

Beyond Jealousy and Communication: Therapy for Polyamory's Biggest Challenges

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Let the
BODY
Rejoice

*The interplay of sexuality education,
sex counseling & therapy*



AASECT 51st Annual Conference

June 13 - 16, 2019 ♦ Philadelphia, PA

Speaker Disclosure(s):

I have no financial relationships
or affiliations to disclose.

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Further Resources:

- My blog includes multiple blog posts about poly that might benefit you, and your clients
- Sign up for my mailing list and I'll send you a brand new article about working with jealousy

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My Objective:

- Help ***you*** gain skills you can apply to your clinical challenges working with poly clients



What are your greatest clinical challenges working with poly?

Poly Clinical Challenges

- Jealousy
- Difference of opinion about opening up
- Recovering from history of poly gone wrong
- Difficulty making/keeping agreements
- Coming out issues
- Challenges for secondary partners
- Marginalization



Conceptualizing the Case

- Developmental model of couples therapy
 - Attachment
 - Differentiation
 - Neuroscience



Ellyn Bader and Peter Pearson
www.couplesinstitute.com

Developmental Model Overview

- Couple relationships progress through normal developmental stages, similar to those children go through
- Nobody comes out of childhood totally equipped for a close love relationship
- Most relationships get stuck between symbiosis and differentiation



Attachment

- The first stage of couple relationships: symbiosis
- Creating a secure bond is necessary for secure functioning
- It is challenging to move from symbiosis to differentiation, but necessary for healthy long-term relationships



Differentiation

- Look into self and identify thoughts, feelings, desires
- Hold steady while sharing them with others
- Hold steady when a partner shares their thoughts, feelings, desires with you



Neuroscience

- Holding steady = self-regulation
- Creating secure relationships = co-regulation
- Understanding how the self-protective brain makes meaning/story is very helpful when learning to manage unruly emotions
- Understanding how the self-protective brain fights/views threat is de-pathologizing and motivating



Developmental Stages of Relationship

- Symbiosis
- Differentiation
- Practicing
- Rapprochement
- Synergy



Symbiosis

- Desire partner change as remedy for own distress
- Separation anxiety
 - Difficulty being alone
 - Clinging when partner wants to spend time with others
 - Fights at times of separation
 - Tantrums when partners enjoy themselves

Differentiation of Self

- Accept differences between self and partner
- Access curiosity and empathy for partners' perspectives
- Hold dualities:
 - Perspective of self and other
 - Love and hate simultaneously
- Object constancy



Initiator/Inquirer Process

- Identify growth edge
- Where does differentiation break down for each partner
- Support growth of all parts of differentiation experientially in session

Initiator *Revealing one's self*

Focus On One Issue Only

Before you begin, get clear on your main concern.
Check your partner's readiness.
Stay on track with this one issue.
Describe what you want.

Express Your Feeling & Thoughts

Feelings are often complex and can even be contradictory.
Are you sad, scared, angry, or happy?
Go beyond simply expressing one feeling.
Look for the vulnerability that may be underneath your initial feeling, e.g. sadness, fear, jealousy, hurt, guilt, etc.

Remind Yourself

This is my problem. It's an expression of who I am. It's about me revealing myself and being willing to express my own thoughts and feelings.

Avoid Blaming, Accusing or Name-calling.

Blaming stops you from knowing yourself.
You have a role to play in being heard.
You may wish to acknowledge some positive aspects of the situation.

Be Open to Self-Discovery

Explore your personal, inner experience.
Keep going deeper into how you feel.
What does this tell you about yourself?
How do you respond?
How do you think and feel?

Remind Yourself

This process is about my willingness to take a risk to speak or discover my truth, and about increasing my ability to tolerate the expression of our differences.

Inquirer *The Effective Listener*

Listen Calmly

Don't defend yourself, argue or cross complain.
Remind yourself that you don't have to take what's said so personally.
Hold on to "The Big Picture."

Ask Questions

Develop an interested and curious state of mind.
The questions you ask are designed to understand your partner's experience.
Can you come up with any examples on your own that will let your partner know you really understand?

Remind Yourself

Am I in a place to listen with openness?
I do not own this problem.
I do not need to get upset.
It's up to me to manage my reactions.

Recap

Repeat back to your partner, as accurately and completely as you are able, what you've understood.
Check it out with your partner to see if it's complete and accurate.

Empathize

Do your best to put yourself in your partner's shoes.
Respond with empathy.
Keep making empathetic statements until a soothing moment occurs.
You can hold onto yourself and still imagine what it's like for the other person.

Remind Yourself

My partner is a separate person with their own feelings, thoughts, personality and family history. I only need to listen, not look for solutions.

Tasks of Couples' Developmental Stages

Bonding: "We are a couple"

Enjoying time together
Forming a strong couples bond
Finding shared values and areas of compatibility

Differentiation: "We are different"

(Essential foundation for all the later stages)
Expressing individual desires
Understanding how partner is truly different from you
Developing ways to successfully manage differences and to resolve conflicts
Increasing tolerance for ambiguity and managing anxiety

Practicing: "I like my independence"

Developing a strong personal identity apart from the relationship
Enjoying career, hobbies, volunteering, community involvement
Having separate friendships
Consolidating self esteem

Rapprochement: "Moving close, moving away"

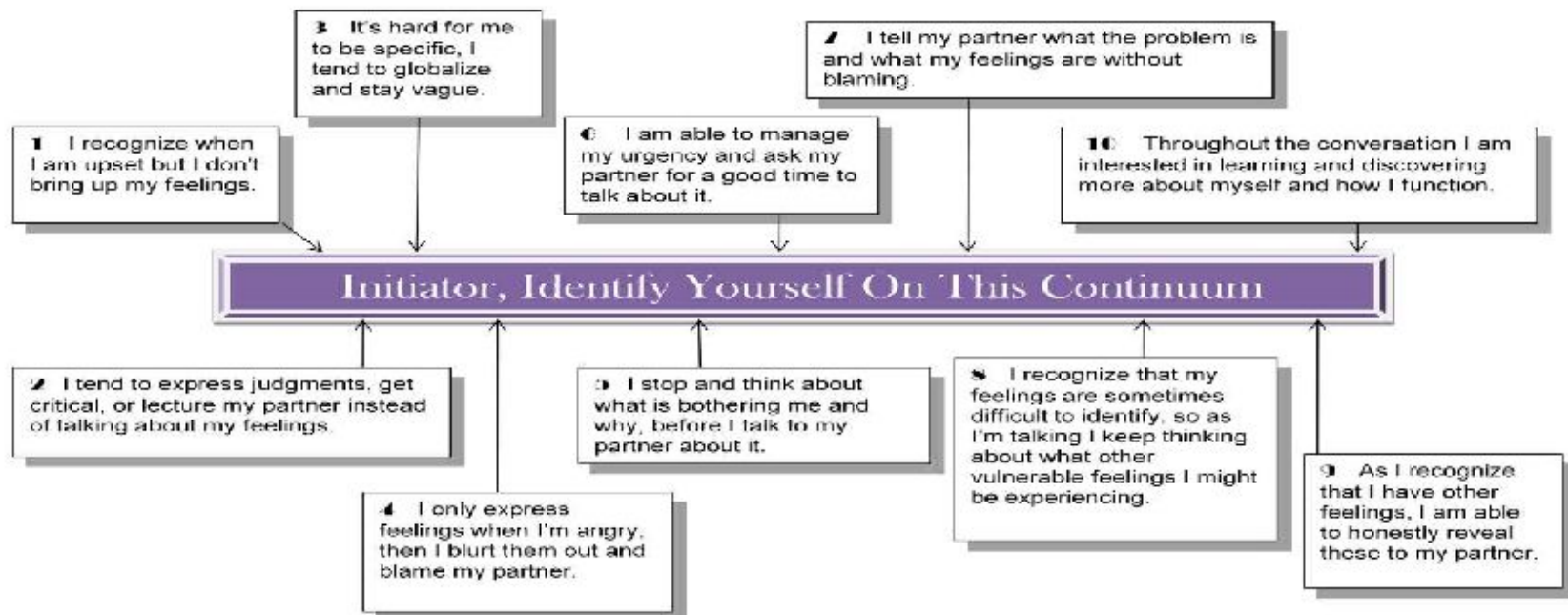
Solidifying the ability to move close and move apart
Spending more time together again
Deepening sexual connection
Developing security in allowing partner to make decisions for you
Giving to the partner even when it is inconvenient
Shifting back to the relationship for more intimacy and emotional sustenance

Synergy: "One plus one is greater than two"

Integrating intimacy into ongoing life and sexuality
Committing to joint projects/work
Leaving a legacy

After you have had some practice as the Initiator, please review this diagram.
Locate place(s) where you see yourself.

Initiator Continuum



After you have had some practice as the Inquirer, please review this diagram.

Locate place(s) where you see yourself.

Inquirer Continuum



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