Masculinities, Emotional Cultures & Feeling-States. Notes on theory and from the Field: Polyamorous Expansive Masculinities.

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Abstract

There is a dominant trend in American masculinities research to align men and their gendered performances to an underlying schema of negative emotions (e.g. reserved, phallic, non-relational repertoires, avoidant of reciprocation, highly aggressive, and masculine alexithymia). The present article sets to problematize this dominant trend. To explore this problem the article is separated into five sections: (1) reviewing the problem by studying the cultural construction of masculinities; (2) offering theoretical notes on emotional cultures, feeling-states, practices, and a generalized front of sympathetic concern; (3) introducing polyamory as an emotional culture and social movement; (4) exploring poly men and their re-socialization into a deeper performance named expansive masculinities; (5) connecting polyamory and other positive masculinities (e.g. expansive, connecting, relational, and deeply communicative) to American cultural history framed around Freudianism, corporate practices, feminism, consumer society, and other cultural politics of recognition.

Il y a une tendance dominante dans la recherche américaine sur la masculinité qui consiste à aligner les hommes et leurs comportements sexués à un schéma sous-jacent d’émotions négatives (ex. timide, phallique, répertoires non-relationnel, évitant la réciprocité, fortement agressif et l’alexithymie masculine). Cet article cherche à problématiser cette tendance dominante. Afin d’explorer ce problème, cet article est divisé en cinq parties: 1) révision du problème en étudiant la construction culturelle des masculinités ; 2) notes théoriques sur la culture des émotions, états affectifs, pratiques et une façade générale de soin sympathique ; 3) introduction du polyamour en tant que culture émotionnelle et mouvement social ; 4) exploration des hommes poly et de leurs resocialisation dans des comportements plus profonds nommés masculinités expansives ; 5) connexion du polyamour et autres masculinités positives (ex. expansives, relationnelles et profondément communicatives) à une histoire culturelle Américaine encadrée autour du Freudisme, des pratiques corporatives, des féminismes, de la société consommatrice et d’autres politiques culturelles de la reconnaissance. (Translation: Alireza Taheri)

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Masculinities and emotionality are theoretically united in their negative relation. When the analytic and theoretic gaze captures men in their emotional lifeworlds, one enters into a negative cultural imagination. Men and their masculine performances are hailed and structured around some general, if not, empty cultural signifiers: limited, obsessive, guarded, competitive, restricted, and protective. Why such a somatic-psychical armor? Men suffer from particular emotions and feeling-states that fragment or threaten their identities: castration, humiliation, competition, anger, hyper-sexual personas, and the whole range of violent feelings and reactions. The rational, enlightened, or even romantic masculine performances have been replaced by a damaged, malfunctioning man, who is partially socialized and limited in emotional and verbal capacities (Levant, 2002, 2011; Levant, Allen, & Lien, 2013; Smith & Kimmel, 2005; Coston & Kimmel, 2012; Kimmel & Kaufman, 1993; Kimmel & Ferber, 2000; Kimmel, 1987a, 1987b, 2006; Connell, 1993, 2005; Scheff, 2003, 2006; Gilligan, 1996).

Cultural movements and transitions can help explain this retreated man. First, there was the rise of feminism. Women – the second sex – demanded recognition. This demand is declared to be too much for the masculine constancy principle in American culture; a constancy principle morphed into brutal discontent. The men scream, “Our whole system is like a woman!” Then the civil rights movements offered another impingement to the dominant heterosexual white American man. Masculinity became scrambled, as Whiteness was lurking in every crack and foundation of the cultural matrix of domination (Hill Collins, 2009; Lipsitz, 1995; Omi & Winant, 2015). They protest, “I have achieved and acquired what I have without the help of you or anything!” Lastly, the cultural movements of gay liberation, contextualized in the American social-sexual landscape structured around AIDS hysteria in the 1980’s, transformed every man as potentially homosexual (Anderson, 2009). The defiled proclamation, “I’m no fag!” Masculinity is cornered, like a terrified and helpless dog, it bites at anything approaching – it has lost its transcendental position of power, and the emotional lifeworlds of these men, like the dog, become hostile and reactionary.

These narratives, cultural movements, and types of men are myths of intelligibility found in the center of American masculinity studies. The descriptive force sounds coherent, and its explanatory power is seductive. I call this fundamentalist masculinity. In fact, these American cultural histories have helped produce a certain type of man, in particular contexts. This is a man pushed to his limit of cultural identity. The prevailing emotional norms that constitute identity and circulate contextually are in jeopardy – an emotional deterrioralization supplemented by other socio-historical movements like globalization, de-unionization, deregulation, and the rise of the neocconservative apparatus offers no legitimate compromise to a masculinity built upon Kleinian envy (Klein, 1975). Through fragmentary processes, these men devised a paranoid lifeworld, where they are always threatened, potentially emasculated, and always ready for action – in a manically driven overcompensation, these men wear and perform their masculinity with intensity, but such intensity, only provides the stage for manifest parody (Butler, 2007; Halberstam, 2000). The cultural trauma narratives above only set the background for fundamentalist masculinity in America (e.g. militia men, white supremacy, lone terrorist, right-wing protectors of liberty, the neo-masculinity, etc.). Fundamentalist masculinity is beyond (as in the Freudian sense of “beyond the pleasure principle”) certain types of hegemonic (Connell, 2005) or traditional masculinities (Levant, 2002) circulating within the American libidinal cultural landscapes.2 They are just one social type, one ideal type, and they are constituted through the dynamics of

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2 Hegemonic masculinity from Connell (2005) is positioned as the ideal-type of all masculine performances found constituting a society’s gender configuration – her account is flexible and also points to gender as practice. Primary to all masculinities that circulate in a patriarchal society, men must distance and denigrate from: 1) women and 2) other men in subordinate and marginalized positions. Complicit masculinity maintains the status quo through conformity and a-political actions, so they gain the patriarchal dividend – the entire male privilege which encompasses status, economic superiority, and symbolic capital. Traditional masculinity from Levant and others is defined by key qualities, attributes and general emotional dispositions. These researches posit at least seven over-arching qualities: avoidance of femininity; fear and hatred of homosexuality; self-reliance; aggression and aggressive reactions as sanctioned; goals of achievement and status over other cultural available values; non-relational attitudes toward sexuality; and restrictive emotionality. It is my contention that these two theories and empirical starting points provide a cultural grid in understanding how masculinity is performed and also
reactionary envy and humiliation (Chodorow, 2012; Corbett, 2009). However, there are many men and many practicing masculinities in America, all with their own norms and emotional repertoires.

Masculinity is abstract, concrete, and a daily accomplishment given a culture’s sense-making, taken-for-granted moments of gender exchanges (Garfinkel, 1964, 1967; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Yet, masculinities can be elusive; especially, when one starts to gaze upon positive emotionality, deep relational experiences, and men altering their “boy code” to expand affective potentials. Disciplines agree on the object, aim and source, but then a particular man, doing particular things, upsets a theoretical vantage point. This is the “heart” of masculinities studies. It ranges from “fag bashing” to “mature, loving men” to “men that hate and kill” to “men that effeminate all dominant practices.”

Multiple meanings and practices are primary in the American masculinity “crisis.” When studying men, their emotional worlds, their desires and normative dispositions, one must approach this elusive cultural object and process of semiosis with flexibility. Without flexibility in theory, men can become too traumatized, humiliated, feminized, and reactionary in their cultural dethronements or proclamations. Though, I think the psychosocial and historical narrative above is legitimate for fundamentalist masculinities, I do not think this general cultural diagnosis – reactionary like a dog – is applicable for all men in different American gendered and sexual cultures.

Masculinity is a collective symbolic act as much as it is a collective theatric. It has its own rules for binding, identification, dis-identification, performances, speech, and mostly, all masculinities have their own syntax. The syntax of the collective “we-ness” of masculinity which supports the subjective confluence of “I-ness” is fantastic and imaginary. This does not negate the fact that institutions uphold fantasies (Acker, 1990; Castoriadis, 1987; Guattari, 2015) and fragment-mend men through a duress of subjectification (Althusser, 2001; Lacan, 2006). Collectivities of men and their mirror-like projections of ideal-practices constitute cultural landscapes to secure boundaries (i.e. boundary-work, difference, power relations, and hierarchies) and signification (i.e. meaning-systems, semiotics of action and appearance, feeling rules, and emotional displays). These multiple vectors of subjectification constrain and constitute masculine emotional cultures. Masculinities, like all gender performances, are seemly natural, only because the social imaginary and the symbolic actions and inscriptions are endlessly being (re)interpreted around stabilized, external referents of difference that collective practice conceals through harmonization.

Masculinities in their articulations, expressions, and fantasies stress difference and deference (Schrock & Schwalbe, 2009). Historically and presently, masculinities, much like femininities, have stressed differences of anatomy and physiology. The first ego is of the body, of the skin, and this initial somatic primal scene inscribes gendered meanings and establishes proto-boundaries (Ahmed, 2004; Freud, 1964a). From conceptualizing women as a negative deformed animal from man, to complimentary-evolutionary maps, men as the holders of power declared separation from women and have supplemented their gendered positions through transcendence (Bourdieu, 2001; Laqueur, 1990; Shields, 2007). In these cultural tactics of transubstantiation, masculinities increased in capital, knowledge, power, and overall being. These currencies and flows of meaning solidified male privilege and status as an everyday reference point, regarding the pre-reflexive practices of sociality – a one-sided “arrangement” between the sexes (Goffman, 1977). The others – women, children, marginalized men, and Simmel’s static, fixed strangers of colonial expansion – become denigrated, objectified, and not human (Simmel, 1923). This constancy principle of inequitable equilibrium thrives implicitly and explicitly in masculinities. These asymmetrical relations are found in fantasy and also in practical consciousness (Giddens, 1984; Williams, 2009) which structure practices as taken-for-granted accomplishments, and are always lived with extreme investment. Appreciating these movements of power, formation, and emergence, explicitly conceptualizes masculinities in the two realms of cultural meaning and
production: (1) the symbolic, bounded meaning-systems of men and (2) men on the move practicing (Sewell, 1999; Swidler, 1986) their masculinities which are always embedded within a terrain of dominance, resistance, custom, ritual, and other figurative cultural modalities establishing a man’s collective memory and subjective interdependence (Elias, 2000).

This introduction presents masculinities as a field of cultural competition and production (Bourdieu, 1993; Connell, 2005). Issues of status, privilege, and most importantly change and power, are primary to conceptualizing the hierarchies and hegemonic forces constituting masculine practices, positionality, and symbolic meaning(s). However, all of these psychosocial constructions (i.e. identity; deference and difference) are all implicated in emotionality and cultural specific emotional-practices. The act of humiliation and its relation to the feelings and psychical wounds of castration are not only central to a negative production of masculinity; it also sets the emotional culture of a particular masculine identity and practice (e.g. think of an intense sense of achievement to (re)prove hegemonic masculinity or disavowing all things feminine). I will conceptualize emotions as cultural repertoires, patterns, and overall, rule based phenomena that men engage in. Such engagement will be seen as everyday accomplishments and also unconscious. However, there is also change; emotional rules and practices change and they are contextual, and for polyamorous men, emotionality and masculinity are deeply implicated and mutually inclusive, as men become poly. After reviewing selected literature regarding emotions, cultures, feeling-states and the concepts involved, I will present polyamorous men as reversing the negative emotional lifeworlds of hegemonic/traditional masculinity (e.g. homophobia, sexual objectification, overt emotional restraint) and the specific poly concepts and behaviors these men use in expanding their deep emotional connections with other poly men. In concluding, I will then present some of the dominant emotional cultures and practices that have supplemented polyamorous norms, displays, and guided cultural doings, by the way of recent American cultural history.

Emotional Cultures and Consummated Feeling-States: Grids of experiences, performances, and reproduction.

‘Emotional cultures’ signify the organized, constrained, and highly embedded-embodied fields of emotional construction, circulation, and consummation. Every culture prescribes and accomplishes the daily and deep task of providing subjects their repertoires of emotional experiences. Emotional experiences are not “raw” or “outside” the signification practices and symbolic codes of embedded and embodied cultural experiences – there is no “pure experience,” though one may enact an emotional theateic “without-much-concern” or have a “sense” of the pre-reflexive “primordial,” however, these nodal points are language-emotion schemas induced by a discourse to find the “primitive,” - the “first” movements of self - and this is nothing more than the classical and empty question of “pre-history” (Marx, 1998; Saussure, 1998). Much like any system of signs, emotions are collectively encoded and decoded and represented in implicit and explicit cultural practices of recognition, power, hierarchy, and distinction (Collins, 1987, 1990, 2004; Kemper, 1999; Swidler, 1986) their masculinities which are always embedded with symbolic meanings, practices, and emotional boundaries and subject-positions: The Woman’s March in 2017 on Washington DC, compared to a classical Freudian’s therapeutic encounter and contract; The emotional culture’s hierarchy that Goffman (1956) found between doctors, nurses, and psychiatric patients, and enacted through ceremonial rituals of status, prestige, discredit-ment, expressions, and symbolic deference through asymmetrical recognition (sentiments of deep regard and appreciation or “avoidance rituals” evoking painful, embarrassing and humiliating emotional-practices) The examples are numerous and suggest a variety of difference, contexts, and guided doings. I am only suggesting some general theoretical notes to help map the reality “that emotion suffuses all aspects of social life” (2009, p. 17).

I have purposely used the phrase “emotional culture.” Most researchers prefer “emotion and culture,” “cultural experience and emotion” or “emotion vocabulary.” My position is that cultures induce, construct, and circulate emotional dispositions and emotional flows for the subject to consume – the act of having a feeling-state is consummation. One of the primary aspects of any culture is that it is emotional; that is, there is a basic emotional structure of a culture. One can easily think of a range of emotional cultures (they have their own symbolic meanings, practices, and emotional boundaries and subject-positions): The Woman’s March in 2017 on Washington DC, compared to a classical Freudian’s therapeutic encounter and contract; The emotional culture’s hierarchy that Goffman (1956) found between doctors, nurses, and psychiatric patients, and enacted through ceremonial rituals of status, prestige, discredit-ment, expressions, and symbolic deference through asymmetrical recognition (sentiments of deep regard and appreciation or “avoidance rituals” evoking painful, embarrassing and humiliating emotional-practices) The examples are numerous and suggest a variety of difference, contexts, and guided doings. I am only suggesting some general theoretical notes to help map the reality “that emotion suffuses all aspects of social life” (2009, p. 17).

I am primarily dealing with emotional cultures and feeling-states. I recognize the important need to theorize and empirically investigate affect. However, I am not theorizing about affect, especially, affect that can be conceived of as nonconscious, undetermined, physiological, and unbound as potential intensities (Sedgwick & Frank, 1995; Massumi, 1995).
Emotional cultures present “feelings” as framed and organized – to use Goffman’s terminology, there is an “agreement” among the immediate locales and specific group(s). Cultural binding – through rituals, ceremonies, and everyday accomplishments – establish an emotionalization process (Durkheim, 1995; Garfinkel, 1964; Pollark & Thiots, 1989; Gordon, 1989b). The Freudian ego, as the great mediator, is even culturally inscribed through this overdetermined process - “Made in Germany.” (Freud, 1964b). Emotional cultures are unique and also generalizable. The arbitrary qualities of emotional cultures are stabilized through the institutionalized ritual chains of authority positions and moral inscriptions that determine legitimacy. Emotional cultures unfold and refold through delicate, fine and detailed rules of presentation and articulation; the extra-linguistic and somatic correspond to feeling rules and highly meaningful zones of attention (Csordas, 1993; Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987), even when they do not, we are signaled - a cultural communication has occurred – an emotional norm has been violated, suspended or outright disavowed, as in resistance (Gould, 2009; Hochschild, 1979, 1983, 1990; Thiots, 1985, 2011). The emotional structure of a culture sets boundaries and a basic syntax, as much as it has, consummated “feelings” and “expressions” found in individual proclamations and practices – an emotional parole, grappling with “me,” the other, and a basic modus operandi of the game that signals and receives direction from the generalized attitudes of the other (Bourdieu, 1980, 1997; Cooley, 1922; Mead, 2015). These two interdependent arenas of emotion construction and practice help synchronize a sentimental subject. A sentimental subject holds positions in specific cultural schemas by three interrelated vectors: (1) solidarity narratives or cultural cosmologies of emotional “right,” “order,” “sequence,” and all accomplished “in-tuned,” “failed,” and “resistant” emotional communications; (2) the mediating role of power, practice and hierarchy in both emotional displays and prescribed emotional values (e.g. values informed by class, gender, and race) as they are held as a belief, and practiced as distinction; (3) informs our personal feelings and cultural dependent logics of expression, in such a way that we “own,” “care” and “work” on our deep acting self.

Framing emotional cultures by way of Saussure – diachronic larger-systems of meaning and micro-synchronic uses by a social self – does not reduce these logics to linguistics. I am merely using Saussure’s imagery to point to grammars and basic cultural logics of emotion and feeling-states that a sentimental subject inhabits, uses, and accomplishes. This cultural reading of emotions and feeling-states are complementary to other thinkers in the field (Cancian & Gordon, 1988; Durkheim, 1995; Goffman, 1956, 1959, 1977; Gordon, 1981, 1989a, 1989b, 1990; Hochschild, 1979, 1983, 1990; Streans, 1990). A case in point is Candace Clark’s (1987, 1990, 1997) work on individualism, sympathy, reciprocity, and culture. In Clark’s analysis, sympathy is both a daily accomplishment and a changing historical norm that reflects modern reflexivity. The rules – that prescribe exchange and the politics sympathy – have changed given the rise of a modern reflexive self that has moved beyond any recognizable traditional relationship. Sympathy as a noun (what it is) and adverb (relation to place, environment, time, and manner) has changed with other social forces: the school, workplace, family dynamics, the expansion of psychotherapy, civil rights movements, and feminism. Clark (1997) offers several contemporary rules of sympathy when the modern individual deliberates who deserves such a normative reaction – a cultural script. Sympathy can be judged, measured and enacted in the positive,

5 “Emotional cultures are unique and also generalizable” suggest that emotions are socially and culturally constructed, but it does not mean they are “free floating.” Emotional cultures are constrained and even used as a generalizable form in different locales – homology. This can be seen in Goffman’s (1959) use of Radcliffe-Brown’s (inspired by Durkheim) thesis regarding descriptive kinship systems – a pre-modern form which offers a subject their total, mechanical position – and its steady decline in a highly complex social division of labor. This complexity hypothesis also works for emotional cultures, but through a doubling-effect: 1) Social and cultural complexity fragments the mechanical – anomic free – form of emotional solidarity linked to practical and mythological knowledge and starts to offer a generalizable form and emotional repertoires without uniqueness, so all members of society can “read” and “see” the emotion and feelings being exchange on multiple “fronts” without too much personal investment; 2) Generalizability does not satisfy a subject’s need for tight-boundaries, hence, with the general emotional forms in circulation – only in a complex society, even in a globalized society – subjects retreat and form unique (or hyper-investment in pre-established emotional cultures) emotional cultures to satisfy their intense need for individualism and a deep cultural need for a “We-Relation.” The second thesis is found in post-modernity and subculture studies.
if the interlocutor has experienced an out-of-the-ordinary deprivation or if they are carry a marker (much akin to Goffman’s stigma-sign) that is read as an extraordinary burden. And, in the negative, if the interlocutor (someone with a deemed gift, and who does not use their gifts to help society) or in today’s celebrity culture is well-off, the potential giver of sympathy can “rightfully” withhold these emotion displays and empathetic feeling-states. Clark’s research reflects both the micro and macro forces that help formulate our shared emotional cultures, practices, and guided feeling-states. In a seemingly complex lifeworld of feelings, there are underlying grids, grammars, and basic cultural logics that help formulate solidarity narratives, emotion-practices, and our deep acting self.

To further clarify the last three points of emotional cultures (solidarity narratives; emotion-practices and power structures; and the deep acting self at the “center” of emotional experiences) I will explore three theoretical schools. My exploration will offer a topology of emotional cultures and individual feeling-states. The importance of phenomenology, micro-interactionism and Bourdieu’s habitus will be examined to offer a theoretical and practical grid of conceptualization. Central to my discussion is a general style of sympathetic concern. I explore this style of interaction by examining a father and son enacting a dominant masculine emotional culture informed by the middle-class, white, professional ethos. As will be seen, these three theoretical and methodological schools of thought are interdependent when conceptualizing emotions, culture, and feeling-states.

Emotions are a shared ground with clear boundaries; they are embedded-embodied markers in the cultural fabric that are mastered and “transmitted in practice...The child imitates not “models” but other people’s actions” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 87). Feelings are moments of consummation, “Rage-Feel-I” or “Shame–Aware-Me.”6 Emotional cultures are the background scene(s) or the habitus, in which, there are structuring effects that produce a sense, a “practical sense,” of specific emotional lifeworlds. Emotional cultures “could be considered as a subjective... system of internalized structures, schemes of perception, conception and action common to all members of the same group” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 86). However, unlike Bourdieu’s account, there are clearly individual moments, but such moments are relational complexes (Burkitt, 1997) and experientially intersubjective. In the intersubjective world of the perfect present tense, the working-self continues without partiality in feeling, and the world-in-reach passionately interests us, given our location regarding the generalized other – the natural and shared attitudes of role taking (Schutz, 1945). Primary to any lifeworld – be it cognitive-experiential and in our case emotional – there are everyday held assumptions that are denied. As Alfred Schutz comments on this denial – an operational denial – one can see the emergence of the everyday emotional lifeworlds coming to the fore:

He does not suspend belief in the out world and its objects but on the contrary: he suspends doubt in its existence. What he puts in brackets is the doubt that the world and its object might be otherwise than it appears to him. We propose to call this epoche the epoche of the natural attitude. (Schutz, 1945, p. 551)

Though Schutz and other thinkers claim all these natural attitudes and “suspended beliefs” are to be found in the “cognitive styles” of interaction, I argue that all cognition and communication themselves relay emotional expressions, “Expression, then, has been treated in terms of the communicative role it plays during social interaction and not...in terms of... tension-release” (Goffman, 1959, pp. 248-249) and as Jonathan Turner notes on the Western turn to synthesize emotions and rationality, “Thus, human rationality, and more generally, decision making are dependent on emotions. Without emotions, individuals cannot attach valences or “utilities” to alternatives.” (Turner & Stets; 2005, p. 22).7 Erving Goffman’s proposition is crucial to the

6 In the moment, feelings are strong; they are quick, in comparison to social sentiments and moods. However, for the most part – at least on the cultural and social level – people are not “blind.” The spectrum of cognitive awareness – to place emotions and feelings in a sequence, even if it is only situational – can fragment the syntax of the simple and basic statement, “I feel rage” or “I am aware of shame.” This is why people privately own their feelings – it is happening to them – but this “happening” is not outside of the emotional culture’s repertoire.

7 This quote from Goffman is similar to Hochschild (1979) designation of “surface acting” (p. 588). “Deep acting” signifies the emotional labor involved in maintaining the self – through suppressive and emotional enrichment work – given the feeling rule of the situation. Though, I agree with both theoretical constructs, I would argue feeling-states (the moments of
everyday emotional communications persons engage with; that is, with every situational greeting, there could be an expectation and response of pleasantness, joy, disinterestedness or even complete disregard (a common exchange of “I-see-you-but-I-will-not-recognize-you”) — all very common emotional gestures. Emotions and feelings are for the most part mundane and structured according to the bracketed lifeworld in which a subject is operating and moving — a finite province of emotional rules, norms and expected communications that rarely diverge from the stereotypes, or are realigned in a timely sense to a cultural ideal.8 We normally expect the “shock” of feelings or emotions (Steven Gordon’s egocentric and private impulsive orientation) — to swipe across our bodies and psyches, but this narrow focus on shocks reestablishes an epistemic practice of “inward” self-cultivation found in self-referential Modernity — and misrecognizes the everyday moods of a culture and contextual interactions which are untheatrical and stabilizing. There is a nip of mourning during such interactions. But, such mundane expressions and emotional communications — always supported by situated cognition and local logics of practice — can pull on cultural sympathies and asymmetrical power relations. Emotional cultures are not innocent and they are not mere flux. There are many vectors which help induce, incite, and seduce “this immanent law, lex insita” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 81) in each of us. I propose a generalized style to help conceptualize our everyday interactions. Sympathetic concern provides a way to track our everyday sequences, so we will “own” and “care” for such feelings, “The world, in truth, is a wedding” (Goffman, 1959, p. 36).

Sympathetic concern is a bounded emotional practice and personal feeling evoked by the content, context, and expected appropriateness of an emotion (linked to idealizations, rituals of expression surrounding collective symbols, stratified positionality, and common “inner” practices of emotional cultivation-restriction). These emotional interactions are guided beyond a subject’s immediate concern of controlling the situation, these interactions and feeling-inducements reflect the normative expectations of the group, class, and other cultural categories. Sympathetic concern is an emotion and feeling interruption to the mundane routine styles found upholding the immediate emotional milieu — the interruption - the concern is an active frame/doing which helps reproduce emotional practices. At first, these are the shocks of Schutz — a repositioning of a feeling which is connected to the impingements (values and norms) of the emotional culture and correlated practical practices — and as Schutz’s stressed, these shocks bring about a different epoch that induces a different style (think about the “inner” and “external” changes of emotion and feelings when the Catholic leaves the stations of the cross and then plays with their child in a fantasy game of becoming-a-cheerful-dog). The different shocks of style in emotional practices are the function of the concern. Sympathetic, etymologically, is tied to the emotional culture and moments of feeling consummation “together-feeling” and “conformity-of-feeling.” Combined, as a tactic of recognition, “Do you see my feeling? Can we share in this emotion?” the expressive performance of one subject morally ties the other to the presentation “I see your feeling, and I too, feel this.” Sympathetic concern is a daily consumption) are circulating in the emotional culture that help determine the situation, but are also linked to the shared past that has a structuring effect on the emerging moment. This dynamic supplies our “inner” toolkit of feeling-states, but does not originate or primarily “happen” in-there. Ian Burkitt (1997) offers a similar complexity, “I want to try to get away from the idea that emotions are expressions of something ‘inner’, so that the expression is an outer register of an inner process...this sense emotions are essentially communicative – they are expressions occurring between people and not expressions of something contained inside a single person” (p. 40).

8 This is what Garfinkel (1964) showed by his breaching experiments. The breach induces social affects that range from anger, shame, guilt, humor, friendliness and anxiety. Such a production and circulation can be understood since “conduct of his everyday affairs” which rest on an economy of assumptions became dismantled, “no norms without identities, and no identities without norms” (Garfinkel, 2006, p. 114). Even when the calling of attention (Schutz, 1970) ushers a differential province of meaning, Garfinkel stresses the recuperative effort of self in the experience of such social affects, “The passing from one to the other can be performed only by a radical modification in the mode of attention to life. Thus to each cognitive style peculiar to each of these different provinces of meaning belongs a specific mode of consciousness, a specific epoch...a specific form of self-experience, a specific form of sociality, and a specific time perspective” (Garfinkel, 2006, p. 126). And, a different, but ordered emotional logic that offers a feeling-state which can be recognized, even if such recognition is (mostly) negative, as in the breach.
accomplishment of feeling something, and it is intersubjective, “We grow older together” (Schutz, 1945, p. 543). Even if sympathetic concern is not overtly “compassionate” or “altruisitc” its function is to enlist, reproduce, and circulate emotions and consummated feeling-states in a given group, culture, class, gender configuration and overall regulated “province of meaning.”

Emotions are embedded and embodied in a given culture and routinely practiced with their own seriousness, to reproduce a general commonsense. Commonsense is not so common in our differentiated social worlds; different groups, classes, races, and other such distinctions generate variant operational moods and general dispositions. Yet, there must be a sens (a general and similar direction of feeling/meaning/sensation) for collective binding and unbinding, so the “harmonization of agents’ experiences and the continuous reinforcement that each of them receives from expression, individual or collective, improvised or programmed, of similar or identical experiences (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 80). Emotions, and its correlated individual consummated feeling-states are at the intersections of activity and practice – you find emotional cultures within the greater social forces of family life, age, class, race, and gender. As Annette Lareau demonstrates in Unequal Childhoods (2011), class and culture reproduce certain dispositions which give children from the middle and upper-classes advantages, as these embodied practices and capitals are institutionalized in educational and professional spheres. Lareau’s concerted cultivation (middle-class practices which are supported by the educational system and dominant cultural fields) surround five parent/teacher interventions – sympathetic concerns – that reproduce inequality and class solidarity: 1) Parental cultivation and assessing a child’s talents, skills, and opinions; 2) Parental organization of free-leisure time that are highly structured around “cultured” activities; 3) Language use and mastery in the arts of negotiation, compromise and questioning; 4) Middle-class children practice a relative sense of freedom, as they reserve the “right” to demand or question a situation where authority is present; 5) These consequences offer middle-class children a sense of entitlement, and the not-so-conscious practical sense of social, political and economic privileges. However, the classes in her study are also prescribing emotional dispositions, and such dispositions only reproduce themselves by learning the feeling-states – the interactions and moments of consummation – which one should cultivate and master. As Monique Scheer suggest:

For the purpose of emotional practices it is important to note that these acts are not only habituated and automatically executed movements of the body, but also encompass a learned, culturally specific, and habitual distribution of attention to “inner” processes of thought, feeling, and perception. (Scheer, 2012, p. 200)

Sympathetic concern is the active interrogation which links feelings to a greater emotional culture that works by invoking an evocation-suppression dialectic (Hochschild, 1979) that intervenes – induces emotional labor resting on norms of engagement – on the cognitive, somatic and internal guidelines that change and manage everyday consummations. A chain of semi-coherent emotional interventions from the culture and adult-centric lifeworld(s) inform internal and external practices that offer the emotionalization process enough stability. This sense of “good enough” stability can be traced in the Tallinger’s home. Everyday occurrences between Garret and his father Mr. Tallinger are situated around sympathetic concerns which are saturated with decrees from an adult-centric, white, masculine, middle-class professional achievement ideology.  First, Mr. Tallinger on the importance of sports and how they offer skills for life:

You could apply all the clichés you can think of. But when you’re the hero, you get all the satisfactions out of that; and when you’re the goat, you find out who your friends are in a hurry...

I think it makes you mentally tough. So that when things are not going your way you have the ability to kind of buckle down or dig down deeper, whatever it is, and try harder and not look for excuses.

So you learn to play as part of a team...His soccer coach is fantastic, preaching to them. If our team scores a goal, it’s the whole team that scores a goal, and if we get scored upon, it’s the whole team that let the goal in, not one guy. And they all seem to be sucking that up and abiding by that attitude. (Lareau, 2011, pp. 60-61)

Here is Mr. Tallinger at a soccer game performing these emotional norms and consummated feelings (emotional decrees are coded temporally, spatially and localized - specific localities do supplement solidarity
narratives of emotions, feelings, class, and normative-futuristic potentials found realistically or fantastically:

Garrett, hold the ball!
That’s it, Tom!
Garrett! Look behind you!
Garrett, come on! Get back.
Hold up, Garrett!
Yeah, that’s it, that’s it, take a run Garrett, take a run!
Watch your feet, watch your feet!
Paul, if you need a rest, ask for it!
Way to go, Jim! (Lareau, 2011, p. 61)

Mr. Tallinger is in the wide-awake state of Schutz – the full-working self, the present self – his subjectivity is already organized around an emotional cultural “project” of constituting a boyhood that can “handle” the hurdles of life (e.g. “try harder,” “sucking that up” and “buckle down and deep harder”). There is a sympathetic concern for the “hope” of winning, a “rush-of-anxiety” in the moment, and an overall “feeling-together” which he is importing on the boys who are playing on the soccer field – there is a Meadian uncanniness to all of this. Yet, this unheimlich moment will have a (re)structuring effect in the Tallinger’s home; the mundaneness of these emotional prescriptions will become the everyday “obviousness” (Althusser, 2001) of emotional life. Mr. Tallinger’s continuity, consistency, and compatibility are on mark:

Last week or the week before, he (Garrett) came down with semi-weepy eyes (saying) that homework was too difficult. So we said, “You know, it’s like a soccer game. What did you do if you’re playing in a soccer game? Do you start crying and say you can’t do it? No, you know this is going to be a hard one, so you just try harder.” So he went back upstairs and did his homework (Lareau, 2011, p. 62).

The intergenerational feeling-rules Mr. Tallinger is inscribing unto Garrett’s potential feel-states, given the professional emotional culture of the middle-class, can be conceptualized as a feeling chain of reproduction (similar to Randall Collins emotional energy). The feelings and emotional practices being imported and reproduced are: competiveness; self-regulation and emotional-restraint; knowing the affective milieu of teamwork; a sense of triumph over contextual adversity; excuses, especially feeling-excuses are not legitimate; and finally, to offer a shell of “mental” toughness concerning daily emotional accomplishments. The norms of the emotional culture are clearly visible, but what is even more important, are that these experiences are organized around the construction and consummation of a certain feeling-states of “I,” “me,” and “mine” (Cooley, 1922) which are culturally prescribed by the history of middle-class formation (Kotchemidora, 2005; Miller, 1996). Mr. Tallinger and Garrett – though not completely codified – are active in the intergenerational process of sympathetic concern that offers a reproduction schema influencing the types of men and types of boyhoods sanctioned by setting the scenes of possible and semi-coherent performances around consummated feeling-states, informed by a wider emotional culture, “Since feeling is a form of pre-action, a script or a moral stance toward it is one of culture’s most powerful tools for directing action” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 56).

Sympathetic concern is about active reproduction, a reproduction that stylizes the emotion and feeling effects in a given situation. Sympathetic concern is “significant without intending to signify” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 80). However, sympathetic concern needs a general field. As I have been alluding throughout this section, the general field is the habitus, a product of history which offers the illusion and misrecognition of indeterminate selection:

The habitus is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent’s practices, without either explicit reason or signifying reason or signifying intent, to be none the less “sensible” and “reasonable.” That part of practices which remains obscure in the eyes of their own produces is the aspect by which they are objectively adjusted to other practices and to the structures of which the principle of their production is itself the production. (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 97)

The tautological production of the doxa does not only rest on non-emotional practices, but are situated within an emotional habitus (Gould, 2009; Illouz, 2007; Scheer, 2012). Through the constant production and
enactment of emotional practices, we the subjects or agents, gain a sense of the emotion and feeling game of our collectivity – we incorporate the structure – the dialectic. Every emotive (any emotional practice such as gestures, speech acts, or expression of feelings) has a “performative quality” (Gould, 2009, p. 37) that must be stabilized enough, as in semi-coherent performances, to emerge as a collective schema of attitudes and expressions, which leads to further labeling of such performatives. The emotive performatives of an emotional culture have a structuring effect – both internalizing and externalizing – the habitus holds, organizes, and offers complimentary and out-of-sequence experiences/practices. These performatives are not simple “acts,” but are “stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, 1988, p. 519). Judith Butler’s essay (1988) on gender as performative is illustrative at this point; namely, emotions and feeling-states connote movement, not stagnation. Butler’s “ontology of present participles” captures this ongoing process of circulation and consummation that an emotional culture induces, an emotion habitus structures, and reproduces. Emotional cultures offer moral boundaries, boundary work, emotion work, and individualized feeling-states, but these are performative in the sense they are continuous. Relentless activity is needed to establish a structured, mundane everyday emotional interaction. This activity and concern offers enough homogenous representation that it can be (re)learned with slight variation throughout practice. Imitation leads to symbolic representations – granted by the social-linguistic register – yet, the emotional habitus “contains an emotional pedagogy, a template for what and how to feel, in part by conferring on some feelings and modes of expression an axiomatic, natural quality and making other feeling states unintelligible with its terms and this in a sense unfeelable and inexpressible” (Gould, 2009, p. 34). This is the general style of sympathetic concern found in micro-interactions (an unconscious activity of feeling-together that offers a guardianship over inclusion/exclusion), which is supported by the larger emotional culture that has a structure, a habitus, and provides the shaping of emotional practices. A paramount issue, this exploration suggest, is that these processes are not always cognitive (unlike many other culture and emotion theorists). This sense of the not-so-conscious field offers a way in understanding the unconscious as cultural, temporal, spatial, normative, and containing historical virtualities, “The “unconscious” is never anything other than the forgetting of history which history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second natures of habitus” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 79). Sympathetic concern as a general style, bridges emotional cultures and the incorporation of the habitus that restructures the unconscious as a socio-historical field, to help trace individual feeling-states through inclusive and exclusive performativity and expressibility.

Emotional cultures and an emotion habitus present generalizable forms and practices with a practical sense of continuity. Stability is perceived through experiences, gestures, and other emotive performatives – there is an underlying grid of sequence, even if the feeling-state is uncomfortable. Yet, this is only partially so. There is change in the undisputed emotion repertoires of a culture’s normative expectations. Feeling-rules can be, and are routinely broken; everyday accomplishments are breached and emergent provinces of meaning form and transform. As Freud clinically illustrated with precision, feeling-states can be highly ambivalent – the same practices, objects, persons, beliefs and ideologies of a collective can be contested through counter-feelings or different emotional norms – and as Ian Burkitt notes on the relationship between manipulation theory, government, and emotional mobilization, only targeted groups can be hailed in a uniform way, “It is ambivalence and alternation of emotion, which, I suggest, makes emotion responses hard to predict in all relations, including political relations” (Burkitt, 2005, p. 684). Conformity – even relentless concern for uniformity – can turn into discontent, when a marginalized group is not heard, recognized, and pushed from the “charmed circle” (Goffman, 1963; Rubin, 1993). Difference and “people’s different histories influence how a reigning emotional habitus shapes their particular feelings and practices” (Gould, 2009, p. 35), and these moments of rupture or marginalized moods, help inform collective ambivalences and contestation. The disruptive and potential feeling-states of individuals or an emergent emotional culture of a group can ignite different actualities from a shared history. The historical-power dynamics of group mobilization push repetition out of a mode of farce (Marx) or not remembering (Freud) and into a mode of (re)inscription and (re)interpretation, but as Foucault reminds us, this force is always internal to the dispositif, “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” (Foucault, 1990, p. 95).

Polyamory can be positioned from the Foucauldian “below” as it is just one of the “manifold relationships of force” that produce homogenization and heterogeneous sexual, emotional, and intimate encounters in the American context. Polyamory slips from complete territorialization, since, there are multiple ways to practice one’s sexual and intimate relationships, but it is also unified around certain emotion norms that structure its very actualization. Polyamory as a political and emotional culture confront two dominant libidinal constructions: heteronormativity and mononormativity (Barker, 2005; Rich, 1980; Rubin, 1993; Sheff, 2006; 2011; 2015). By deconstructing these two pillars of sexuality, polyamory offer men different ways of relating and performing their sentimental selves. For men becoming polyamorous, certain emotional practices are held to be paramount: open-communication, sharing of feelings, emotional joining around positive and negative affects (e.g. sharing the joy of a metamour or conversing about jealousy). Overall, polyamory promises many men that come to practice this sexual-intimate ethic the promise of emotional expansion and depth that hegemonic or traditional masculinity excludes. This exclusion is especially true for men-in-relation-to-other-men in our dominant hegemonic culture. The men of poly contest and resist this stoic relationship and find struggles and promises of male-to-male intimacy as they navigate their feeling-states given the emotional culture of polyamory.

Before proceeding with selected narratives of poly men and how they navigate male-to-male relations which are marginalized in American hegemonic masculine culture, I present a short introduction to polyamory.

Polyamory as an Emotional Culture & Social Movement: Outlining the center.

Etymologically, the word ‘polyamory’ has a queer construction. Polyamory from the beginning has used the dominant language system, to juxtapose different linguistic systems and symbolic meanings. This cultural and political negotiation is intended to synthesize and create a space of mutuality and difference. Deborah Anapol opens her first chapter in Polyamory in the 21st Century: Love and Intimacy with Multiple Partners with:

Polyamory is an invented word for a different kind of relationship. Poly comes from Greek and means “many.” Amory comes from Latin and means “love.” Mixing Greek and Latin roots in one word is against the traditional rules, but then so is loving more than one person at a times when it comes to romantic or erotic love (2010, p. 1)

This is just one example of how the polyamory movement “blurs” traditional categories and dominant cultural logics, as practiced in the contemporary Anglophone world (Barker, 2005). ‘Polyamory’ has been academically translated as “many loves,” and not “many lovers” or any other derivative; this conscious move, establishes political boundaries regarding cultural representation and the public sphere (Kleese, 2006, 2011). At first glance, “many loves” seems to carry a connotation of “free love” or a disavowal of all socially sanctioned boundaries, this is not the case in polyamory. The type of openness found in polyamory is complex, since all openness has a cultural and subjective limit. It is not the fact, that there are no boundaries, but there are a multiplicity of boundaries, co-constructed verbal contracts, and many ethical responsibilities. The question being presented to the public sphere: How can we polyamorists, (re)present ourselves to the dominant mode of expression and desire, which is monogamy? Barker and others, in the polyamorous community have all answered this question by stating: Polyamory is a type of sexual and emotional arrangement known as ethical nonmonogamy.

Polyamory is a recent sexual identity and practice. Though, one could speculate that such arrangements may have existed (and in no doubt did) in the past, the poly-movement itself as a self-reflexive and nodal point of organization for both individuals and groups, formed in the 1990’s (Sheff, 2011). Polyamory as a social, cultural, sexual and emotional affiliation is a by-product of several intersecting historical ruptures. The three most cited are: the sexual revolution and communal living experiments of the 1960’s and 1970’s; the articulation of 2nd wave feminism, and its implantation in the public and private spheres of life; and, finally, the 1980’s crisis and mass panic caused by the AIDS epidemic and its mass media representation (Aguilar, 2012). Through these historical ruptures, articulations, discourses-practices, and popular movements (the most notable popular movement being the cultural production of self-help books focusing on “loving more”
and “responsible non-monogamy”), one starts to find the beginning of poly-activists and researchers, defining a political identity and “lifestyle choices” known as polyamory.

How is polyamory different from other non-monogamous affiliations? The form of polyamory is unique when compared to other non-monogamies. Polyamory stresses full-disclosure of emotional and sexual intimacies with all partners involved, and all partners are aware of and have a say in the multiple relationships (i.e. ethical non-monogamy). Demarcating this form in relation to swinging, cheating, polygamy, and polyandry are worth noting. In swinging, there is an emotional exclusive condition of the sexual experience, “Though it is OK to have sex with you, you are not my life partner, my intimate second-half.” In cheating, it is generally acknowledged that the “cheatee” (Mint, 2004), the victim on unethical nonmonogamy, is unaware of the cheaters actions; this entails a whole set of roles, narratives, and typical emotional reactions, sanctioned by our shared monogamous culture (close to Clark’s research on sympathy). Polygamy and polyandry prescribes that only one gender is allowed multiple partners; these last two forms further heteronormative culture and the complementary gender thesis. It is only in polyamory that all partners/couples/groups and other affiliations (i.e. sexual preferences and intimate relationships) become aware of both sexual and emotional intimacies. In addition, not all polyamorous relationships are sexual; many are strictly emotional investments, known as polyaffectivity (Sheff, 2015). The term ‘poly’ offers another perspective on the sociolinguistic signification of this culture, its practices, and reflexivity, “Polyamorists use the term poly as a noun (a person who is poly and engages in polyamorous relationships), and adjective (to describe something that has polyamorous qualities) and an umbrella term that includes polyfidelity or relationships based in sexual and emotional fidelity among a group larger than a dyad” (Sheff, 2015, p. 201). One may say: this is the form and practical/daily operations - modus operandi – of polyamory in its current cultural and academic representations.

Most researchers concerned with polyamory situate poly life as a sexual, cultural construction, known as “pure relationships” (Giddens, 1992). ‘Pure relationships’ are juxtaposed against ‘traditional relationships,’ in which the social practices, arrangements and structures determine many affective qualities and social roles of the partners involved. However, in ‘pure relationships’ the individuals come together and negotiate their interest, desires, emotions, and future together; this negotiation is characterized by mutual boundary setting, and is not concerned with the dominant social bonds of marriage, religion, traditional object choice, and other social fabrics –pure relationships stress individualism and existential choice, whereas, traditional relationships will adhere to historically conservative social institutions. To make this clear, one only has to think about the different social normative arrangements which have governed proper and suitable marriage options in our past. These sets of possible object choices and intimate indexes are still very much alive today, yet there is a clear “melting” of traditional pressures, “Who can I marry or have sex with?” and “With whom may I live with?” In pure relationships, each partner is allowed their own affective individualism (Stone, 1977), and the relationship is maintained, only if, the parties involved are heard, understood, and allowed a certain amount of flexibility to organize their public and private lives. In many ways, pure relationships are modernity’s wish-fulfillment, which stresses the ideals of freedom, choice, rational decision making, and monadic existence. These relationships are not about the social bond of traditional cathexis, but are about the individual, in an existential social and cultural space of desire, play, and self-reflexive mutual commitment. At all times - polyamory as an ideology and practice - pursues this ideal, and poly adherents, structure their experiences and feelings around such a prescription.

A different study (Seidman, 1993), could understands Giddens’ “pure relationship” as a by-product of what he calls, “Eros Unbound.” It is my contention, that these two social theorists provide a historical and theoretical conceptualization of the poly movement, desire, emotionality, group genesis, and finally, the polyamorous subject. In conjunction with the “pure relationship,” Seidman declares that there have been three major categorical shifts after WWII in how subjects define, approach, and practice their sexuality and sentimental, intimate selves. First, there was the eroticization of the female body and feminine desire in both the private and public spheres of life (this is the rise of feminism and the mass marketing of “woman as product” for consumption). Secondly, the public sphere becomes a place to mold a gender/sexual identity,
so sexual minorities become visible; most notably, these are the various homosexual identity political movements (D’Emilio, 1983). Lastly, as with most post-modern narratives, the ‘public’ and ‘private’ collapse (or implode) and subjects become part of the eroticization of the public spaces of culture and society; that is, sex and gender both become something to be constructed and consumed, as prominent symbolic exchanges in collective affiliations and subjective meaning formation. Our shared preconceptions — our dominant myths, imaginaries, and overall ideologies — have rapidly altered, since the actualities of Modernity have become more than virtual.

Men becoming poly must navigate this emergent emotional culture. The poly emotional culture, though flexible, has cultural-specific emotional norms, emotional-practices, and a general habitus. These specifics are radically different than many masculine performances engendered as traditional and hegemonic in American culture. As the cases will illustrate, emotional cultures set the scenes for feeling-states, especially, for men becoming poly. This becomes an interesting intersectional analysis, since, these men are moving between different masculine cultures that prescribe different feeling-states and emotional practices. The performatives of dominant American masculine emotional culture are different than polyamorous emotional culture. As the cases suggest, these men must learn a different “emotional pedagogy” as they transition, and become re-socialized through the fine and detailed rules of engagement, expression, and general maintenance of the poly lifeworld.

**Men Becoming Poly: The emotional culture, feeling-states and identity.**

The reasons why men become poly are diverse. My informants ranged from men who experienced infidelity (either the object of cheating or the cheater), men who dealt with sexual fantasies of having multiple partners when they were in a committed monogamous arrangements, men negotiating their wife’s or female partner’s bi-curiosity or bisexuality, men that were questioning their overall commitment to their partner or monogamy in general, men questioning their sexual orientation, and men in a committed monogamous relationships that decided to open their exclusionary intimate contracts to pursue polyfidelity. No matter the reason for becoming poly, all the men eventually agreed upon the emotional practices and/or sexual ethic of loving more. This fluidity of men becoming poly, and the reasons for entertaining this sexual and intimate culture can be seen in Ben (a white man in his late 20’s, working in middle-management sales) and Kenny’s (a white man in his late 40’s, working in information-technology) descriptive accounts:

*It (polyamory) is like, build-your-own relations...a DIY. The work you put into yourself and your friend or lover is the mileage you get...Mileage is relative to the different people in the relationship. Being on the same page is the most important thing. It can be everything or nothing or whatever you wish, but you must be ethical and true.*

And, from Kenny:

*Think about it: Why do you want to do this? Will being a poly man only benefit you? Has your partner or partners ever hinted about a poly relationship? If your partner could respond negatively to these questions, you may want to ask yourself about your decision. Are you happy in your present relationship? Are you trying to breakup your current relationship by telling your partner about polyamory? Are you trying to hurt your partner? If you answer any of these questions with “yes,” then polyamory is not for you!*

For Ben and Kenny the decision and motivation becoming poly points to several overarching emotional norms. First, one must take the poly culture serious, and such a culture requires a sense of trueness and ethical demand. Secondly, if one is thinking about polyamory, then there must be a degree of self-reflection regarding the other people in one’s immediate locality and also one’s own desires. This second point stresses a relational ethic; poly emotional practices strive for greater self-achievement, self-knowledge, and self-reflection, but all of these individualistic demands are found within the contours of multiple relational agreements with different partners. The possibilities and reasons are open, and this reflects polyamorous normative elevation of individualism, open-communication, and positioning the other as subject (all

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emotional norms and emotional practices that guide potential feeling-states). When I inquired more about the conflicts when a potential man may be interested in polyamory, Kenny responded that no serious poly will take you “in,” if you don’t answer with, “With TRUTHFULNESS and VERACITY!”

The constraint of the poly emotional culture and correlated feeling-states pressure interior and exterior practices of self. The man becoming poly must take what Anthony Gidden’s declared to be one of the core aspects of the modern project, “The self is seen as a reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible” (1991, p. 75). The emotional culture of polyamory offers a grid of intelligibility of self-actualization, and more importantly authenticity. Authenticity emerges and shapes motives, feelings, desires, fantasies and relational experiences for men becoming poly—it drives many of them to this emotional culture, so they can feel more, love more, and do more - “The morality of authenticity skirts any universal moral criteria, and includes references to other people only within the sphere of intimate relationships—although the sphere is accepted as highly important to the self” (Giddens, 1991, p. 79). The first lesson of emotion work and acceptance of certain feeling-rules that will bring about general cultural acceptance for men in polyamory is the highest goal achievable, authenticity. Authenticity guides emotional grids and feeling-states when open-communication is negative or positive; from the authentic response, the poly man is honest, open, and deep. These cultural virtues and emotional norms set a range of intimate responsibilities to self and other, as continuous open-communication and conversing about feelings are staged, performed, and regulated. As the mantra “become what one is” (Bauman, 2002, p. 32) is ingested and incorporated, the emotional culture’s practices of self and consummated feeling-states can signal a spectrum of unease to joy.

Kenny documented his unease using the rhetoric of authenticity, regarding his wife’s desire for another woman to join their household, bed, and sexual and intimate relationship:

My wife missed the touch of a woman. I am heterosexual in fantasy and lying in my bed, but my wife was becoming bi-curious in our bed…She really missed these experiences. We talked for hours about this decision, but it seemed to me that she wanted a hot bi chick on reserve after a long day at work. Something different…for her...

Kenny’s confessional is dual. For him and other men becoming poly, there partner’s bi-sexuality is of great importance – many men reported this dynamic as their initial entrance into polyamory. Kenny practices the poly norms that guide long conversations; in this case the possibility of opening their marriage to another woman. However, he is also concerned about his wife’s fantasy of having a “hot bi chick on reserve.” Authenticity and open-communication drives the course and sequence of conversation between partners and potential situations. This duality of his concern and authenticity grew into a problem for the triad – his predications were correct. Kenny became a constant mediator between his now two partners.

“My wife’s need for sexual exploration became an emotional exploration for me,” Kenny responded. Kenny thought his wife “jumped into this poly thing way too quickly.” For him, his wife was more enthralled with the sexual encounters she was experiencing, than establishing a close intimate and emotional bond with potential partners. This emotional work—the altering of feelings, practicing deep and open communication, and negotiating multiple desires—became Kenny’s primary duty in the relationship. He was constantly thrown in the middle of debates and conflicts. Looking back he stated:

She (Kenny’s wife) never fully entertained the seriousness of polyamory, it was just about playing, but this playing turned into reality, real issues screamed at me. This happened since my wife did not deal with the full spectrum of these encounters and the potential relationships flourishing...It takes a lot!

And, once their triad was established:

When everyone is happy it is easy...when my wife and our partner are not seeing eye to eye, I am there to help. The friendship between these two women...tested all the time. Then their sexual relationship wanes, and they don’t have the love to fix it...to sustain it.

For Kenny, his wife’s sexual desire was a hindrance to potential intimate and emotional possibilities. Kenny had two overarching fears during these initial months becoming poly. First, he did not want the triad to become a “vee;” this is when two people become more bounded, known as “arm partners.” His second fear was that he or his wife would end up establishing primary and secondary relationship formations. Both
of his worries can be interpreted as his agreement to the cultural constraint and radical declaration of equality in polyamory (other poly men do establish primary, secondary partners). Adherence to this value and emotional norm demands constant reflexivity, open-communication, and dialogue about feeling-states – at times it borders a confessional schema. These emotional practices are supplemented by polyamory’s emotional habitus – Kenny, his wife, and partner, are orchestrated and granted dispositions in the field. Besides, the relative positions assigned by the general rules of the game in polyamory; polyamory also provides a practical sense and daily practices of conversing, reflecting, and augmenting the self and feelings-states to dominant emotional poly norms. Authenticity, openness, reflection, and expansion of feelings guided by the emotional culture, helped the triad to recline conflicts over sexuality and needed intimacy, establishing a new interpersonal “equilibrium.”

The “newness” of this equilibrium can be conceptualized by enlisting emotional energy, entrainment, emotion work, and the triad’s shared symbols (e.g. ideals of open communication; equality; authenticity). Following this process of feeling-states, emotional poly norms, and practices, synthesizes aspects of Hochschild (1979) and Collins (2004) theories. As the triad practiced polyfidelity, their contract became exclusive, and shared experiences and feelings received mutual attention, and reinscription. By sharing the symbols and ideals of the poly culture, the triad was able to establish the proper and expected ritual interactions – all done through confessional, reflective dialogue – to shape an intersubjective lifeworld. As the standard was reinforced, and the group became bound by the cultural norms and principles of their personal sexual/intimate contracts – informed by the poly culture’s emotional grid of expectations – Kenny could speak and claim other feeling-states (e.g. anger, unease, or a feeling of disrespect) that he was experiencing. The micro-rival chains reinforced generalized codes of feeling that the poly emotional culture prescribes to dispositions – these types of “feedback loops” (Collins, 2004, p. 48) are primary to any culture’s doxa (Bourdieu, 1980, 1997). Kenny provided a dialogical and feeling repetition akin to sympathetic concern outlined above – this stresses the active attunement and entrainment that others come to feel, label, and perform continuously – yet, the generalized front of sympathetic concern pulls on cultural content, codes, expectations, emotional norms, and recognizable feeling-states. At this point, self-other emotional practices are classifiable, repeatable, and shared. And, by enacting these emotional practices, Kenny also gained emotional capital – his becoming is crystallized - and these repertoires of emotional communication and recognized feeling-states, can be transferred to other poly arenas that share the beliefs in open-communication, consensual non-monogamy, truthfulness, reflection, and authenticity. These emotional practices and positions within the poly lifeworld, provides regulated patterns that can be called upon as poly men transverse similar groups and other fields supporting shared masculine subjectivities; that is, from these fine-tuned emotional practices and feeling-states, men can accumulate cultural and emotional capital that other cultures will recognize and other men can imitate given the inclusive-exclusive markers of an emotional culture. In presenting this front, men like Kenny, gain a type of veteran status in polyamory. Lastly, this vantage point from social and cultural analysis should not overwrite Kenny’s personal work in expressing positive and negative feelings within his triad – conversing with Kenny, always signaled a taxing toll (i.e. masculine role strain) of his becoming poly, and position in the triad.

Kenny’s narrative offers an individualized account that stresses a relational ethic, certain poly emotional norms, and how constant emotion work and practices are enacted to guide feeling-states. For the remaining part of this section, I am going to stress multiple voices of men becoming poly. Some of the issues presented will be the construction of jealousy, compulsory monogamy and its effects, dishonesty, and the function and practices of a metamour. These three aspects of emotion work, practices, feeling-states, and general emotional habitus of polyamory, all suggest that poly exclusive male relationships undergo expansive, emotional transformation. At all points, these men are constructing and practicing masculinity beyond the scope of hegemonic/traditional masculinity.

The theoretical, social, historical, and clinical discourses on jealousy are extensive. Is jealousy productive or destructive? Is jealousy related to identification processes and internal object relations? Is it pathological and traumatic, and can we understand these propositions in developmental schemas? Is it gendered? Is it...
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Infantile? How is it mobilized in power-relations and cultural hierarchies? Is it a basic emotion or a signal in a social interaction? Can jealousy be appreciated as a tactic, a strategy, for recognition? Is it an effect of the oedipal complex or a side effect of stratification, capital, private property, or status embedded in an achievement ideology? The questions and answers are multiple. However, how do poly men construct jealousy? And, how do they deal with this overarching feeling-state when they share their partners (many of the heterosexual men I conversed with were married for years, before becoming poly)? What are the guidelines or to use Bourdieu’s terminology, how do these men establish an ontological complicity (when the agent takes advantage of the preexisting qualities and principles of the social to organize perception and apperception) in regards to this feeling, given the contextual constraints in the poly emotional culture? As the men narrate, jealousy is a primary aspect in the emotional culture and a feeling that must be managed, discussed, and rationalized. These vectors of figuration help men deal with the burden and construction of jealousy.

There are two general accounts of jealousy. The first explanation of jealousy resembles a deep intrinsic structure. These deep intrinsic structures can be from biology, instincts, and other natural “programming.” Chip offers a glimpse into this naturalized theory of jealousy as they relate to gendered experience. For Chip, (a white man in his late 30’s, form the managerial class, a national and traveling manager for a major corporate firm) jealousy separates the genders/sexes into a naturalistic binary: Look at women, love is their way, it is feeling, this love is 90% of who they are…Men are different, we are a different thing altogether. When we have a feeling, like jealousy, these feelings are an issue for our brains…we are an organic-carbon-like-atom…a unit of matter which possesses. The more toys we have the happier we are. Men have different wirings, we are pure physical matter bouncing, and our brains can’t handle it.

The metaphors of neurons, wiring, and Hume’s billiard balls come to mind. Men are programmed to be jealous, and their master is evolution - To survive, a man must have, be, and never share. This naturalizing of masculine jealousy becomes a masculine burden, a real male problematic in polyamory. For Chip and others, men have it much worse than women when it comes to feelings of possessiveness, rivalry, and jealousy – most of the men confessed to this binary. Here possessiveness and the hatred of sharing are programmed into the male brain – a typical imagery of warriors, hunters, and alpha-males are circulated. However, the second male account of jealousy is not lodged in biological rhetoric, but social constructivism. If the first account naturalizes the emotion, then the other is the constructivist account, by which men are socially “programmed.” It is not an issue of hardware, but of software. Men are not to be blamed because of their carbon qualities or hormones, but because men have been subjugated socially. Ben and Lincoln (a white man in his early 40’s, working in information-technology and a self-published poet) offer insights inspired by Marx and Engels:

Capitalism, hierarchies, possessions, this is mine, that is yours – this is what men are...But we don’t have to be this, this is how we are trained...socialized. Jealousy is what we are told to do, it is a programmed reaction. There’s nothing harder than sharing my wife with some other guy… I am told to think this way, to feel this way – it hurts – but something I can overcome, because it is not natural.

And from Lincoln:

Monogamy and jealousy are devices that were used as a form of ownership when women were treated as property...to ensure that the man’s claim to their lands was always secure. It was a way to keep royal bloodlines pure ensuring that bastard “commoner” children would not come to power. Nothing about this is natural.

This story of jealousy places men at the center of this problematic, but in a different light. Social forces, economic rationality, and other pre-conditions are telling men to be jealous, not an inner drive from our evolutionary inheritance. You may feel that a man may be a rival and you may not want to share your “toys” or “wife” with him, but this is something done to you by society, not by nature – a noble Marxist savage. These two versions of jealousy play an important role in the poly male quest for identity. These versions can be productive and as well as debilitating as many men struggle through their feelings in becoming poly.
Conversing and signifying jealousy is an ongoing process for men in polyamory. The chains of interactions which help shape the feeling-state are multiple and vary depending on the man answering. For Lincoln, one of the social constructivists, jealousy is a determined by monogamy itself - compulsory monogamy established by our dominant institutions and expressions of love, sexuality, and intimacy. For him, monogamy and the overestimation of a couple’s adherence to strict fidelity cause the symptom of jealousy. Since, these are not “natural” or “hardwired” biological necessities, polyamory - a form of consensual nonmonogamy - allowed him to work-through this feeling state, given the emotional culture of polyamory:

I needed a relationship structure where infidelity was not an issue...why not a relationship structure where infidelity was basically built in? There’s something that makes more sense and is less hurtful and damaging when everyone is just honest about who they are and what they want.

Being able to choose a different relationship configuration was appealing. Also for Lincoln, the aspects of individuality, authenticity, honesty, and an intimate respectability, structures his relationship ideal. Open-communication is once again called-upon to settle issues of desire, emotional conflict, and an emerging sense of identity.

Ben also gave an expanded version of jealousy; he related it to the dishonesty and monogamy. Dishonesty, either in action or feeling, becomes a marker when potential instances of jealousy can arise:

I soon realized dishonesty is the worst thing I could do to people I love, and to myself. What’s the point of being dishonest? Polyamory encourages men to be honest about love and sex...I guess it’s radical. There is nothing wrong in having sex with some other woman or man as long as I can agree with my other partners. They don’t care about me having sex with them, but they will care if I lie about it.

Honestly to one’s self, as a great project, is reinforced in Ben’s narrative. Jealousy can be navigated, if a man becoming poly can not only have an open dialogue, but to approach such an encounter with honesty and as Kenny remarked with “VERACITY.” Jealousy is not only a feeling-state that is common to men becoming poly, but it is a primary feeling-tool when they navigate the emotional culture with prescribed actions, speech, and norms. These accounts signal an expansive emotionality which offers these men a new, expansive masculinity. To let one’s guard down, to feel the reactions of jealousy, and to converse with fellow men and other partners, are all emotional practices that offer a sense of regularity and patterned feeling-states. Though jealousy can have a sudden “rage” or “hurt” and “wanting,” poly emotional practices help structure and constrain the edge of such a feeling in a set of emotional vocabularies, repertoires, and general rules of display. Lastly, Chip offered a clear and precise narrative of his jealousy:

My jealousy is not about sex...I may be missing-out on something special...This is normal...I have time with Joyce that Dave doesn’t have. The important thing is that we all talk about this stuff. Even Dave and I talk, we can be best of friends or foes, but we talk about it.

Chip consciously declares it’s not about sex, but about “missing-out on something special.” However, as stressed, Chip and his co-father Dave (they are part of a quad made up of two previously married couples, all are heterosexual, with nine children) can come together and talk about these negative feelings. This last quote brings up a very important cultural function in polyamory: the metamour. As will be seen this cultural function offers a ritualized dialogue of feeling-states which are always guided by emotional poly norms and overarching respectability for intimate/sexual contracts, honestly, open-communication, and authentic recognition. Crucial to the metamour function in polyamory is polyaffectivity (Sheff, 2015). Polyaffectivity is the elevation of intimate relationships beyond the scope of sexual practices. Polyaffectivity allows for non-sexual members of a triad, quad, or moresome (five partners or more) a space for verbalized feelings, conflicts, and praises. Lastly, it exceeds the limits of a dominant monogamous relationship (where not only sexual exclusivity is the norm, but also intimate exclusion) into a field of multiple, close, and intimate forms of consensual non-monogamy. The metamour as a cultural function, and polyaffectivity as a practice, expands traditional/hegemonic notions of masculine emotionality into a process of attunement, confession, reciprocal recognition, and overall entrainment. At all points, this function and emotional practice held by poly emotional norms, allow many heterosexual poly men navigate feeling-states of envy, angry, impotence, and jealousy in a more deep, elaborate, and expansive way – a stage of deep acting.
What is a metamour? And, how does this relationship function and help suture many of these poly men experiencing male-to-male envy? A metamour is one’s partner’s partner. A metamour is defined by emotional intimacy or as Paul (a white man in his 50’s, who is a psychotherapist) states, “you are invested in this person, because this person is important to your partner.” Metamours are not sexual partners, though the potential is always there. Metamours share a person they have both decided to love, inducing the metamours to “build and share a bond of friendship and closeness.” As Jake (a white man in his 40’s, who is a graphic designer) relayed:

Metamours are hard for non-polys to understand, but they are important. I don’t have a direct sexual relationship with my partner’s partner...we are all heterosexual men. But, I have chosen to share my life, time, vigor and commitment with them.

The metamour functions by the ethics of open communication and full disclosure. Jake, Paul, and Lincoln, all stressed how important this relationship was for them, “it opens it all up,” replied Paul. Here men can talk with the hope of expressing their concerns and insecurities with their partner’s partner. Lincoln stated, “Once I started to talk to him, we both realized how we had a lot of the same feelings and worries.” The metamour function in poly culture supplements and guides these men when they are dealing with the many negative feeling-states of sharing their loved one(s). It also informs practices of self and influences these men’s identities and how they personally relate to their inner conflicts and shared feeling-states.

Paul and others, think the metamour is crucial in their own self-understanding and further associations in polyamory. Taking the metamour serious, offers many of these men a different, yet constrained experience of their insecurity and comparison, typically found in hegemonic/traditional performances of the phallic ideal. Paul directly connects his intimate dialogues with his metamours, with his own sense of competition and masculinity:

Yes, being a poly male is much different than being a traditionally mono male. Investing in my partner’s partner, shakes the whole traditional male role up. Poly males, like myself, are often less competitive, and have learned how to respect the choices of others by talking.

Furthering the positive role of metamours, Jake offers this insight as he wrote about his male-to-male relationships in polyamory:

I’ve had metamours who increasingly compete for attention of our common female partner. I’ve actually seen males end relationships in which they could not clearly be treated or identified as the superior male. I’ve enjoyed relationships with metamours who are able to understand that male competition is not necessary. I’ve also had many successful conversations with other men who were being way too competitive...helping them understand that competition is not necessary and avoiding it can actually create more relationship opportunities and strengthen our relationships with lovers and metamours.

These men and their relationships with male metamours are reminiscent of an intentional family. They bind over their mutual partner. They are able to deal with their comparisons and insecurities without resorting to overt aggression or debasement. These male-to-male relations can be long or short lived, but the normative practice of open communication is paramount. As Steve mentioned, “I stopped dating this woman, but I haven’t stopped talking with Dan.” Dan and Steve became good friends, since; they were able to live and practice the demands of polyamory. Steve ends, “A lot of men in polyamory are OK with being intimate with other men...not a big deal.”

Male-to-male intimacy is a potential libidinal space for men becoming poly. Many of these men had to deal with the external strain of hegemonic norms and practices (e.g. acquisition of women/men without confession), as well as, aligning themselves to the poly emotional norms – a nodal point of identity, where the achievement of emotional practices folds upon emotional work, and the deep acting self can be realigned, adjusted, and attuned . Though there is overlap, many of these experiences could be interpreted as strain, but a strain that entices movement and momentary closure. Lincoln and Paul, poly veterans, offer two concluding remarks about the metamour function. First, Paul:
In fact, in our poly world we try to create a place for men to explore that side of themselves with other men in a safe and non-judgmental environment. We have met a lot guys who appreciate this. Some are just curious guys who want a chance to check things out and we never hear from them again. Others are guys who are struggling with ending a marriage or relationship with a woman and need the ear and perspective of another man who’s been through that. Others are open and poly as well and just like to hang with us in an intimate setting. We enjoy being this for our friends, but mainly it has changed the way I approach being a poly man completely.

The emotional cultural space of polyamory offered Paul a way to re-identify with his “interior masculinity” which was induced by the contextual impingements and demands of the poly culture. Initially, poly demands opened him up to male-to-male intimacy and consequentially, this intimacy transformed into a therapeutic space for other men searching and questioning. Emotional practices – deep acting, ritualistic dialogue, and verbalized feeling-states consummated/consecrated by poly norms – can be delivered in different, but similar fronts and staging’s of identity. Male-to-male intimacy was one of the biggest lessons for Lincoln:

Many men feel this way whether it’s a same sex attraction or just being poly in general. The thing that is universal is that men need male intimacy. This does not mean sex, but poly allows for the sexual expression of intimacy which a lot of poly men are comfortable with, surprisingly.

Deep acting and entrainment that corresponds to poly norms and collective symbols (i.e. an ideology of masculinity, emotionality, and strategies of self) become an ongoing process – a project of self (Giddens, 1991) - which destabilizes traditional norms and ideals related to hegemonic/traditional and complicit masculinity. This strain is culturally compensated by the demand of full disclosures and willingness to confront masculine insecurity. Basic male relational insecurities are confronted with a cultural demand to engage with one’s partner’s partner, the metamour. The metamour secures the possibility of navigating complex feelings of envy, comparison, competition, and jealousy. This navigation transforms into the realization that other men have similar fantasies of being overwritten and dethroned in their male position of illusionary completeness. Poly men bind over their mutual sense of insecurity, driven by the relentless masculine need for comparison and supremacy. These binding experiences for these men helped them traverse the many polarities between traditional/hegemonic masculinity and poly masculinity. These emotional practices supported by the habitus, offer men in the poly lifeworld experiences and tactics of identity that engage in an expansive emotional masculinity.

Expansive poly masculinities revolve around signals that convey a wide-range of dialogue concerning feeling-states and attunement to poly emotional norms. Through these emotional practices an “inner space” becomes negotiable to ongoing confession, fantasy exploration, open-communication, and the recognition of other as subject. To link the culturally sanction “word” with the “thing” (to use psychoanalytic discourse) is synchronized, and the dialectic informs the regulated field, game, and notion of masculine identity. The demand for communication becomes a demand for honesty and forthcoming practices of relaying this culturally approved “inner space.” Even in conflict – masculine competition, feelings of inferiority and jealousy, and envy – the metamour function helps elevate strain through a constant practice of being voluble. These ritualistic dialogues and poly emotion norms help men navigate certain feeling-states and constitute expansive poly masculinities. These repertoires are consecrated and transferable to other cultural enclaves with similar norms, ideologies, notions of self, and identity-work (e.g. debates concerning feminism; other moments of non-monogamy, even if it is non-consensual). However, this expansive masculinity is part of a longue duree that has helped fashion polyamorous relational ethics, emotion norms, practices, and feeling-states.

Symptomatic Conclusions: Masculine expansive emotionality and equal intimates.

The “unconscious” is never anything other than the forgetting of history itself produces by incorporating the objective structures it produces in the second nature of habitus: “...in each of us, in varying proportions, there is part of yesterday’s man; it is yesterday’s man who inevitably predominates in us, since the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we were formed and from which we result. (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 78)
Pierre Bourdieu offers a sociohistorical and cultural synthesis of the objective and subjective that is grounded in regulated daily practices between the opus operatum and modus operandi. In closing, I would like to follow this method of tracing emotional and feeling practices of poly expansive masculinities, and relate such practices, to wider emotional repertories and vectors in American culture. Though the historical territory and literature is well documented, I propose, Eva Illouz's (2007) narrative of the rise of homo sentimentalis to be complimentary to my overall theory and research of poly masculinities and their practices of open communication, labeling and expanding on feeling states, and mutual, relational recognition of authenticity. Polyamory as an emotional culture and guide to feeling-states (i.e. practices of self-other entrainment, conflict, communication, and the deep working cultural subject) can be conceptualized along the path of “yesterday’s man” – a man of Modernity, par excellence. This historical path points to several overarching cultural schemas and repertories: feminism; therapeutic styles of relating; psychology/psychoanalysis as an expert discourse informing the popular imagination; and the role of the corporation in consumer bourgeois society.10 I cannot entertain all of these cultural forces that have helped produce many poly practices of feeling and regulated emotion norms, however, I wish to highlight parts of this past through emerging cultural practices and dominant themes. In many respects, these practices and historical themes have become common everyday categories of thought, agency, and taken-for-granted morality. However, in poly expansive masculinities, these patterns of display, feeling-states, and emotion norms are salient in becoming poly.

Peter Streans (1990) examination of emotional cultures and particular modifications toward feeling-states (i.e. anger, envy, love, jealousy) in the American contexts (e.g. corporations/bureaucracy, industrial psychology, therapy, romantic love relations, gendered childhood conflicts, developmental schemas, parental technique, and cultural revolutions) since the 1920’s have increasingly crystalized androgynous emotional practices and norms. Unlike other cultural historians, Streans constructs a historical emotional narrative based on the increasing equality of gendered emotional expectations; that is, Streans doesn’t think there has been an overall feminization of men given these cultural, socioeconomic, and historical forces. The institutions, policies, and discourses mentioned by Streans and Illouz constitute a modern schema of reading and sending feeling signals – for Illouz “emotions are cultural meanings and social relationships that are inseparably compressed together and it is this compression which confers on them their capacity to energize action” (2007, p. 3) – this entrainment stemming from different spheres of cultural life have a doubling effect on our private, deep acting selves. A different emotional script becomes perfunctory, and it is in polyamory, especially expansive emotional masculinity, that engages with these emotional practices, norms, and culturally guided feeling-states.

Freudian discourse is a major force and vector in this historical narrative. It is not just Freud and his followers, but many other determinants and possible strategies found in constituting the field of forces and struggles for a recognizable voice (Bourdieu, 1993). Freud’s voice will be heard as Freudianism, “psychoanalysis...was a new set of cultural practices which, because they were in the unique position of being located in the realm of scientific production as well as in the twin realms of elite and popular cultures, reorganized conceptions of self, emotional life, and even social relations” (Illouz, 2007, p. 7). A new vocabulary of self, feelings, and the etiology of everyday psychopathology (“everyday” because one of the greatest cultural achievements of psychoanalysis was to infuse the neurotic principle throughout the masses – we are all sick, potentially perverse, and you do not know what you want) was ushered into the modus operandi of the middle and upper classes of American consumer and popular culture after WWII. Freudianism as the mediocre practice of the clinician and daily ramblings of the bourgeoisie, impacted American culture by giving basic guidelines to a genealogical self in conflict, a nuclear family that took center stage in biographical and

10 I by no means wish to stress a rigid cause-effect or base driving force (e.g. economic determinism; “in the last instance” or “index of effectivity”) regarding this socioeconomic and cultural historical narrative. Elective affinities (Weber, Protestant Ethic) is a more constructive concept when dealing with the multiple forces, vectors, powers of assembly, analogy, and mutual election and affirmation, which supplement mutual reinforcement (and exclusion) of emotional practices and feeling-state recognition (i.e. labeling, dialogue, discourse) found constituting dominant spheres of social and cultural life – in Bourdieu’s language: homology, capitals, and fields.
narrative terms, instances of everyday abnormality, and the cultural demand to verbalize, record, share, and confess without censorship or shame to a caring other. This new emotional-scientific-popular vocabulary (a dispassionate scientific gaze mixed with conformity, morality, empathy, and mass appeal and consumption) found a perfect balance in advice literature, the book industry, the new Hollywood, women’s magazines, and early marketing journals (Cook, 2004; Illouz, 2007). Freud’s great discoveries became a perfect commodity—complexity repackaged for the high and low markets—a commodity that can be named the therapeutic style of relating.

The steady rise in the expertise of the psychologists and psychoanalysts also found an enclave in the new management ideology and advertising professionals (trying to claim a new science) (Illouz, 2007; Williams, 1980). Exploitative actions and formulas are the core logics of capitalism; however, brutal exploitation can only take the new corporate world so far. As Foucault stressed, the analytic gaze of power-knowledge switched from deciding the terms of death to enhancing the management of life—to give more than mere subsistence to the worker (Marx’s base line of industrial/colonial capitalism and the reproduction of the proletariat/native), the production of a society managed and regulated life itself with competence, health, justice, and keen rationality—a moral-orthopedic stressing a life worth living. The new corporate management system (gazing upon work as a system was a new tactic of surveillance as well), needed to surpass Weber’s bureaucratic, administrative instrumentality and to present itself as an authority guided by a principle of general welfare. Besides high productivity-efficiency, managers and corporations enlisted other workplace virtues: reliability, listening, speaking, tact, teamwork, openness to constructive criticism, attentiveness to the other’s expression, and the controlling of negative emotional outburst. Business is market driven, and the market is driven by competition and profit, but the new corporate worker—the white collar man as an ideal—must be one of persuasion that can use the vocabularies of the new experts: people, feelings, motivations, and competition without overt conflict. The workplace started to resemble maturation schemas of assertiveness, empathy, and well thought-out verbalized intentions. Illouz summarizes this new mode of affection as a imported register of knowledge, “psychologists seemed to promise nothing less than to increase profits, fight labor unrest, organize manager-worker relationships in a non-confrontational benign language of emotions and personality” (2007, p. 17). Through these affinities and mutually enhancing cultural forces two dominant norms became commonplace in corporate setting: equality and cooperation.

To achieve this new Post WWII ideal of pacification and verbalization, the skills of self-restraint and dialogic constraint, circulated around an intense need for teller-listener recognition, self-reflexivity, perceiving the social situation “objectively,” and mutually agreed upon symbols. These practices of self-other became crystallized as a new communicative ethos; an ethos held by the institutions of capitalism and business, and transferred to the private sphere of domestics, sexuality, and intimate partnership. The new model of communication ushered different sets of emotional practices, emotion norms, and recognizable feeling-states. A new sense of entrainment around different sets of symbols and ideals became more and more dominant (i.e. open-communication, equality, cooperation, resolving conflict, confession, and recognition of self-other boundaries guided by sympathy and empathy). This lead to a democratization of relationships and perceived desires:

...with the changing normative structure entailed in the democratization of social relationships, procedural rules had to be set up to reconcile the increasingly hierarchical structure of corporate organizations with the increasing democratization of social relations...a kind of affect committed to and commanded by the imperative of cooperation and mode of settling conflicts based on “recognition.” (Illouz, 2007, pp. 22-23).

The economic sphere focused on production, while adding a sympathetic production, with intense financial interests. A new style of recognition and calm competitiveness (a mild cheerfulness would be even more ideal) became dominant; these emotional vocabularies and practices became standardized and transplantable to other cultural spheres. In addition, to this rising concern for self-other recognition and communication, the new Post WWII consumer market of the middle-class became the center of media and political representations—the good housewife, the breadwinning husband, two children who were pillars of hygiene and education, household appliances as status markers, white suburbia (and the ghettoization of
Northern cities), and cars for everyone – the good life (Cohen, 2003; Lipsitz, 1995; Wacquant, 2001). In 1946 the National Mental Health Act was passed, and by the 1960’s Freudianism’s greatest achievement of neuroticizing the masses made the middle-class, white American culture a major consumer of therapy which was condoned by the state and ideological apparatuses. The gender politics and the formal commodity of therapy are well documented during this time. Strict sex-category and gender role moral adhesion prescribed normality and pathology for the rest. However, this growing trend in therapy as a commodity during the everyday life of consumers entrenched in the American cultural landscape, also became conflictual. Social movements and cultural revolutions will be the last major forces and vectors in the metamorphosis of emotional culture(s) that stress authenticity, recognition, equality, and a high degree of intimacy.

One of the major cultural revolutions that helped supplement and articulate the emotional culture of equality, listening, recognition, and authenticity was second-wave feminism. Outside the halls of the academy, second-wave feminism became institutionalized by the 1970s and an object of everyday consumption with the rise of women clinics, book publishers, bookstores, credit unions, newspapers, and magazines (Cancian & Gordon, 1988; Illouz, 2007). Feminism and the therapeutic style of relating presented a different emotional vocabulary for women and men, “The cultural model of intimacy contains key motives and symbols of the two major cultural persuasions which shaped women’s selfhood in the twentieth century (namely, psychology and liberal feminism): equality, fairness, neutral procedures, emotional communication, sexuality, overcoming and expressing hidden emotions, and centrality of linguistic self-expression are all at the heart of the modern ideal of intimacy” (Illouz; 2007, p. 29). The emotional culture of intimacy and self-regulation (to the point that the unconscious will become visible to a caring other) allowed self-other relations to develop and converse over sexual fulfillment, partner’s rights, self-expression, self-fulfillment, and recognition. The equality of the emotional culture of intimacy, however, was still the providence of women and other minority groups. The emotional work – to cultivate these modes of articulation and recognized feeling-states – became a generalized front and way of working-through dissatisfaction and gendered politics. The generalized front gained currency by everyday consumption and the feminists’ fronts demanding recognition in the masculine world (e.g. the workplace). In addition, the mutual affinities between psychology, psychoanalysis, calm productive workplace relations, and the public’s recognition of second-wave feminism, offered a mass acceptance of emotional health and healthy relationships. The emotion norms to help regulate and pattern felling-states had a moral appeal, a mass moral appeal. Behind the linguistic register of partner’s rights and mutual recognition was the moral claim that verbalization, acceptance, fantasy (un)fulfillment, was to be taken serious. A breach in this everyday moral and emotion culture’s universe was cause for alarm: misogyny, hyper-masculinity or ruthless patriarchy. These immoral speech acts (even only implied, an implicit emotional violation) discredit the interlocutor and ruined the hopes for further open-communication and deep intimacy. The positives of an emotional culture became circulated and consummated, and the negatives became widely known for most to expect, appreciate, and even pardon, so communication, intimate relations and therapeutic styles could continue.

There are other important cultural political and historical vectors and forces at play after second-wave feminism that strengthen this emotional culture that polyamory has become enmeshed with. The groups devalued from the charm circle demand public recognition (e.g. kink cultures; group sex; sex toys; casual sex; pornography; and of course consensual non-monogamies). Gay liberation and other sexualities after the Stone Wall Riots and AIDS hysteria provide other important aspects of public recognition, rights-entitlements, and non-pathological response from therapeutic/medical discourses. Civil right campaigns breaking the cultural landscape of its middle-class white privileges. The perfect combination of advice literature and psychology for mass consumption (this is even true in polyamory). Computer-mediated communication, World Wide Web, and the mobile internet opens the lines of potential communication even further – transcending traditional geographic boundaries. That is, there are many other supplemental mutual affinities which have help shape some of our contemporary emotional practices and feeling-states. This history is not linear as proposed by some cultural theorists, but is one of mutual affinities, politics of recognition, economic productivity-efficiency, a deepening of an “interior self,” a relation to self, and ultimately oppression (e.g.
feminism, civil rights, gay liberation).

At all points this narrative of a budding emotional culture, especially polyamory, reorganizes traditional/hegemonic masculinity. Poly expansive masculinities are just one cultural production of these diverse, but coherent vectors of masculine (re)constitution. Men in polyamory become versed in these emotional practices, and embody such regulated and constrained feeling-states. Poly men with the help of the emotional culture’s norms and function of the metamour, are part of a longer cultural history and reorganization of identity and American masculinity in general. Masculinity is not always a symptom of negative emotionality; there is no intrinsic bond between the two. Masculinity can practice a sense of cultivated verbalization, mutual recognition, equality, and manage intense feeling-states of jealousy, envy, and competition. Lastly, this performance, I am calling “expansive masculinity” is not uncommon, as the narratives above indicate. This sense of expansiveness has been on the rise and becoming an everyday social encounter – it is not as radical as others assume (there are of course other masculine privileges that come with expansive masculinities). Yet, our theorizing seems to push us into the negative. Men becoming poly suggest another conceptualization: Men can actually expand and deepen their identity by enacting culturally ordained emotional practices that are not alien to the American landscape, but are central to it.

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