

# Demystifying the Structure of Multiple Partners: Exploring the Relationship Dynamics of Polyamory in the Philippines

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*Abstract* — Consensual non-monogamy (CNM) relationships are distinct from the status quo in the Philippines, where monogamy is the rule. CNM is a type of non-monogamous sexual relationship where both partners know and agree to it. This kind of relationship can look different, with polyamory being one of the most common. In these situations, two or more people have romantic or sexual relationships with each other, usually in a trio or quad. This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews to get information from 10 Filipinos who are currently in polyamorous relationships. The goal was to shed light on the rarely studied reality of polyamory in the Philippines and fill a research gap. With the help of a semi-structured conversation, the researcher looked into how a polyamorous relationship works and what people think about it.

After employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the main tool for analysis, the research found eight themes: (1) agreement on the start of a polyamorous relationship, (2) the foundations of polyamorous relationships, (3) the challenges of being in a polyamorous relationship, (4) the skills needed to handle multiple relationships, (5) the basis for making decisions, (6) misconceptions about polyamory, (7) perceptions of polyamory, and (8) perceptions of monogamy. As expected, the study shows that Filipino polyamorous people have to deal with a lot of misunderstandings and abuse, which hurts their emotional and mental health. In conclusion, the study gave suggestions for creating an environment that encourages openness and where emotional and mental support is available, even for people who have been mislabeled as taboo in the past.

*Keywords* — *Polyamory, IPA, Consensual Non-Monogamy, Relationship Dynamics, Perspectives, Polyfidelity*

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## I. Introduction

In the Philippines, marriage is the norm, and dating outside of a couple is frowned upon and considered wrong. For example, consensual non-monogamy, a relationship in which one or all people accept that they can have emotional or sexual relationships with other people (Balzarini et al., 2017), is unusual and does not fit with the conservative nature of Filipinos. Polyamory is a type of consensual non-monogamy. It is different from swinging, in which couples can have other sexual partners; open relationships, in which a primary couple has sexual relationships with other people; and polygamy, in which a man has more than one wife (Conley, 2017). Polyamory means having or wanting more than one emotional or sexual relationship with everyone's permission. It can have different kinds of relationships, some of which are hierarchical and some of which are

not. These relationships can be triads, quads, or moresomes, depending on how many people are involved and whether they agree to the rules (Sheff, 2016).

People think that polyamorous relationships are naturally more complicated than monogamous ones, not just because more people are involved but also because they require constant conversation, openness, and agreement from everyone (Musson, 2017). Almost everywhere in the world, monogamy is still the only accepted type of relationship. Polygamy is also allowed in some religions and cultures, but polyamory is still looked down upon. Most people, even in the free society of the West, see polyamory as a relationship style that cannot last and is doomed to fail (Seguin, 2019). Johnson et al. (2015) says a negative link exists between social factors like political conservatism and religious fanaticism and a person's optimistic view of polyamorous relationships. This shows that conservative people with strong religious and traditional beliefs have a more negative view of polyamorous relationships. Since the Philippines is conservative and religious, polyamory likely has a bad reputation there. Polyamory goes against the cultural and social norms of the Philippines and makes a big difference in how most Filipinos think and act. Polyamorous partnerships, especially in the Philippines, would be interesting. Even though polyamory is common and could change how people look at things in modern society, social science and psychology have not done much research on it. So, experts started this study to learn more about polyamorous people and their relationships in the Philippines. The study looked at how polyamorous people interact with each other and how their relationships work. The goal was to understand polyamory and shed light on it.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Polyamorous relationships are unexplored nor studied in the academic setting since most societies have monogamous relationships. For this reason, it has resulted in the lack of educational information about polyamorous individuals and, in turn, contributes to the lack of awareness and acceptance of the general public about them.

Hence, this phenomenological study's aim was to explore the relationship dynamics among polyamorous individuals in the Philippines and to achieve this goal; the research used the two main questions below as a guide:

1. What are the lived experiences of polyamorous individuals in the Philippines regarding having multiple partners in their relationships?
2. What are the relationship patterns of polyamorous individuals in love, communication, commitment, and intimacy with multiple partners?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The present research is focused on relationship dynamics and foundations, particularly polyamorous partnerships. The researchers employed Robert Sternberg's' (1997) Triangular

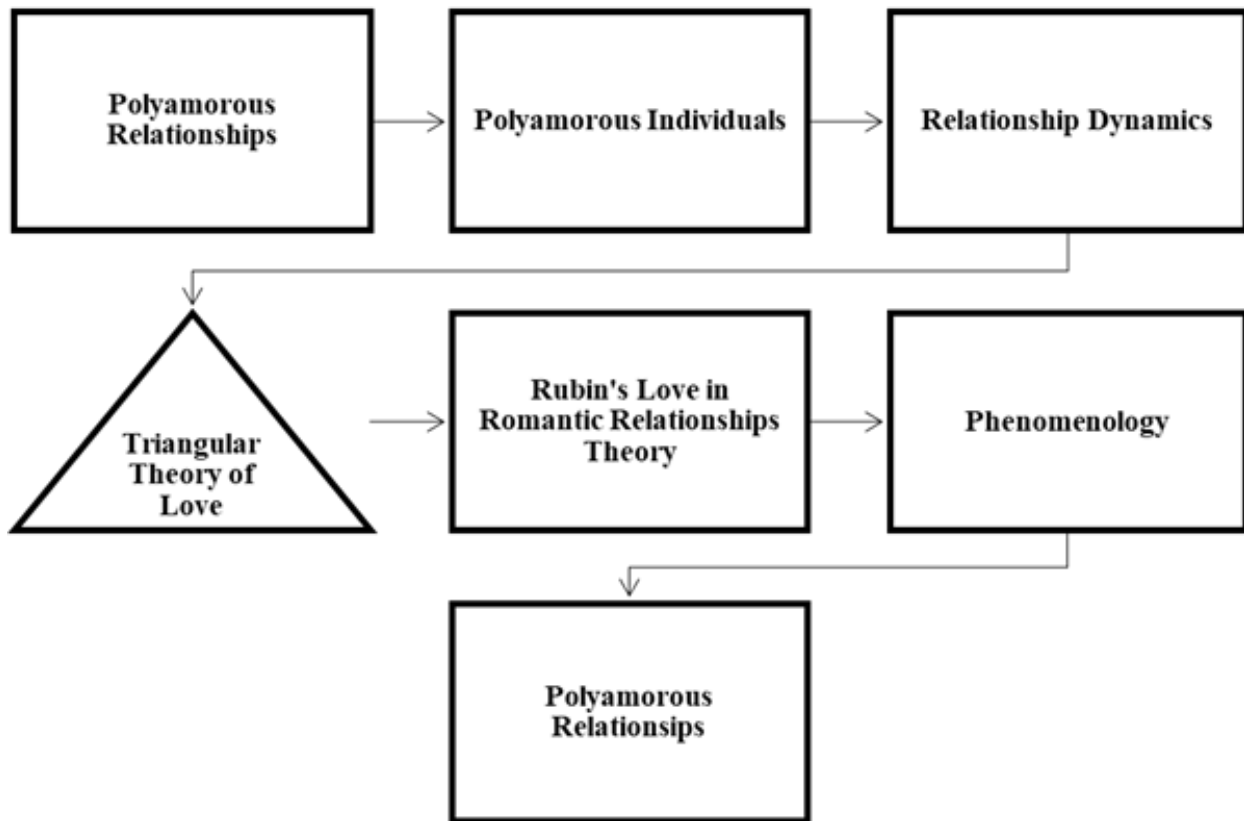
Theory of Love and Zick Rubin's (1985) Love in Romantic Relationships Theory to analyze polyamory in the Philippines. Sternberg's (1997) triangular theory of love describes love as three factors that form a triangle. The triangle is a metaphor, not a geometric model. Passion, intimacy, and decision/commitment. Each piece represents a different love.

Intimacy is a connection, closeness, and bonding in love relationships. It includes feelings that lead to romantic affection. Passion includes romantic, sexual, and other desires. Passion in a love relationship comes from numerous kinds of drive and arousal. Both decisions are short-term: the short-term decision to love someone and the long-term commitment to keep that love. One can love someone without being committed to the relationship, or one can be committed to a relationship without loving the other person (Stenberg, 1997). Rubin's Love in Romantic Relationships resembles Stenberg's Triangular Theory. The theory says love involves closeness, connection, and concern. According to his concept, various combinations of these characteristics create distinct human bonds. Attachment is a need for acceptance, contact, and support. However, caring means considering others' needs as much as one's own. Finally, intimacy is a shared bond between two people.

A relationship's emotional equilibrium is compromised without the three components of both theories. Polyamory rejects the idea that one person can satisfy all three aspects of a healthy relationship. Polyamorists help their spouses grow by having several relationships. This suggests that several partnerships can build closeness, commitment, and desire. The researcher also employed phenomenological hermeneutics to understand the study's difficulties. Hermeneutic phenomenology by Van Manen (1990) was utilized to reveal the phenomena. This paradigm laid the groundwork for studying Philippine polyamory relationships.

Hermeneutic phenomenology shows how people interpret their experiences (Cohen et al., 2011). Hermeneutic phenomenology suits this study's questions.

### Conceptual Framework



**Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework for the Exploration of Relationship Dynamics of Polyamorous Relationships**

### Review of Related Literature and Studies

Polyamory is consenting to many sexual or romantic relationships with different persons (Rubel & Bogaert, 2015). Polyamorous relationships are a type of consensual non-monogamy (CNM) that emphasizes long-term relationships and mutual consent (Cohen et al., 2017). Trios, quads, and moresomes are common polyamorous arrangements (Veaux et al., 2014). Polyamorous couples are stereotyped as promiscuous, participating in risky sex, and mentally aberrant (Hogenboom, 2016, Conley, 2018). Moore (2015) reports that 56% of Americans believe polyamory is immoral, while 25% believe it is moral. According to Sheff and Hammers (2016), Westerners view most polyamorous people as well-educated, middle-class, and gay males since polyamory is seen as a costly and time-consuming relationship. Seguin (2019) found that most individuals think polyamorous relationships are unsustainable and doomed. It is frequently considered a bad relationship with more problems than positives. More complex than monogamy.

It also increases the danger of sexually transmitted diseases and is more time-consuming and emotionally draining. However, sociocultural influences including political conservatism and religious fundamentalism cause these fallacies (Johnson et al., 2015).

Polyamory improves everyone and satisfies everyone more than monogamous partnerships (Conley et al., 2017). Unlike popular opinion, polyamory encourages honesty, independence, commitment, and compassion. It also promotes emotional well-being and relationship satisfaction by ensuring constant communication (Klesse, 2014; Shotwell, 2017). Polyamory is more complicated than monogamy not only because of the number of people involved but also because it requires emotional openness, honesty, explicitness as a romantic norm, and continuous tenderness (Shotwell, 2017). Polyamory is widespread and unpredictable, requiring constant negotiation and renegotiation (Ben Ze-ev, 2017). Polyamorous relationships are just different. Polyamorous partnerships are just as fulfilling as monogamous ones (Rubel et al., 2015).

## **II. Methodology**

### **Research Design**

With the primary goal of answering the research question, a research design formulates a blueprint or a plan to be used as a significant framework for excavating data (Polit et al., 2001). The study focused on exploring the dynamics of polyamorous relationships through the lived experiences of the respondents. As such, the study employed phenomenology as its research design.

Phenomenology is the study of human experience, and how things present themselves through such experience. This design is intended to explore the 'lived world' without any existing pre-given framework (Sokolowski, 2000).

### **Tradition of Inquiry and Data Generation Method**

Qualitative research is a broad approach that examines people's experiences in depth through specific research methods. It lets the researchers determine the problems from the perception of the respondents in order to understand and interpret their behavior more accurately (Hennink et al., 2020). This qualitative study aimed to explore the relationship dynamics of polyamorous individuals in the Philippines by using a phenomenological approach. By emphasizing the respondents' personal beliefs, perceptions, and awareness about their situation, this approach will look at human experiences through pre-existing perceptions (Umanilo, 2019).

As for the data generation method, the researchers utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

According to Smith & Osborn (2014), Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is an approach in qualitative research that investigates participants' lived experiences in-depth. It is usually a method for emotionally charged research topics. IPA creates a report of the lived experiences of the participants as they try to make sense of their world (Smith & Osborn, 2014). After the main data-gathering procedure, the respondents were given updates regarding the progress of the findings and results of the research after the data were categorized into coherent findings. To facilitate triangulation and increase the research results' validity, the themes and subthemes were validated by psychologists and subject matter experts, and the results were also shown to respondents to heed their feedback.

### **Description of the Respondents**

A total of 10 polyamorous individuals were interviewed for the study. The respondents are chosen based on the inclusion criteria; the respondents must be of legal age—25 to 40 years old, currently residing in the Philippines, and must be currently in a polyamorous relationship.

## **III. Results and Discussion**

This phenomenological study aimed to explore the lived experiences of polyamorous individuals and understand their relationship dynamics in the Philippine context. The researchers gathered data from 10 participants using virtual interviews through video conferencing platforms and has the following findings:

The theme Agreement on the start of a polyamorous relationship explains how polyamorous individuals reach mutual understanding of the boundaries and limitations, expectations or goals of the parties involved in a poly setup. Most of the respondents also described how they disclose their preferences on the onset of a relationship and create their rules and regulations to keep everyone in-check and satisfied through notarized written agreement, no contact policy, and no-ask-don't-tell rule.

The theme Foundations of polyamorous relationships describes the core of poly setups and how these foundations important in strengthening the commitment and bond of polyamorous individuals involved in a relationship. Most of the respondents reported the significance of love, honesty, loyalty, and transparency in strengthening the trust and bond in one another.

The theme Challenges of being in a polyamorous relationship describes the difficulty that polyamorous individuals experience in the Philippines. Since polyamory is a setup of a relationship with multiple partners involved, the respondents found it being costly, time consuming, and physically draining, as they find the setup hard to disclose to their friends and family. Since polyamory contradicts mononormativity, being under the scrutiny and judgment of the general

public is also a problem for them along with the guilt and overwhelming feelings that go along with it. According to the respondents, it can also lead to more sexual and mental health risks.

The theme Necessary aspects for handling multiple relationships focuses on the necessary qualities and practices for managing polyamorous relationships. In order to ensure that the needs of individuals involved in a poly setup are met, there are certain responsibilities they have to fulfill. Most of the respondents require themselves and their partners to communicate properly, practice time scheduling, comparison, and safer sex. They also need the presence of their partners, and it is a must for them to have self-awareness and emotional maturity.

The theme Basis for decision-making elaborates how polyamorous relationships handle decision making in a sense of involving their partners. There are respondents who express the importance of having primary partners while some respondents based their decision by majority. Further, as there is more than one partner involved in a polyamorous setup, expertise is also a consideration in terms of deciding. The severity of the decision is also considered, and some respondents compromise with their partners before deciding. In terms of handling finances, some respondents show different approaches towards it.

The theme Stereotypes and common misconceptions about polyamory discusses the experiences of the respondents towards engaging in polyamorous relationships. Misconceptions such as: boredom, lust, and justified cheating are discussed under this theme. The respondents expressed their insights about every misconception mentioned in the latter.

The theme Perception on polyamory elaborates the insights of the respondents towards their polyamorous relationships. Most respondents expressed their sentiments that polyamorous relationships are valid despite the misconceptions towards it. Under this theme, respondents also elaborate that polyamorous relationship is the same as monogamous relationship, but it just has more people within the relationship. Lastly, most respondents also mentioned that polyamorous relationships are not for everyone.

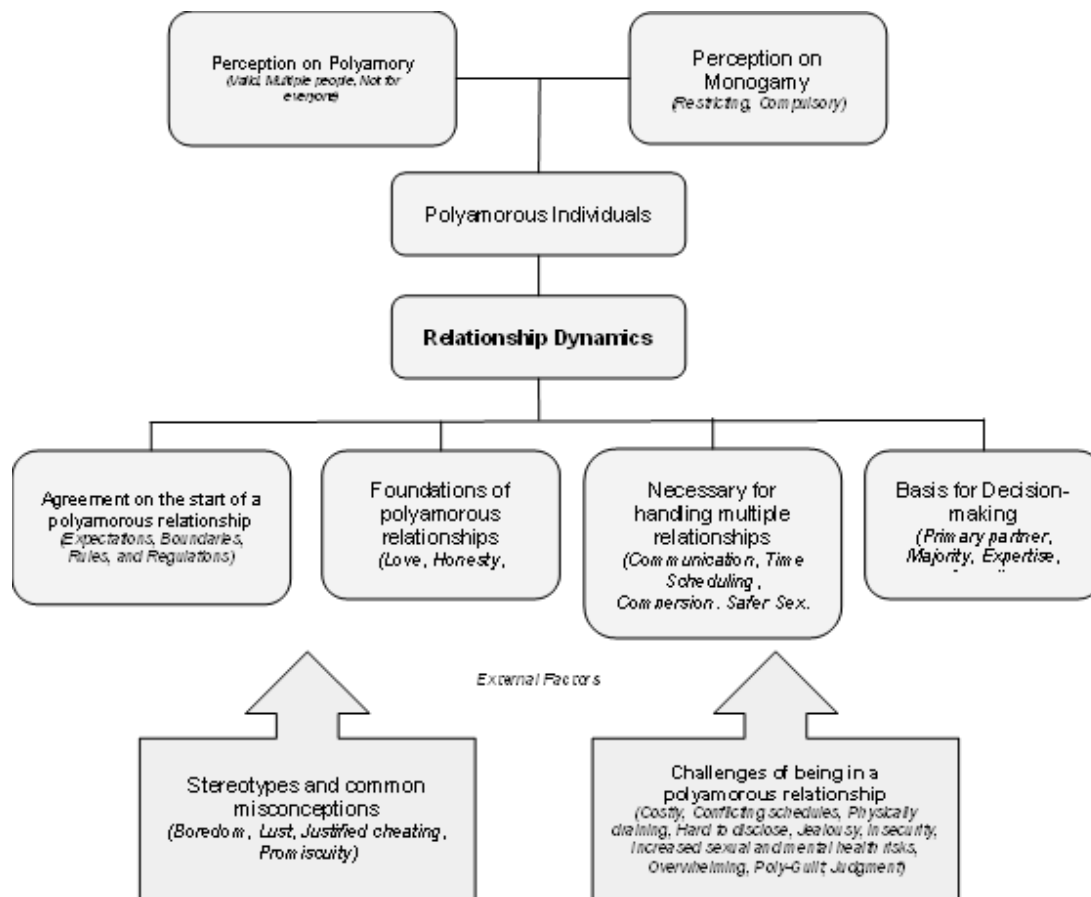
The theme Perception on monogamy focuses on the respondents' insights about monogamy. They elaborated their perception towards monogamous relationships such as how restricting monogamous relationships are and at the same time, it's compulsory.

These eight themes clearly demystify the structures of polyamorous relationships. Through these, the relationship dynamics of polyamorous relationships in the Philippines are explored and give more understanding on how polyamorous relationships work.

#### IV. Conclusion

The study explored and examined the lived experiences of polyamorous individuals and their perspectives. It is clear from the study that polyamorous relationships are different from monogamous relationships, which is seen as the conventional and standard form of relationship—polyamorous individuals have different ways of agreeing with the terms and decisions in their relationships; they value honesty, consent, loyalty, and transparency; and they value time, love, and work as well as compromise for everyone in the relationship.

Polyamorous relationships may seem as simple as having multiple consenting partners, but it requires time management, maturity, as well as emotional stability and understanding. Polyamorous relationships pose a lot of challenges, because it faces a lot of misconceptions, discrimination, and hardships. For instance, despite being initially seen as sexually impulsive and risky individuals, polyamorous individuals practice safer sex and reports to regularly be tested (Lehmiller 2015). In line with this is the preconceived notion that polyamorous relationships are sex-driven, but polyamory can also provide emotional and romantic satisfaction for everyone involved.



**Fig. 2. The Simulacrum of the Demystifying the Structure of Multiple Partners: Exploring the Relationship Dynamics of Polyamory in the Philippines**



Polyamory is also emotionally taxing. Negative emotions such as jealousy, insecurities, feeling overwhelmed and polyguilt are the usual challenges that polyamorous individuals have to face. Polyamory also leads to more sexual and mental health risks, is time-consuming, physically draining, and costly. Individuals engaging in this kind of relationship also have a hard time of opening up to other people, therapists, friends, family and the general public due to discrimination.

The dynamics, lifestyle, challenges, and other factors that comes along with being in a polyamorous relationship isn't for everyone, but as the study delved into the perspective of polyamorous individuals and explored their relationship dynamics, this doesn't make this form of relationship any less valid.

### **V. Recommendations**

The researcher recommends the Philippine society to have an open-mind and be understanding of polyamorous relationships. Polyamorous individuals are afraid to come forward because of the negative connotations associated with them. The researchers suggest the general public to be open in this kind of set-ups in order to minimize the gaps between polyamorous individuals and people who practice or who are in favor of monogamous relationships. Furthermore, this may realize the implication of the country being more progressive and accepting.

The researcher suggests the Philippine psychological community, most especially psychology practitioners to further delve into polyamorous relationships and explore further the nature and technicalities of polyamory particularly in the Philippine context. As the research suggests, polyamorous individuals suffer from discrimination, and their emotional and psychological well-being are affected. As such, an understanding and open environment is needed to give them emotional and psychological support.

The researcher suggests for the Philippine government to address the pressing concerns about the rights of polyamorous individuals especially when it comes to property ownerships, custody, and their protection. Currently, there are no existing laws to protect and preserved the rights of the polyamorous individuals in the Philippines. The lawmaking body will help in terms of the protection, and inclusivity of polyamorous individuals in the country.

The ongoing pandemic had limited the researchers on using various data gathering procedures. It is recommended for future researchers to utilize different forms of data gathering aside from online interviews. Face to face interviews, and focused group discussion may be used by the future researchers to get more elaborate and detailed data than what virtual interviews can offer. Furthermore, the researchers may try to expand the locale of the study and include respondents outside the National Capital Region (NCR), as well as increase the sample size to have a better representation across all polyamorous individuals in the Philippines.

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