyamory. South Koreans likewise underscore consent as the key element of polyamory arguing that it is what distinguishes their polyamorous relationships from

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[117] Kakyŏng, interview by author, Seoul, May 16, 2019.
그게 참 별거 아니고 이 사회에서 용납되지 않는 욕망임에도 불구하고 내가 그거를 인정하고 그걸로 인한 피해나 이런 걸 감수하겠다고 결심하는 과정이 되게 중요했어요. 그걸 그 후배나 내가 연애하는 사람들이 그거를 못 받아들여 준다던가, 아니면 내가 이거를 드러냄으로 인해서 내가 맺고 있는 거 관계에서 배척된다거나, 이거까지 내가 감수 해볼래 라는 결심하는 그게 저한테 되게 중요했어요. ... 내가 나한테 필요한 거를, 내가 원하는 걸 인정하고 지금 현재 상황 틀 내에서라도 내가 그거를 성취하겠다고 했을 때, 오히려 편안한 느낌.

infidelity. Unfortunately, creating consent is one of the biggest challenges for South Korean polyamorists. Here, by drawing from the contrasting experiences of two polyamorists, Taesu and Chinun, I showcase how polyamorists struggle to obtain their partner's consent to the practice of polyamory. Then, I discuss what polyamorists' struggle for consent signifies in terms of their realization of the self and how individuals' gendered position plays out in that struggle.

Taesu is a heterosexual married man in his late forties. I remember meeting him first at Taae's monthly meeting. Taesu introduced himself as a polyamorist who is in a polyamorous relationship with two other partners as well as his wife. Though he had been actively participating in two polyamory communities, Yŏrŏ and Taae, Taesu suddenly left the communities by writing a post. In the post, Taesu explained that he was withdrawing himself from the communities due to his wife's severe objections to polyamory; after his wife found out about his extramarital relationships, he faced a crisis in his marriage, and to avoid divorce, he decided to stay away from polyamory communities.

After he left the communities, I had a one-on-one interview with Taesu to listen to his full story. Taesu, who had been married for more than twenty years, had lived what he defined as a "promiscuous" life before marriage. Enjoying casual sex, he was not able to develop a stable, monogamous relationship until he met his wife. Yet, when he married his wife, Taesu decided to end his promiscuous life, "I thought it [marriage]'d be a fresh start to my life, being loyal to my wife. Because I am Christian, I also followed the Christian value of marriage; once getting married, there is no divorce, and a couple ought to be faithful to each other, devoting their lives to each other. I made that promise."[118]

Initially, Taesu was loyal to his wife. Having kids, he and his wife built a happy family. However, after ten years of marriage, he fell in love with another person, whom he called a "secondary partner." Taesu said that it was not because he no longer loved his wife, but just because he found love with another person along with his wife. Though he felt guilty towards his wife, Taesu developed a deep intimate relationship

[118] Taesu, interview by author, Seoul, May 28, 2019.

with his secondary partner. Then, after being with his wife and his secondary partner for several years, Taesu found himself once again feeling attracted to a new person, who has become his "tertiary partner."

It was after developing a relationship with his third partner that Taesu first learned about polyamory. Suffering from self-reproach, he found that polyamory could be an "ethical" way of practicing a non-monogamous relationship based upon "mutual consent among partners." As he got to know about polyamory, Taesu determined to transform his existing relationships into consensual polyamorous relationships. By doing research on polyamory and attending polyamory community meetings and events, he strove to gain consent from his two partners and his wife for the practice of polyamory.

Taesu, as he illustrated, made various efforts to create consent to establish his polyamorous relationship. Surprisingly, while seeking consent, Taesu never explicitly expressed his *own* desire for polyamory to his wife. As he became more confident in his decision to transition to polyamory, Taesu talked to his wife about his interest in polyamory and let her know about his participation in polyamory communities. But, that notwithstanding, Taesu did not tell her that he *himself* wanted to practice polyamory. In other words, while Taesu shared his thoughts on polyamory in an impersonal and abstract way, he did not reveal his extramarital relationships and his own desire to practice polyamory.

What held Taesu back from telling his wife about his desire for polyamory? Taesu stated that he could not destroy his family's—especially his wife's—expectations of him. As much as he wanted to make a transition to polyamory by being open to his wife about his non-monogamous desires, Taesu also cherished his role of a "considerate, sweet husband" and "good father":

> I wasn't courageous enough [to tell her that I'm a polyamorist]. (I: What were you afraid of?) I go to church, and I'm the head of a household. And my children were not grownups yet. I mean they are still not. And also, my wife is very conservative, especially regarding the family and marital relationship. To put it nicely, she does love me very much, she respects me very much, and she is so loyal to me. I mean, she trusts me enough to tell me things about her guy friends. She also has guy friends. But she said they are just friends. She doesn't have any secrets [from me] so she could [even] tell me about a man who she almost slept with. That being said, I was burdened with the thought that I could not disappoint [her]. I know how much she trusts me and loves me.[119]

[119] Taesu, interview by author, Seoul, May 28, 2019.

It is hard to say that Taesu sacrificed his desires for his wife and children. He indeed pursued his intimate, sexual desires by developing extramarital relationships behind his wife's back. Yet, while seeking to realize his desires outside his family life, Taesu also thought that, in his family, he had to swallow his feelings and desires to fulfill the roles of head of the household, husband, and father: "There is no *me* in the family. I feel like I'm there as the basis on which my wife can work well and my children can follow their dream."[120] Put differently, Taesu considered his family *not* as a place where he can be himself *but* as a place where he has to fulfill duties to others: "[In my family,] I couldn't disclose who I really am. I was kind of fitting myself into what was required for me to be."[121]

With this approach, it was inevitable that Taesu would fail to obtain his wife's consent for his practice of polyamory. Tied to his roles as head of the household, husband, and father, Taesu could not communicate to his wife who he really is and what he wants for his life. Instead, all Taesu did to gain his wife's consent was to introduce polyamory to her and indirectly express his interest in polyamory, hoping that his wife would notice his desires and agree with his pursuit of a polyamorous life. Without having been able to directly ask his wife for consent to his practice of polyamory, Taesu had to give up his pursuit of polyamory when he faced his wife's objections.

While Taesu's story illustrates how one can fail to attain a partner's consent for polyamory when they are not able to be honest with their partner about their desires, Chinun's story shows the opposite situation. Through the long and difficult process of acknowledging his desires and feelings and

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[내가 폴리아모리스트다] 그렇게 까지 말할 용기는 없었던 거 같아. (나: 뭐가 두려우셨어요?) 교회를 다녔고 가장이었고, 애들이 성장하는 기간이고, 지금도 마찬가지고. 또, 그런 부분에 대해서 아내가 유독 가정, 부부 관계 이 부분에 대해서 굉장히 보수적이었어요. 좋게 말해서는, 저를 너무 좋아하고, 저를 너무 존중하고, 좋아하고, 저만 바라보고. 다른 남사친들의 대해서 다 저한테 신뢰하고 얘기할 정도로. 아내도 남사친들이 있어요. 근데 남사친이라는 거죠. 잘 뻔한 사람에 대한 얘기도 [저한테] 비밀이 없이 이야기하고. 그런데 제가 [아내를] 실망시킬 수 없다는 맘이 굉장히 컸던 것 같아요. 이렇게 나를 신뢰하고 좋아하는데.

[120] Taesu, interview by author, Seoul, May 28, 2019.

[121] Taesu, interview by author, Seoul, May 28, 2019.

communicating about them with his partner, Chinun managed to develop a polyamorous relationship with his partner's full consent.

Taesu and Chinun's journeys to polyamory appear similar yet different. As a married man with a child, Chinun had extramarital relationships without knowing about polyamory. And, when his wife caught him having an extramarital relationship for a second time, Chinun and his wife started to live apart. In fact, his experiences of having two affairs and separating from his wife were critical to the way Chinun came to practice polyamory. Chinun and his wife got married young in their early twenties after finding out that she was pregnant. Feeling responsible for his wife and baby, he tried his best to perform his role as head of the household to make a living for his family. Yet, Chinun, while working hard for his family, found it difficult to share his concerns or issues with his wife. He could not communicate with his wife about his honest desires, feelings, and thoughts, and it was the same for his wife: "It's necessary to be honest and to have courage to be open with each other, but we didn't do that. I couldn't convey what I wanted to my wife. And she also didn't tell me what she needed more of."[122]

The biggest difficulty that Chinun had was with their sex life. As Chinun and his wife's sex life dropped off, he could not fulfill his sexual desire, which, he argued, was the main reason that he cheated on his wife. Nevertheless, Chinun did not communicate with his wife about his dissatisfaction with their sex life until she found out about his infidelity for the second time. Feeling ashamed, he stated, "I thought I should endure [my difficult feelings] by myself without talking about them. I really did. I mean that's what I learned about being a man from society."[123] It was the crisis in his marital life that finally allowed Chinun to be open about his sexual desires and frustrations to his wife, putting aside his role as head of the household and husband. Chinun, in other words, started to be honest to his wife, telling her how he felt dissatisfied with their sex life.

It was around that time that Chinun decided to live as a polyamorist. He desperately wanted to practice polyamory because he thought it would be the way for him to maintain his relationship with his

[122] Chinun, interview by author, Seul, May 14, 2019.
[123] Chinun, interview by author, Seul, May 14, 2019.

wife and have a sexually fulfilling life. At that time, he was no longer hiding his desires from his wife: "I told my wife [about polyamory] right away. As we were going through that extreme time, we weirdly felt closer than before. We became more honest as well. I started to tell her about my desires."[124] Initially, his wife's reaction to polyamory was not positive. But, by expressing his thoughts and desires frankly as well as by sharing various resources related to polyamory, Chinun persistently tried to convince her to practice polyamory. After one year of his efforts, his wife came to understand his desire for polyamory and agreed to his polyamorous life.

Here, I do not intend to present Taesu and Chinun's stories as a bad example and a good example of creating consent for polyamory. Even though Taesu abandoned his pursuit of practicing polyamory because of his wife's opposition, we cannot judge his decision as a bad choice. In Chinun's case, though his wife eventually assented to polyamory, she still appeared to be uncomfortable with his polyamorous relationships. I have discussed these stories because they exemplify how South Korean polyamorists struggle to obtain their partner's consent for polyamory.

Through Taesu and Chinun's stories, I contend that polyamorists' endeavors to obtain consent essentially operate as a process in which they reflect on, acknowledge, and claim the self—their own desires, thoughts, and feelings. In other words, at the core of Taesu and Chinun's stories is their struggles and efforts to affirm the self—who they are as individuals untethered from what is expected of them as husbands, fathers, and heads of households—and communicate about it with others, mainly their wives. Chinun's consensual polyamorous relationship was the result of the long process in which he strove to acknowledge and express his repressed or hidden desires and liberate himself from the burdens of social expectations for a head of household, husband, father, and man. Chinun stated that, through the process of becoming a polyamorist and developing a consensual polyamorous relationship, he came to become more honest about his desires. In the case of Taesu, though he failed to be honest about his polyamorous desires with his wife, he still maintained that polyamory helped him to look into himself and understand his own desires. Through

[124] Chinun, interview by author, Seul, May 14, 2019.

the process of striving to communicate about his desire for polyamory with his wife, Taesu came to look at "his thoughts or his inner sides" and "elucidate" himself "without being afraid or worried".[125]

The last point revealed by Taesu and Chinun's stories is gender dynamics in South Korean polyamorists' struggles to obtain consent. Both Taesu and Chinun are married men, and they sought to convince their wives to agree to let them practice polyamory. But, when they were trying to acknowledge and express their desires via practicing polyamory, what about their wives? What did their wives do while Taesu and Chinun were struggling to create a consensual polyamorous relationship? Would polyamory also allow them to recognize and realize their own desires undefined by their roles as wives, mothers, and caretakers of the family? My answer is no. Though Chinun's wife eventually accepted Chinun's desire for polyamory, not only does she not have interest in practicing polyamory herself, but she also does not like hearing about Chinun's relationships with other partners. Needless to say, it was a huge shock and very hurtful to Taesu's wife that Taesu developed polyamorous desires while having extramarital relationships. That is to say, while Taesu and Chinun endeavored to create consent for their practice of polyamory, what was expected of their wives was their understanding and acceptance of their husband's desires.

"I have been to a polyamory community's regular meeting once," Hari said. "At that time, I found that a lot of people who participated in the meeting were married men. It was very annoying. Why aren't they alone without their wives? If they were women, could they be here? Do they really have their wife's consent?"[126] In her interview, Hari expressed her ambivalent feelings towards married men in polyamory communities. As a matter of fact, it is not uncommon to see married polyamorous men like Taesu and Chinun alone at such community meetings. Many of them attend meetings while hoping to get advice on how to create a polyamorous relationship with their wife's consent. But, as Hari pointed out, their wives were not present. Rather, their wives are discussed in the meetings as an obstacle to the married men's practice of polyamory. Why are their wives or married polyamorous women absent in South Korean polyamory communities? I claim that the unequal gender power dynamics of the heteropatriarchal family

[125] Taesu, interview by author, Seoul, May 28, 2019.
[126] Hari, interview by author, Seoul, June 14, 2019.

is the root cause of the different positions that a husband and a wife have in polyamory communities. Put differently, when Taesu and Chinun sought to obtain their wife's consent through the process of admitting their desires detached from their familial roles and responsibilities, their position as men in the heteropatriarchal family was fundamental to their being able to recognize their desire for polyamory.

Toward Cultivating the Private Self

One of the final questions that I asked in my one-on-one interviews with polyamorists was about the value of polyamory: what does polyamory mean to your life? While some interviewees had a hard time articulating the value of polyamory to them, others gave clear, insightful answers. Chinun was one of the latter:

> It [polyamory] is a means of happiness, somewhat hard to define, but definitely a means of happiness. … What happiness means to me is that I'm honest about my desires and live as myself following my honest desires. And in doing so, I mediate between living [as myself] and society through negotiations and agreements. It means that I don't just live the life that I'm asked to live [by society], but am constantly questioning.[127]

Pointing out that polyamory is a primary tool for his happiness, Chinun illustrated that a happy life signifies a life in which he lives as himself. What does Chinun mean by living as himself? How does he think polyamory enables him to live as himself?

In this chapter, I have thus far showcased how the notion of self-realization lies at the heart of South Koreans' experience of polyamory. While South Korean polyamorists claim that polyamory is a choice that they make to realize the self in their individual life, their experience of being a polyamorist operates as the process through which they can affirm and express their own desires, thoughts, and feelings apart from society's expectations as well as their familial roles and duties. Here in the final section of this chapter, I

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[127] Chinun, interview by author, Seoul, May 14, 2019.
[폴리아모리는] 행복의 수단. 아직 정의 내릴 수 없는 행복의 수단. … 저에게 행복이라는 거는 내가 욕망하는 것에 솔직하고, 그 솔직한 욕망을 추구하면서 내 삶 동안 최대한 나답게 사는데, 그 [나답게] 사는 것과 사회 안에서의 조율, 그리고 철저히 합의하고 조율해서 살아가는 것. 끊임없이 의심하고, 내가 [사회가] 살라는 대로 살지 않는 거지.

will discuss the meaning of the self that South Korean polyamorists seek to realize through their practice of polyamory and how their self-realization is a gendered experience. Ultimately, my claim in this section is that while South Korean polyamorists practice polyamory as a means of defining, nurturing, and expressing *the private self*—which is the self that is untethered from social, familial roles, statuses, and relationships—individuals' experiences of polyamory fundamentally intersect with their gendered position or their position in the hetero-patriarchal nuclear family.

Considering that the ways in which people understand the self vary by different historical periods and cultures, many sociologists and psychologists have argued that Western cultures and Eastern or Asian societies place a different emphasis on the way that individuals perceive and experience the self (e.g., Markus and Kitayama 1991; Singelis 1994; Barak at el. 2011). In many Western societies, individuals subscribe to the prevalent belief in the autonomy and independence of the individual, tending to understand themselves as bounded, separate, and unitary beings (Bella et al. 1996). Though the existence of others is critical to the way that they are aware of the self, they mainly envision themselves as singular, coherent beings separate from their social environments. In the independent view of the self, what is important in their understanding of the self is *the private or inner aspect of the self*—one's internal feelings, thoughts, and abilities—that no one else but the individual can have access to (Markus and Kitayama 1991, 230; Tafarodi at el. 2003; Illouz 2008). Prioritizing the private self as their unique individuality, the individual strives to express and realize the self in their social interactions with others. In this respect, the actualization of the authentic self, which Southern Californian polyamorists emphasize in their practice of polyamory, is aligned with the cultural value of the private self in Western societies (see Chapter 2).

By contrast, it is often claimed that individuals in many non-Western societies rely on the dominant social value of harmony or connectedness among human beings, making them more likely to perceive themselves as part of a larger social unit and social relationship (e.g., Kanagawa at el. 2001). Although such individuals are aware of the private, inner aspects of the self, they recognize themselves basically as interdependent, relational, or ensembled beings. With the interdependent view of the self, the primary focus in their self-understanding is *the public or external aspect of the self*—one's statuses, roles, and

relationships—which is shaped through social environments (Markus and Kitayama 1991, 230). Given that focus, an individual's important task is *not* the expression of the inner self *but* fitting in or harmonizing with others by adjusting the self.

In line with this understanding of non-Western societies, South Korea is believed to adhere to the interdependent, relational view of the self with its emphasis on social integration. Existing studies have indicated that South Koreans put their social groups and relationships at the core of the way in which they construct and appraise the self (e.g., Suh 2002; Kim and Papacharissi 2003; Kim at el. 2003; Park at el. 2017). Though I admit this to be a valid aspect of the social context of South Korea, I nonetheless contend that South Koreans polyamorists underscore *the realization of the private or inner self*. Put another way, through the practice of polyamory, South Koreans seek to identify, foster, and realize the private self, which is the inner self extricated from their familial or intimate relationships as well as from social expectations.

To detail how South Korean polyamorists connect polyamory to their realization of the private self, I now turn to Kakyŏng's story. I first met Kakyŏng at the colloquium *Escape from Normative Intimacy*, which was held in 2019 by the feminist team T'aryŏnae Sŏnŏn (see Chapter 3). As one of the speakers at the colloquium, she gave a talk about her own experience of polyamory. Later, I contacted her for an interview. Remarkably, Kakyŏng summarized her journey to live as a polyamorist as "the process of becoming an agentic individual" (*chuch'ehwa*) or the process of learning "to live as a complete individual."[128]

Kakyŏng's trajectory of becoming a polyamorist was interesting. She decided to practice polyamory in her twenties. As she described, it was a choice she made to deal with her low self-esteem. She thought that polyamory would help her fulfill her desire to be loved and thereby increase her sense of self-worth. While practicing polyamory, Kakyŏng, however, still suffered greatly from extreme mood swings, separation anxiety, and self-hate. Instead, Kakyŏng's polyamorous relationships allowed her to realize that it was she who could not fully love others or herself. Kakyŏng, as a result of being in

[128] Kakyŏng, interview by author, Seoul, May 16, 2019.

polyamorous relationships, started to look into herself and to interpret her own inner desires, thoughts, and feelings. Through constant self-reflection and self-work, she eventually came to recognize herself as an independent, whole individual without depending on others. In such a manner, Kakyŏng stated that, through her journey of practicing polyamory, she has come to live as "an agentic individual" (*chuch'e*).

According to Kakyŏng, polyamory, although it is certainly not a panacea, is a useful tool that allows one to develop into an agentic individual. This is because, in a polyamorous relationship, people have to both admit that they do not have control over their intimate partners and go through the process of making negotiations and agreements with their partners in order to gain what they want from their intimate relationship:

> For me, polyamory entails a great deal of self-regulation. All relationships entail self-regulation. Without it, we cannot build a relationship with others. … What I mean by self-regulation is *the whole process in which I understand what I want for now and, based upon that, reach an agreement with my partner, who also has what they want, and the process in which I think about what my partner and I need to do to achieve what we both want*. It's a political process for me. And in undergoing it, I need to regulate myself. I cannot say [to my partners] anything I have in my mind. But most people believe that, especially in an intimate relationship that involves sex, their partner should embrace every aspect of themselves and listen to whatever they say, including their very raw, unorganized thoughts. But that shouldn't be. … We all have very limited resources, not only time or effort but also mental energy. Given such limited resources, I need to *constantly ask myself and mull over what's more important or what's less important for me* in order to build a relationship with others who also have very limited resources. And for that, self-observation is necessary.[129] (Emphasis Added)

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[129] Kakyŏng, interview by author, Seoul, May 16, 2019.
저한테 다자연애는 엄청난 자기 통제의 과정을 거치는 일이라고 생각하거든요. 사실 모든 관계에 자기 통제가 없으면 타인과의 관계를 맺을 수 없는 거거든요. … 그 자기 통제라고 하는 게, 내가 지금 원하는 게 뭔지를 이해하고 그거를 바탕으로 상대가 원하는 것과의 접점을 만들어 가고 이걸 이루기 위해서 서로 어떻게 서로 움직여야 될 지에 대해 고민하는 과정이 저한테는 정치고, 자기통제. 그렇게 하려면 자기 통제가 되어야 되니까요. 아무 말이나 막 뱉으면 그게 안 되잖아요. 근데 대부분의 사람들이 특히 친밀 하거나, 성애가 섞이게 되는 관계에서, 나의 모든 걸 다 받아 들어 줘야 되고 나의 아주 긴밀한 아무 정리도 안된 아무 말을 다 들어 줘야 된다고 생각하는 그런 게 있는데, 사실 그게 아니라. … 시간이나 노력이나 그것뿐만 아니라, 나의 정신적 자원부터 시작해서 모든 자원은 한정적이고, 그런 한정적인 가운데에서 또 한정적인 자원을 가진 타인과 관계를 맺는다는 건 무엇을 더 우선적으로 생각하고 덜 우선적으로 생각하는지 끊임없이 생각하는 게 필요한 거라고 생각해서, 그게 그렇게 되기 위해선 자기 응시 그게 필요한 거죠.

Kakyŏng demonstrated that the practice of polyamory, above all, requires individuals to be introspective. By departing from social norms or expectations of what an intimate relationship should look like, individuals are asked to examine and understand what they want for themselves in their intimate relationships. But understanding their own desires is not enough. In order to achieve what they want, individuals have to gain agreement from their partners, who also have their own desires and thoughts. Far from imposing what they want on their intimate partners, individuals need to efficiently communicate about what they want and negotiate with their partners, which requires a whole process of self-regulation. Therefore, Kakyŏng argued that, polyamory, which calls for an individual's constant practice of self-regulation, is a form of intimate relationship that enables or compels one to become an agentic individual (*chuch'e*).

Becoming an agentic individual through polyamory is not a concept that is unique to Kakyŏng's argument. Many of the South Korean polyamorists that I interviewed also similarly mentioned that polyamory has helped them grow into agentic individuals. They described polyamory in the following ways: "the relationship through which each person can become an independent, agentic individual,"[130] "the process of making each other agentic individuals,"[131] "A form of relationship in which my partner and I can respect each other as individuals,"[132] "The thing [polyamory] that opens up the possibility that I can live as myself without being bound by social standards."[133]

What, then, does it mean to live as an agentic individual, which not only Kakyŏng but other polyamorists emphasized? I assert that becoming an agentic individual, for South Korean polyamorists, essentially signifies *the process in which an individual defines, nurtures, and expresses their private self.* In other words, when South Korean polyamorists say that they live as an individual or as themselves, this suggests that they do not simply live their lives by attuning themselves to their role in a familial or intimate relationship or by complying with society's and others' expectations. Rather, what polyamorists call being

[130] Tohun, interview by author, Seoul, May 26, 2019.
[131] Minsu, interview by author, Seoul, June 9, 2019.
[132] Kiyong, interview by author, Seoul, April 22, 2019.
[133] Chŏnghyŏk, interview by author, Seoul, May 24, 2019.

an agentic individual is essentially being a person who recognizes and tends to their own inner desires, thoughts, and feelings and seeks to build their life in a way to realize them. As these polyamorists stated, polyamory is a form of intimate relationship that allows them to identify, foster and realize their private selves unfettered by not only societal norms and expectations but also their social statuses, roles, and relationships.

Although previous studies, as mentioned above, have shown that South Koreans mainly construct and experience the self through their social statuses, roles, and relationships (Kim and Papacharissi 2003; Kim at el. 2003; Park at el. 2017), the relational or interdependent view of the self is neither an essentialist nor an unchanging characteristic of South Koreans. Additionally, depending on one's ethnicity, religion, gender, class, or age group, individuals display divergent ways of understanding the self. With that being said, my analysis indicates that South Korean polyamorists, in their practice of polyamory, emphasize the private self that is recognizable to themselves rather than the relational self that is recognizable only through their social relationships—that is, central to South Koreans' experience of polyamory is the cultivation of the private self.

As a matter of fact, it is plausible that South Koreans seek to foster their private selves through polyamory, given that polyamory has developed in close entanglement with the liberal individualistic ethos, which underscores the individual as an autonomous, independent being (see Chapters 1 and Chapter 2). Whereas Americans utilize polyamory as a means of discovering and actualizing their inner, true selves—the authentic self—South Koreans similarly strive to recognize and express their private selves by virtue of the practice of polyamory. Indeed, South Korean polyamorists' emphasis on the private self is fundamentally entwined with the changing social climate surrounding the value of individuality in the 2000s and the 2010s. Through the neoliberal reconstruction of the socioeconomic system after 1997, the neoliberal ethos, which emphasizes individual freedom, choice, and responsibility, has become prevalent in South Korean society (Chapter 3). By transforming South Koreans into freewheeling, self-interested subjects who focus on self-development for survival in the competitive labor market, the neoliberal ethos does not just change South Koreans' economic, public lives but also affects the way in which South Koreans

organize their private, intimate lives. In their familial or intimate relationships, South Koreans have increasingly come to perceive themselves as individuals who have freedom and choices. I contend that it is under these social circumstances that South Koreans have come to adopt polyamory as a way to express and realize themselves as free, agentic individuals.

Lastly, while polyamory operates as a means by which individuals can cultivate their private selves, it is important to note that polyamory is not equally available for everyone. The possibility and meaning of practicing polyamory are critically interlaced with an individual's gendered position. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the gender imbalance is one of the most distinguishing characteristics of South Korean polyamory communities. Overall, there are more polyamorists who self-identify as men than polyamorous women, but the discrepancy in the gender ratio becomes even more stark when one considers married polyamorists. Single women, single men, and married men were relatively evenly distributed, yet it was extremely rare to see married women in polyamory communities. Indeed, during one year of fieldwork in South Korea, the number of married polyamorous women that I met either online or offline was less than 10 (In contrast, I met approximately forty married polyamorous men either online or offline during my fieldwork). What accounts for the low proportion of married women in South Korean polyamory communities? And what does this imply about South Koreans' quest for the realization of the private self, which polyamorists highlight as the essential meaning of polyamory?

When I point out that one's experience of polyamory is entwined with their gendered position, I do not use gender simply to mean gender identity, which is binarily categorized as either women or men. Rather, I claim that what significantly informs one's experience of polyamory is their *gendered position within the heteropatriarchal nuclear family*. While there is a scarcity of married polyamorous women, South Korean young feminists are one of the most important social groups that have shaped the social discourse of polyamory in the mid and late 2010s (see Chapter 3). To challenge the heteropatriarchal form of the normative intimate relationship as a source of oppression to women, young feminists have promoted polyamory as an alternative, healthy way to practice intimacy that enables women to exercise their freedom and agency. Demonstrating that it is impossible for women to live as agentic, free individuals within the

existing normative form of familial and intimate relationships, these young feminists have endorsed polyamory as a feminist practice that tackles the heteropatriarchal system. (Kakyŏng is one such young feminists.)

Considering the active role that young feminists have played in the development of the discourse of polyamory, it is unsurprising that I found a significant number of young, single women taking part in South Korean polyamory communities, and they tended to actively participate in the communities' online discussions and offline meetings. Some of the single polyamorous women, similar to young feminist, perceived polyamory as a lifestyle that allowed them to live as agentic individuals, while resisting being incorporated into the patriarchal family system that oppresses their freedom and agency. Of course, not every single polyamorous woman shared the same view on the heteropatriarchal system or rejected the possibility of forming a nuclear family of their own in the future. Nevertheless, what's important here is that polyamory exists as a painstaking yet possible option that s*ingle women* who are not in heteropatriarchal family relationships can choose to pursue to realize their private selves, just as single men can.

On the contrary, *married women* may not feel that this option exists for them, hence the distinctive gender imbalance among married polyamorists. As mentioned previously, it was not uncommon to see married men in polyamory communities during my one year of participant observation. In fact, I met many married polyamorous men, such as Chaemin, Chŏnghyŏk, Taesu, and Chinun. These married men, while enacting their roles as husbands, fathers, and/or heads of households, sought to practice polyamory as a means of recognizing and expressing their desires, thoughts, and feelings. For them, polyamory, although not easy, seemed to be a plausible approach they could try for the realization of their private selves while maintaining their positions within the heteropatriarchal family. However, polyamory was rarely a married woman's choice. I could only find three married polyamorous women who participated with relative regularity in polyamory communities—either Yŏrŏ or Taae—during my fieldwork. Two of them, Yŏnchu and Yumi, started to practice polyamory in conjunction with their husbands. Yŏnchu reached a mutual decision with her husband about the practice of polyamory and Yumi began to practice polyamory because of her husband's suggestion. Sumi, the third married polyamorous woman, began participating in a

polyamory community alone without her husband's knowledge after her husband turned down her suggestion to practice polyamory.

Within the heteropatriarchal family system, married women can hardly afford to choose polyamory as a way to realize the private self, untethered from their familial roles as wives, mothers, and caretakers of the family. Above all, it is an undeniable fact that many married women are economically dependent on their husbands. The South Korean labor market shows significant gender inequality with a low female labor force participation rate (69% as of 2019) as well as a high gender pay gap (33% as of 2019). Married women, especially married women with a child, are one of the most vulnerable groups.[134] According to the Korea Economic Research Institute's report on female labor force participation in 2020, while the labor force participation rate among women between 25 and 29 was 71.1% in 2019, the rate drops to 57% among women who have a child less than 15 years old, which is 13% lower than their American counterpart.[135] That is, given that most married women are either partially or completely dependent on their husbands economically, it is by no means easy for them to voice their own desires, thoughts, and feelings unbounded by their roles in the family.

More importantly, I point out that women and men in a heteropatriarchal family tend to experience a fundamentally dissimilar relationship between the family and themselves. Although forming a hetero-patriarchal nuclear family has been established as an indispensable task for both women and men in modern South Korean society (Moon, 2005; D. Lee, 2017; Cho, 2020), their relationships to the family are inherently asymmetrical. Married men who pursue polyamory can cultivate their private selves while maintaining their families. As has been shown, living as agentic individuals, for men, is not incompatible with their familial roles, although it requires them to mediate between their private selves and their familial relationships. Distinct from their familial roles, men perceive themselves as full individuals; and for them, it is the family

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[134] https://www.pwc.co.uk/services/economics/insights/women-in-work-index.html
[135] Korea Economic Research Institute, A Report on female labor force participation in South Korea compared to Other Countries in 2020 (Seoul: Korea Economic Research Institute, 2021), accessed February 23, http://www.keri.org/web/www/news_02?p_p_id=EXT_BBS&p_p_lifecycle=0&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&_EXT_BBS_struts_action=%2Fext%2Fbbs%2Fview_message&_EXT_BBS_messageId=356146

that supports them as they function as full individuals in their public and social lives. In contrast, the relationship between the self and the family appears to be more complex for women. Historically, South Korean women, when incorporated into the heteropatriarchal family, are recognized as individual subjects, albeit incompletely. What lies at the core of how women understand and construct themselves is their familial roles as wives, mothers, and caretakers/managers of the family. Considering this, compared to married men, it is much more difficult for married women to envision a self that is untethered from their familial roles. And, even though they may acknowledge the private self, cultivating the private self and performing their familial roles are conflicting or incompatible tasks for women, unlike for men. As such, I assert that when South Koreans utilize polyamory as means of cultivating their private selves unbounded by their social roles, statuses, and relationships, polyamory is an intimate practice that South Korean married women can hardly imagine or afford for themselves.

Conclusion: Polyamory, a Private Self, and Gendered Experiences

In this chapter, I have discussed South Korean individuals' experience of practicing polyamory with a focus on their management of selfhood. With the increasing social value of individual freedom and self-development in South Korean society in the 2000s and 2010s, individuals perceive polyamory as their agentic choice to realize the self in their private, intimate lives. While not only opposing social persecution for being a polyamorist but also creating partners' consent to build a polyamorous life, individuals are required to acknowledge and express their own desires, thoughts, and feelings against social norms as well as their roles in an intimate or familial relationships. I have therefore claimed that polyamory operates as the process by which individuals identify, foster, and realize their private selves being unbounded by their social, familial statuses, roles, and relationships. Ultimately, my analysis of South Koreans' practice of polyamory reveals individuals' endeavors to cultivate a private self and how the cultivation of a private self is gendered experience under the South Korean heteropatriarchal nuclear family system.

First, South Koreans' experiences of polyamory are closely entwined with the neoliberal ethos that has been growing in South Korean society since the 2000s and 2010s. As Seo Dongjin (2009) astutely pointed out, in the wake of the neoliberal reconstructions of the socioeconomic system after 1997, the neoliberal ethos, which highlights individual freedom, choice, responsibility, and self-development, has been growing and a new type of economic subject, which Seo called the "self-developing subject" has emerged in South Korea. While Seo analyzed the transformation of South Koreans' economic lives, I indicate that the impact of neoliberalism has not been limited to economic life but has permeated South Koreans' familial or private lives since the 2000s and 2010s. In this manner, I demonstrate that the emergence of South Korean polyamorous subjects is in line with what Seo (2009) terms the self-developing subject. As neoliberal subjects who "examine, interpret, and take care of their lives through their exercise of freedom" (Seo 2009, 367), South Korean polyamorists seek to achieve self-realization via practicing polyamory.

At the same time, though they are essentially connected to the neoliberal ethos, South Korean polyamorists cannot simply be regarded as "self-developing subjects" (Seo 2009) in the field of their private, intimate lives. When polyamorists strive for self-realization through polyamory, as I have illustrated, they are not pursuing what is regarded as desirable by society or following what society expects them to do. Rather, they are trying to express and realize *a private self that* is untethered not only from existing societal norms, values, and expectations but also from their roles in social relationships. While social statuses, roles, and relationships tend to be the main sources by and through which South Koreans perceive and construct themselves, polyamorists recognize themselves through their own inner desires, thoughts, and feelings and attempt to build their lives in a way that expresses those inner desires, thoughts, and feelings. That is, it is the cultivation of a private self that South Koreans are mainly pursuing and experiencing in their practice of polyamory. In this respect, I claim that polyamorists' pursuit of self-realization gestures toward a new emergent way in which South Korean individuals construct and manage their selfhood in the post-crisis, neoliberal society.

Lastly yet most importantly, in this chapter, I have tried to show how South Korean polyamorists' cultivation of a private self is a fundamentally gendered experience. When individuals recognize their inner desires, thoughts, and feelings through their practice of polyamory, it is certainly a liberating experience for them. Polyamory indeed provides individuals with an experience of exercising freedom and agency as they construct their polyamorous lives. However, I maintain that, under the heteropatriarchal nuclear family system, not everyone can afford to cultivate their private self in a way that is extricated from their roles in social and familial relationships as well as from societal norms. Particularly, polyamory is hardly ever a plausible choice that a married woman can make for herself. Being signified as wives, mothers, and daughters-in-law rather than as separate, full individuals, South Korean married women can hardly avail themselves of the experience of looking into their inner desires, thoughts, and feelings separated from their familial roles. Therefore, by showing how the cultivation of a private self occurs among South Korean polyamorists, I hope I have illuminated that individuals' gendered position fundamentally informs the way in which they construct and manage their selfhood.

Conclusion Between "Ethical Sluts" and Invisible Housewives:

Polyamory as a Racialized, Gendered Project of the Self

> I have always been somewhat suspicious of the notion of liberation, because if it is not treated with precautions and within certain limits, one runs the risk of falling back on the idea that there exists a human nature or base that, as a consequence of certain historical, economic, and social processes, has been concealed, alienated, or imprisoned in and by mechanisms of repression. According to this hypothesis, all that is required is to break these repressive deadlocks and man will be reconciled with himself, rediscover his nature or regain contact with his origin, and reestablish a full and positive relationship with himself. I think this idea should not be accepted without scrutiny. (Foucault 2010, 282)

While I was writing my dissertation after finishing my fieldwork, I learned that the popular polyamory self-help book *The Ethical Slut* had finally been translated and published in South Korea in 2020. This was good news for South Korean polyamory communities since many polyamorists were struggling due to the lack of polyamory resources from which they could get help for their practice of polyamory. *The Ethical Slut* (1997), as discussed in Chapter 1, was written by two pioneering American polyamorist women, Dossie Easton and Janet Hardy. They wrote the book based on their own journeys of developing polyamorous lifestyles after leaving their patriarchal monogamous marital relationships. Believing that polyamory is a lifestyle that allows individuals to realize their sexual autonomy and freedom by being liberated from the heteropatriarchal monogamous marriage system, they expected that their book would help people, especially women like them, find agency in their own sexual, intimate lives. Though I was pleased about the translation of this book into Korean, I could not help wondering who the readers of the book in South Korea would be. Who would be able to read this book and accordingly attempt to exercise their freedom and autonomy in South Korea? More precisely, I was curious if this book would be helpful for South Korean married women who were seeking to be liberated from the heteropatriarchal nuclear family and thereby be able to exercise autonomy and freedom in their lives? Unfortunately, according to what I observed, it is very unlikely.

My examination of polyamory culture in the US and South Korea began with a simple question: what roles do our intimate experiences play in our understanding and management of the self? By looking at American and South Korean polyamorists who willingly choose a non-monogamous intimate lifestyle

that resists the social norm of monogamy, this dissertation aimed to understand how our intimate practices interact with the way we understand, appraise, and govern ourselves as particular individuals. This dissertation showed that individuals experience polyamory as a process through which they can make themselves free and autonomous, although the specific ways in which individuals practice and signify polyamory are different between and within the US and South Korea. If anything, polyamory is an individual endeavor to form and govern the self as a free, autonomous individual.

But, is it possible to consider polyamory as a practice of liberation through which all individuals can exercise freedom and autonomy in their lives? As I observed during my fieldwork, polyamory is certainly a liberating experience for some people: it enables them to be free from the heteropatriarchal monogamous marital system or to break away from the repressive social norm of monogamy. However, my dissertation also illustrated that polyamory is not a liberatory experience for everyone because it is fundamentally racialized and gendered. Put another way, as a particular form of intimate relationship that developed entwined with the specific racialized and gendered power relations within the historical, political, and economic contexts of the US and South Korea, polyamory necessarily operates as a racialized and gendered project of self-realization.

As illustrated in Chapters 1 and 2, polyamory developed as a racialized experience in the US. Given that US history reveals the racialized construction of monogamy as a civic norm, white, middle-classed normative individuality is essentially embedded in the development of polyamory. Indeed, as we saw in Southern Californian polyamorists' experiences, what individuals seek to attain through the practice of polyamory is nothing but the ideal of the white, middle-class, liberal individual. As polyamory communities in the US appear to be predominantly white, this dissertation illustrates that the norm of whiteness is deeply ingrained in the practice of polyamory.

Meanwhile, in South Korea, polyamory appears to be a gendered experience. In South Korean society, through the neoliberal reconstruction of the socioeconomic system after 1997, polyamory culture has grown entangled with the changing dynamics of the heteropatriarchal nuclear family as well as the increasing social values of individual freedom, choice, and self-realization. And in this process, South

Koreans' different gendered positions in the patriarchal nuclear family have determined their experiences of polyamory. While South Korean polyamorists have primarily adopted polyamory as a means to realize their private selves, untethered from social norms as well as their roles in their familial or intimate relationships, the individuals who practice polyamory are mainly single women, single men, and married men, all of whom can envision themselves as individuals independent from the heteropatriarchal nuclear family. On the contrary, polyamory is hardly an option for married women who are constrained by their roles as mothers, wives, and daughters-in-law. In this way, this dissertation demonstrated that, while polyamory was developed mainly by white, middle-class American women who sought to exercise their sexual autonomy and freedom by breaking away from their heteropatriarchal monogamous marital relationships, in South Korea, polyamory appears to be an irrelevant or impossible practice for married women who are bound to the heteropatriarchal nuclear family.

Considering the racialized, gendered nature of polyamory culture in the US and South Korea, how, then, can we understand polyamory? Should we denounce polyamory as an intimate practice that is only available to individuals with racial or gender privilege seeking to affirm their privileged social positions? My answer is firmly no. To consider the racialized, gendered nature of polyamorous experiences, I want to return here to Foucault's famous quote introduced at the beginning of this dissertation: "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (1990a, 95). For polyamorists, polyamory does in fact signify a practice of resistance through which they can oppose existing social norms and power relations. When white, middle-class American women created polyamory to realize their own sexual, intimate desires and promoted it as a new way of living, they made a courageous choice to break with the social norm of heteropatriarchal monogamous marriage. For South Korean married men, polyamory also appeared as a practice of resistance, which, in spite of social oppression and risks, they chose to pursue, thereby opposing the social norm of monogamy as well as social expectations of them as heads of households, husbands, and fathers.

Nonetheless, as Foucault claimed that there is no resistance outside of power relations, I point out that the practice of polyamory cannot be separated from existing racial and gender power relations. As

individuals in the US and South Korea practice polyamory to contest existing social norms and beliefs, their practice of polyamory is inescapably interlaced with their particular racialized or gendered positionalities. In other words, when white, middle-class American women praise polyamory as an intimate relationship that one can create on their own using self-understanding instead of merely following social expectations and norms, the white, middle-class norm of individuality and intimate life underlie their practice of polyamory. In a similar fashion, when South Korean married men seek to realize their agency in opposition to social norms and their roles in familial relationships, their position as men who are recognized and can act as individuals detached from the nuclear family lies at the core of their pursuit of polyamory. Under these circumstances, the practice of polyamory reproduces and reinforces existing racial and gender power relations, regardless of the intentions of individual polyamorists. Therefore, this dissertation suggested that, rather than a practice of liberation, we might understand polyamory as *a practice of ethics* through which individuals, within very specific conditions and limits, struggle to transform themselves into ethical beings by actively analyzing, employing, or modifying existing social norms and values.

As a postcolonial feminist analysis of polyamory culture in the US and South Korea, *Rethinking Intimacy, the Self, and Ethics* has tried to illuminate the non-normative intimate practice of polyamory as a practice of ethics to intervene in three different fields of scholarship. First, this dissertation contributes to critical studies on intimacy by offering an account of how intimacy operates as *an agentic practice of the self* by which individuals construct and govern selfhood in their relationship with the self as well as with the reality that circumscribes their identities, beliefs, and behaviors. Many studies on intimacy have illustrated how intimate practices operate as a critical domain in which individuals experience, reproduce, and consolidate larger power relations. Like those existing studies, my dissertation also provides an analysis of how Americans' and South Koreans' experiences of polyamory are informed not only by their particular gendered, racialized, and classed positionalities, but also through historical, political, and economic power relations, particularly the postcolonial power dynamics between the US and South Korea.

While examining the larger power relations that underlie individuals' intimate experiences of polyamory in the US and South Korea, this dissertation has also tried to advance our understanding of

intimacy by bringing forward the role of an individual's constructive agency in the process of constructing their intimate life. Rather than regarding intimacy as merely the personalized or individualized effects of systems of power relations, I explored how individuals develop and maintain polyamorous relationships by actively and creatively dealing with the circumstances and limits that condition their intimate practices. Informed by Povinelli (2006)'s conceptualization of intimacy as an individual experience that takes places at the intersection between discourses, practices, and fantasies about the self-making, self-governing liberal subject and discourses, practices, and fantasies about the social constraints placed on the liberal subject by inheritances, I provide an account of the specific processes and endeavors by which individuals practice intimacy in an attempt to form themselves as free and autonomous while grappling with the various social constraints placed upon them.

This dissertation also contributes to theories of selfhood by promoting decentering the Euro-American, white narrative of the self. By taking up Foucault's understanding of the self, this dissertation explored how American and South Korean polyamorists construct and manage their selfhood, while highlighting the culturally-specific, flexible, and varying logics of governing the self in the US and South Korea. Foucault and many other scholars have argued that our mode of being is neither ahistorical nor universal, and many scholars have shown how the contemporary understanding of the self—the reflexive practice through which individual discover, build, and manage a stable, unified, and rational self—has been shaped through modern Western history (e.g., Taylor, 1989; Giddens, 1991; Siedentop, 2014). However, while there have been rich scholarly discussions about the modern Western narrative of the self, relatively few scholarly works have examined the construction of selfhood in non-Western societies. Having said that, by juxtaposing individuals' experiences of polyamory in the US and South Korea, my project unearthed the different modes through which individuals view and manage their selfhood in the US and South Korea and how those different modes are intertwined with specific cultural, political, and economic contexts in the US and South Korea.

Based on individuals' experiences of polyamory in the US, this project described how individuals seek to actualize the authentic self through the practice of polyamory. As discussed in Chapter 2, the

authentic self has developed as a moral virtue in American society since the mid-twentieth century. In line with this, my project offers an account of how individuals signify the value of the authentic self and the specific manners and processes through which individuals strive to realize the authentic self. Showing that the liberal individualistic value of autonomy and the therapeutic ethos that focuses on the inner self are embedded in the value of the authentic self, this project argues that the pursuit of the authentic self operates as a constant practice of self-reflection and self-discipline.

In the case of South Koreans' experiences of polyamory, this project showed how individuals practice polyamory as a process of crafting a private self that is untethered from social roles, statuses, and relationships. Traditionally, as a Confucian East Asian society, South Korea has embodied a collectivist culture, and one's social status, roles, and relationships lie at the core of how one perceives oneself. However, such an understanding of the self is neither an essentialist nor a fixed characteristic of South Koreans. In fact, I indicate that there have been significant changes in the ways that individuals perceive and manage themselves in South Korea due to the neoliberal reforms after 1997. I suggest that, with the growing values of self-realization and individual freedom in the post-crisis era, South Koreans have increasingly focused on the inner, private self and have sought to realize it in their lives.

Lastly, this dissertation intervenes in Foucauldian studies on ethics by bringing forth intimacy as an ethical practice. Following other studies on ethics, this project offers an analysis of how individuals transform themselves into more ethical or better modes of being by inspecting, employing, or modifying the moral codes and beliefs in their everyday lives. Particularly, this project focused on the non-normative intimate practice of polyamory as a practice of ethics. It explored how the practice of polyamory serves as diverse, complex processes through which individuals reflect on, examine, and improve themselves as they strive to form themselves into better, more ethical human beings. I contend that polyamory operates as nothing other than an exercise of the self by which individuals can attempt to transform themselves and attain an ethical life. Showing that intimacy is an individual experience where sexual, intimate desires, freedom and autonomy, and moral norms and values about love, sex, and relationships intersect and are

negotiated, this project suggests that intimacy is a compelling site to examine the exercise of the self-formation of the ethical subject.

By using a case study of polyamory culture in the US and South Korea, this dissertation provides a critical assessment of intimacy, the self, and ethics. Since I first started this project, many things have changed. In particular, for the last year during the pandemic, we have witnessed a change in the very conditions in which people relate to and are intimate with others. While some people have suffered from isolation due to the absence of intimate connections, others have struggled to protect their personal boundaries from family members or loved ones during quarantine. As I was writing my dissertation in quarantine, I wondered what my project on polyamory could offer in these times of crisis. Given that polyamory is a non-normative intimate practice pursued by a relatively small population, one might think that this dissertation is just a story of the experiences of polyamorists who enjoy a radical, subcultural intimate lifestyle in the US and South Korea. However, what I have tried to tell in this dissertation is an account of how our intimate experiences operate not just as a form of connectivity but more fundamentally as a practice of the self by which we can recognize, value, and look after ourselves. Ultimately, I hope my dissertation has illuminated how the way we are intimate with others is interwoven into the way we perceive ourselves as well as the way we are governed.

Future Directions

To close my dissertation, I here present four future directions that I would like to take to expand or deepen my findings. First, I propose to continue exploring racialized practices of polyamory in the US with a particular focus on the experiences of African and Asian Americans. This direction will require the expansion not only of my ethnographic efforts but also of historical understandings of African and Asian Americans' experiences of non/monogamy. As I discussed in the first part of my dissertation, the norm of white, middle-class individuality is deeply embedded in the development and practice of polyamory in the US. Indeed, it appears that polyamory communities in the US overall lack racial diversity, including only a small number of African and Asian American polyamorists. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there

are no polyamorists of color in the US. Moreover, the voices of polyamorists of color have been noticeably increasing for the last couple of years; not only have polyamory books written by an African American and an Asian American been published, but also polyamory activists of color have become increasingly visible. Considering all of these new voices, I plan to examine African and Asian American individuals' experiences of polyamory in a future study. How did they come to identify themselves as polyamorists? What are their experiences of polyamory? How do their racial identities play out in their practice of polyamory? As African Americans and Asian Americans, what difficulties and conflicts do they face while practicing non-normative intimate polyamorous relationships? I propose to examine polyamory culture in the US from the perspectives of African and Asian American polyamorists.

Second, I propose to explore how one's intimate practices interact with their government of the self. In this dissertation, I analyzed Americans' and South Koreans' diverse experiences of polyamory within the dynamics of governing the self, showing the contrasting cultural logics by which individuals construct and manage their selfhood in the US and South Korea. Beyond the practice of polyamory, I will continue to examine how intimacy serves as a critical site where individuals perceive, appraise, and govern their selfhood. I am currently in the process of developing a new project that explores how sexual consent is created within the dynamics of self-governance. By examining how young generations negotiate and communicate sexual consent in the US and South Korea, this project will illustrate the culturally different logics through which individuals draw boundaries for the self and exercise their agency within intimate relationships. Combining ethnographic methods and media content textual analysis, I will focus on the culturally specific, gendered dynamics through which American and South Korean young generations negotiate their agency, freedom, and intimacy to create sexual consent. While there is a growing body of work on sexual consent, this project aims to illuminate how sexual consent is entangled with the cultural logics of the self, gender, and sexuality.

Third, I expect this dissertation to be my starting point for exploring culturally specific, changing notions of the self in East Asia. In this dissertation, one of my main findings was that, in the neoliberal, post-crisis contexts of South Korea, there has been a transformation in the way in which individuals

understand, value, and manage their selfhood, which I conceptualized as the cultivation of the private self. As East Asian societies are identified with Confucian cultural traditions that emphasize filial piety, hierarchical social orders, and social harmony, it is often assumed that East Asians share a collectivist perspective on the self. However, as my dissertation has shown, the way individuals recognize and assess the self can change according to shifting economic, political, and cultural conditions. Hence, I propose to explore the changes of selfhood taking place in East Asian countries. I will explore changing notions of selfhood in several East Asian societies including not only South Korea but also Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan. This will allow me to expand critical understandings of culturally specific, flexible notions of the self while decentering the Euro-American modern notion of the self.

Lastly, I intend to examine the transformation of intimacy, marriage, and the family in South Korea in the neoliberal, post-crisis era. By analyzing the development of polyamory culture since the 2000s, my dissertation has suggested that there has been a fundamental change in the way South Koreans understand, value, and practice intimacy, marriage, and the family due to the neoliberal reconstruction of the socioeconomic system after 1997. As a matter of fact, many South Korean scholars have focused on the crises of South Korean nuclear families, particularly the decreasing marriage rate and the low fertility rate. While their studies have provided important insights into how South Korean families have been changing, I will shift the focus away from the nuclear family toward individuality. By bringing forth how changing individuality is at the center of the way South Koreans understand and value their practices of intimacy, marriage, and family life, I will explore the transformation of intimacy, marriage, and the family in South Korea in the neoliberal, post-crisis era and how gender and class dynamics play out in that transformation. In doing so, I hope to provide a comprehensive understanding of the transformation of South Koreans' private lives, shifting away from the ideology of the heteropatriarchal nuclear family.

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