You Me Her:
A heteronormative representative of polyamory?

by

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate, without acknowledgment, any material previously submitted for a degree or a diploma in any university and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Elisa Armstrong

I believe that this thesis is properly presented, conforms to the specifications for the thesis and is of sufficient standard to be, prima facie, worthy of examination.

Dr. Heather Brook
Supervisor

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Introduction

My interest in polyamory was first piqued when I saw an episode of the ABC show *You Can't Ask That* [1] about polyamory. The people interviewed seemed so normal, but their relationships and lives were outside what I knew to be normal. I have always been strangely fascinated with polygamy and the family dynamics that result from polygamous arrangements. I admit that I have watched both *Sister Wives* and *My Five Wives* which are American reality television shows about two modern polygamist families. I had always thought polygamy unfair because of the gender inequality regarding the formation of multiple relationships but polyamory seemed different. Intrigued, I set out to do some research and stumbled upon the active polyamory community on Reddit.[2] As I read more books and articles, I began to feel like I had some level of understanding of polyamory.

I first heard of *You Me Her* on the Polyamory Reddit in a discussion about media representations of polyamory. I had previously read several threads where someone was looking for television shows or movies they could watch that had polyamorous characters or relationships. The pickings were slim, and most of the comments were along the lines of "X show has one episode that could be vaguely construed as having a polyamorous relationship in it" or "X movie/show has a love triangle that I like to imagine ended up in a polyamorous arrangement". Occasionally someone would mention a dubious reality tv show called *Polyamory: Married and Dating* that seemed to be met with contempt for its focus on sex and overall inaccuracy - I watched it out of curiosity and it bordered on pornography at times. Then *You Me Her* came out and suddenly there was a solid recommendation that could be given whenever someone enquired about polyamorous television. It was explicitly polyamorous, there was no need for fanfiction or pretending, so I decided to watch it. Popcorn at the ready, I settled down to binge watch the first season, but I was so frustrated and disappointed that I turned it off after three episodes. I went back to Reddit to read anything and everything posted about it on the polyamory section and found I was mostly alone in my reaction. Most of comments that I saw about it were positive and excited, and I was left a little confused. I expected more negative posts about the quality of the representation and how the polyamory had been rendered 'vanilla' to be palatable to the masses. I think the Reddit polyamory community was so desperate for anything that constituted polyamorous representation that they lacked a critical approach to the show. I

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[1] *You Can't Ask That* is an interview-style show in which marginalised Australians (including blind people, ex-prisoners, and drug users, for example) respond to a series of questions asked by anonymous members of the public.

[2] Reddit is a social discussion website that is broken down into "sub-reddits" dedicated to different topics. These sub-reddits serve as a platform for open discussion, relationship advice, and personal experiences.

decided to finish the series to see if it the latter half was redeeming; I didn't think so, but I could see why people were so enthralled with it.

This project grew from my desire to justify and properly articulate my dissatisfaction with how *You Me Her* represents polyamory. I have focused on building an understanding of what polyamory is, from both an academic perspective and from the community's standpoint. I feel that this is important not just for the polyamory community, but for understanding how mononormativity and heteronormativity influencing our representations of other relationship styles and sexualities.

This thesis is divided into four main chapters: frames, power, sexuality, and jealousy. In the first chapter, 'frames', I present a literature review, description of key terms, and my methodology. Chapter 2 focuses on the power dynamics in polyamorous relationships and between the characters Jack, Emma, and Izzy in *You Me Her*. This includes a discussion of 'unicorn hunting', couples privilege, and the disempowered position of a 'third' in a triad. The third chapter, on sexuality, is divided between the portrayal of romantic sexual relationships and how polyamory might affect them, and representations of bisexuality in the show. Finally, the chapter on jealousy explores how this emotion is dealt with in both monogamous and polyamorous relationships. The portrayal of jealousy is a crucial consideration as dealing with jealousy constitutes a significant part of polyamorous advice literature. By focusing on how *You Me Her* characterizes power, sexuality, and jealousy in polyamorous relationships I develop a comprehensive critique of the show.

Chapter 1: Literature Review and Framing

The following literature review frames polyamory and the related topics which will be discussed. This introductory chapter will establish an understanding of polyamory and the associated issues. First, I discuss the various academic disciplines that are represented in polyamorous research. Works of the most prominent researchers in polyamory are examined, as well as the journals in which they are published. Then, I go on to define polyamory and how it is distinct from other forms of consensual non-monogamy. It is important to understand polyamory's distinctness from other forms of non-monogamy, both consensual and non-consensual. As this thesis intends to dissect the program You Me Her though the cultural lens of monogamy and mononormativity, a definition and discussion on these topics is also included. I then discuss the importance of media representation to establish why You Me Her's impact on polyamory is worth considering. Finally, I have included an explanation of the key terms that appear in polyamory research, terms that have been created by the community, and a summary of the characters and plot of You Me Her.

Disciplines reflected in polyamory research

Academic articles are usually entail a critical analytical approach and are typically directed towards an academic demographic. This includes students and researchers, rather than the general population or those considering polyamorous relationships. Researchers tend to use white, middle-class, university-educated, Americans as their sample which undoubtedly affects their findings. Books written by the polyamorous community are typically intended to serve as an introduction or guide to the lifestyle. I would argue that the authors do not want to scare people off, they want to make polyamory seem approachable, achievable, and even desirable. This would then influence the reality they weave into their books, softening the hard corners of polyamory and emphasising the attractive parts. So where does *You Me Her* sit regarding these two approaches? Historically, research into non-monogamy has focused on non-consensual forms such as affairs or infidelity (Barker & Langdridge, 2010, p. 749). Consensual non-monogamy's history is tied to sexual liberationism and critiques of both monogamy and the family (Haritaworn, Lin, & Klesse, 2006, p. 518). Consensual non-monogamy is rising in popularity, Conley, Ziegler, Moors, Matsick, and Valentine (2013, p. 131) found that approximately 4-5% of the American population were engaged in a form of consensually non-monogamous relationship.

There are several researchers that have significantly contributed to the academic research on polyamory. These include: Meg-John Barker, Terri Conley, Amy Moors, Jes Matsick, Ali Ziegler, Christian Klesse, Ani Ritchie, and Elisabeth Sheff. Meg-John Barker, Terri Conley, and Ali Ziegler have psychology backgrounds. Amy C Moors is an interdisciplinary researcher with a background in psychology and women's studies who focuses on relationships, sexuality, and gender. Jes Matsick also has a background in both psychology and women's studies. Christian

Klesse's background is in sociology and gender studies, his work has focused largely on the areas of gender studies and queer theory. Ani Ritchie has a background in sociology, media studies, gender and sexuality. Elisabeth Sheff's website describes her as being an expert on polyamory and her PhD is in sociology. Sheff is the only researcher in this group to be described as focusing on polyamory. This leaning towards psychology is reflected in the journals that the articles used in this thesis. The vast majority of articles were in journals that focused on two main categories: psychology or sexuality. There was some overlap from journals that focused on both psychology and sexuality. Only one journal had feminism in its title: *Feminism & Psychology.* The research into polyamory is heavily focused on psychology or sexuality and this influences the areas that are considered, and the approaches taken. This also means that there is potentially an absence of gender and feminist theories.

Polyamory

Through exploring polyamory, the opportunity arises to critically consider monogamy and question its dominance as the social default. Polyamory provides a challenge to monogamy's ideals and society's "dominant relationship constructions" (Barker, 2005, p. 76). Monogamy is constrained by heteronormativity and the ideals of the active man and passive woman whereas polyamorous communities and literature are very open to queer relationships (Barker, 2005). Sheff (2005, p. 3) suggests that through the study of polyamory it is possible to more completely understand gendered power sexual subjectivities. Sexual subjectivity within monogamy is heterocentric and rife with patriarchal objectification (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2005, p. 28). Women's sexuality is commodified for the convenience of men whilst sexuality continues to be presented (mostly) as a firmly masculine area (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2005, p. 28). Sexual power is limited for women, who lack the power to define their sexuality "outside of rigidly controlled norms" (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2005, p. 30). These restrictions and infringements on women's sexual subjectivity affect agency and self-esteem beyond sexual contexts (Horne & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2005, p. 30). Polyamory offers women a wider range of sexual choices, greater potential for rejecting sexual objectification, and more room to develop their sexual subjectivity (Sheff, 2005, p. 4).

Research has found that many people hold negative thoughts, feelings, and beliefs towards polyamory and polyamorous individuals. Our culture is mononormative and positions monogamy as the normal and most desirable relationship-style (Jordan, Grogan, Muruthi, & Bermúdez, 2016, p. 4). This results in non-monogamy being perceived as inferior or aberrant and contributes to its vilification. Negative beliefs are stronger in those who have more traditional traits, such as being politically conservative or religious (Hutzler, Giuliano, Herselman, & Johnson, 2015, p. 74). There is a correlation between sex-positivity and positive attitudes towards polyamory (Johnson, Giuliano, Herselman, & Hutzler, 2015, p. 74). Those who have thrill-seeking or pleasure-seeking attitudes are also more likely to feel positively

about polyamory (Johnson et al., 2015, p. 321). Johnson et al. (2015, p. 331) found that the more emotional jealousy a participant reported towards their partner flirting with or similarly engaging with another person, the less positive their attitudes towards polyamory.

Polyamory involves maintaining multiple relationships where each partner is aware that it is not a monogamous arrangement and that other partners exist (Barker, 2005; Haritaworn et al., 2006, p. 515; Klesse, 2006, p. 567; Klesse, 2011, p. 4; Sheff, 2005, p. 2). These relationships should be based on love and emotional intimacy, and Benson describes "an openness to loving" as a foundational concept in polyamory (Benson, 2017, p. 31; Klesse, 2006, p. 567). Highlighting a shared valuing of love and emotional is potentially an attempt to appeal to mainstream society which typically values romantic relationships above other types (Klesse, 2014, p. 91). Sexuality is de-emphasised as a feature to accentuate the idea that polyamory is more ethical than other forms of consensual non-monogamy (Klesse, 2006, p. 567). This ethical characterisation is based on polyamory's commitment to honesty, integrity, full disclosure, communication, and self-responsibility (Barker, 2005, p. 81; Brunning, 2016, p. 2; Klesse, 2006, p. 567; Klesse, 2014, p. 91; Sheff, 2005, p. 22). A polyamorous identity does not provide a consistent set of expectations or desires for relationships, and individuals may practice polyamory differently (Benson, 2017, p. 25). These differences highlight the instability and complexity of polyamory as a relationship concept.

Emotional work is often described as a constitutive feature of polyamorous relationships due to the complex and challenging nature of the emotions involved (Aguilar, 2013, p. 119; Brunning, 2016, p.9). Brunning (2016, p. 10-12) goes so far as to say that without emotional work a relationship cannot be truly polyamorous. Participants in polyamorous relationships may describe this as being beneficial to their own personal development (Aguilar, 2013, p. 119). Sexual and emotional energy directed at a new partner might be confronting or challenging for any existing partners and could cause anxiety or jealousy.

There is some debate regarding whether polyamory is an orientation or a relationship practice; that is whether polyamory is an innate identity or something people choose to do (Klesse, 2014, p. 90). Some poly-identified people describe polyamory as something that is "hard wired", similar to a sexual orientation (Klesse, 2014, p. 82).

Polyamory's distinctness from other consensual non-monogamies

Within these forms of common consensual non-monogamies, only polyamory allows for the formation of romantic connections. Swinging and open relationships require extra-dyadic relationships to be purely sexual, whilst polyamory's core idea is to foster emotionally intimate long-term relationships (Sheff & Hammers, 2011, p. 488). In swinging, there is emotional exclusivity or monogamy whilst being sexually non-monogamous, and long-term commitment to a sole primary partner is encouraged (Klesse, 2011, p. 20; Sheff & Hammers,

2011, p. 488). Klesse described polyamory as being distinct from non-monogamy as it is an ethical style (Klesse, 2006, p. 571). These suggestions of being more loving and ethical serves to "elevate" polyamory above sex-focused or casual relationships (Haritaworn et al., 2006, p. 518). Polyamory encourages practitioners to actively maintain and work on their relationships so they might last long-term (Klesse, 2011, p. 20).

It also important to acknowledge that polyamory is distinct from polygamy. Polygamy is plural marriage whose typical form is one husband with several wives (polygyny). Polyamory gives equal opportunity to all genders to have the number of partners they desire (Sheff & Hammers, 2011, p. 488). There is an emphasis on *women's sexual agency and liberation"* in polyamory that overlaps with feminist ideals and resists the patriarchal traditions of restricting women's sexuality and choices (Aguilar, 2013, p. 122).

Monogamy and mononormativity

Monogamy is the "happily ever after" that so many people set as their life goal (Barker & Langdridge, 2010, p. 752). In monogamy, romantic and sexual attraction are restricted to one partner at a time to create a dyadic and exclusive relationship (Brunning, 2016, p. 2). Heterosexuality and monogamy are heavily normalised and central to how most people conceive of relationships (Benson, 2017, p. 24). Serial monogamy is the norm, with people moving from partner to partner or having sequential marriages (Robinson, 1997, p. 149). This string of monogamous relationships is normalised through the idea that people will settle down once they've met "the one". Monogamy is institutionalised through marriage and the idealisation of both the nuclear familiar and monogamous romance (Aguilar, 2013, p. 107).

Jealousy is held as an innate proof of love and to reinforce arguments for the naturalness of monogamy (Aguilar, 2013, p. 107). Through the use of jealousy and exclusivity, monogamy privileges the interests of capitalism, patriarchy, and men (Robinson, 1997, p. 154). Women are considered as property to be owned whilst men benefit from their emotional and physical over-investment in the relationship (Robinson, 1997, p. 145).

Mononormativity describes the "dominant assumptions of the normalcy and naturalness of monogamy" that are present in political, popular, and psychological discourses (Barker & Langdridge, 2010, p. 750). Monogamy is often presented as the only morally acceptable or "natural" way to have a relationship, this frames any alternatives to monogamy as "unnatural". The pervasive bias towards monogamy means that it typically goes unquestioned as being the superior relationship style (Conley, Ziegler, et al., 2013 p. 124). Aguilar (2013, p. 106) states that monogamy is not just treated as the most successful and only relationship model. The discourse around monogamy tends to degrade non-monogamous relationship-styles such as swinging or polyamory, and creates shame and isolation (Jordan et al., 2016, p. 2).

Anderson (2010, p. 853) suggests that the definition of monogamy is individualised and socially malleable, and that there are multiple categories of monogamy. These categories include physical monogamy, desirous monogamy, social monogamy and emotional monogamy (Anderson, 2010, p. 854). Physical monogamy requires having a physical relationship with only one person, whilst desirous monogamy is only fantasising about one sexual partner (Anderson, 2010, p. 854). Social monogamy is the desire to be thought of monogamous by peers even if the relationship is not strictly monogamous (Anderson, 2010, p. 854). Finally, emotional monogamy requires reserving emotional intimacy for only one partner (Anderson, 2010, p. 854). Through some combination of these varying definitions it is possible for those who have had extradyadic sexual intercourse to still consider themselves monogamous (Anderson, 2010, p. 854). Affairs are common enough that Klesse (2011, p. 4) suggests they can be "considered to be an institutionalised part of the intimate and sexual landscape".

Polyamory challenges the template and rules of monogamy and provides a new template of sorts for engaging in multiple romantic, sexual, intimate relationships in an open manner (Wosick-Correa, 2010, p. 44). Jealousy is described in many polyamorous communities as something to be engaged with and overcome rather than avoided as it is in monogamy (Aguilar, 2013, p. 119).

The importance of media representation

Non-monogamy is portrayed negatively when represented in mainstream media, and typically only infidelity is shown (Barker, 2005, p. 80). Consensually non-monogamous relationships are frequently presented as "psychologically damaging, immature, and selfish" in the media (Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2013 p. 4). Seeking sex outside of a primary dyadic is portrayed as a last-ditch effort of a troubled relationship whilst the idea that the couple might have agreed to such an arrangement is discounted (Conley, Moors, et al., 2013, p. 4). Where any form of non-monogamy is represented, it typically involves a focus on infidelity, adultery or promiscuity (Barker, 2005, p. 80; Hutzler et al., 2015, p. 71). These depictions are typically accompanied by severe punishment or terrible outcomes to reinforce its undesirability or serve as a cautionary tale (Barker, 2005, p. 80; Ritchie & Barker, 2006, p. 587). When consensual forms of non-monogamy make their rare appearance in mainstream media, the participants are presented as being "weird" or "New Age" and face negative consequences for choosing non-monogamy (Barker, 2005, p. 80). Hutzler et al. (2015, p. 71) found a positive relationship between exposure to polyamory and attitudes towards polyamory. This suggests that more media representations of polyamory could reduce stigma towards polyamory. *You Me Her* is therefore especially important because it is ground-breaking polyamory representation in mainstream television programs. The reception of *You*

Me Her and its impact on the polyamorous community has the potential to influence polyamory's inclusion in future television shows, movies, and the media in general.

Key Terms

A set of terms have been created by scholars and activists in the polyamorous community to describe the unique aspects of polyamorous experiences that conventional language could not adequately or accurately describe. These terms are by no means universally used in polyamorous communities and there are likely to be differences between communities and cultures. Ritchie and Barker (2006, p. 585) describe this practice of language creation as enabling "new ways of experiencing as well as expressing sexual stories". Custom language helps polyamorous people to conceptualise how their identities, relationships, and emotions might be incompatible with the dominant mainstream ideas surrounding relationships and love (Ritchie & Barker, 2006, p. 585).

Consensual non-monogamy is used as an umbrella term for explicit agreement between partners that they may enter into additional romantic and sexual relationships (Cohen & Wilson, 2016, p. 1; Conley, Ziegler, et al., 2013, p. 124; Moors, Conley, Edelstein, & Chopik, 2015, p. 223). Polyamory, swinging, and open relationships are examples of consensual non-monogamy. 'Swinging' is where partners agree to have purely sexual relationships with others, and this is often engaged in as a couple and/or at parties (Moors et al., 2015, p. 223). In open relationships, partners agree they are able to have sexual relationships with other people, but pursue them as individuals (Conley & Moors, 2014, p. 56).

The term polyamory comes from the Greek "poly" and Latin "amory" and means "many loves" (Klesse, 2011, p. 4). Polyamory remains a disputed term amongst communities, practitioners, and theorists but common themes exist that can be brought together to produce a loose definition (Barker, 2005, p. 75; Klesse, 2006, p. 567). A flexible and less prescriptive definition is consistent with the ethos of polyamory.

Polyamory is used as both a noun to describe those who choose polyamorous relationships and also as an adjective to describe something with "polyamorous" qualities such as a relationship, person, or discussion group (Sheff & Hammers, 2011, p. 488; Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 3). Infidelity is the most commonly thought of form of non-monogamy and this history of connection constrains the language available to describe having multiple concurrent relationships. As such, there is a repetition of the terms "openness", "honesty", and "ethical" throughout polyamorous communities and self-help literature (Ritchie & Barker, 2006, p. 585). These terms resist the negative connotations of infidelity to position polyamory as a distinct and positive practice.

The polyamorous community has developed many terms to describe how many people are involved in relationships. Some of the more common terms are 'dyad', 'triad', 'V', 'quad', and 'polycule'. Dyad is used to describe the relationship between two people, and is still used in polyamory because it does not specify that a relationship is monogamous or exclusive (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 227; Winston, 2017, p. 71). A triad (or throuple) consists of three people who are all romantically involved (Ritchie & Barker, 2006, p. 592; Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 8; Winston, 2017, p. 128). "V" also describes three people, but it is where one person is involved with the other two, whilst those two are not themselves in a relationship (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 231; Winston, 2017, p. 128). A quad has four people and often starts with two couples starting a group relationship (Ritchie & Barker, 2006, p. 592; Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 8; Winston, 2017, p. 128). The definition given by Veaux and Rickert (2014) states that the four need not all be romantically involved for it to be a quad. Often polyamorous relationships form a network rather than being a discreet triad or quad, and an individual might be in multiple triads or a combination of dyads, triads, Vs, and other formations. This complex network can be referred to as a "polycule" (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 401; Winston, 2017, p. 128).

It is not enough to simply describe the number of individuals involved, there are also terms that indicate relationship dynamics. "Group marriages" are where those involved behave in a manner consistent with stereotypical marriage: they share finances, a home, and often have children (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 8). This arrangement is often "closed" or "polyfidelitous". "Polyfidelity" describes an agreement to have sexual relationships only within an agreed upon group such as a triad or quad and to not pursue other outside sexual partners without the explicit approval of everyone in the group (Hardy & Easton, 2017, p. 69; Klesse, 2006, p. 574; Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 303; Winston, 2017, p. 34). Relationships may take a hierarchical structure where a person considers one partner (or possibly more) a priority over their others (Ritchie & Barker, 2006, p. 592; Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 54). This might be reflected in the activities they do together, emotional intensity, interconnection or whose needs are considered above others where there is a conflict (Ritchie & Barker, 2006, p. 592; Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 54). The partners being prioritised are described as being "primary" partners, whilst others are "secondaries" (Barker, 2005, p. 76; Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 24). Primaries are often "anchor" (or "nesting") partners, which is where the relationship is typically one of long-term commitment, shared housing, financial entanglement, and entails a "significant time commitment" (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 24). In effect it is the relationship an individual would typically shape their other relationships around. Some choose to practice "Don't ask, don't tell" (DADT) relationships: this is where partners do not want to know any details of each other's relationships and would prefer not to meet their partner's partner (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 39). Relationship dynamics are a hot topic

in polyamorous communities, and the decision to practise polyamory in a hierarchical or "Don't ask, don't tell" manner can be controversial.

There is often a need to describe the relationship between two people specifically rather than in the context of their larger network. The term "metamour" is commonly used to describe a partner's other partner (Hardy & Easton, 2017, p. 219; Ritchie & Barker, 2006, p. 593; Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 191). This term was potentially created to avoid language used in infidelity, for example "the other woman" or "mistress". The term "significant other" or "family" might be used to describe someone with whom the person has an intimate or important relationship with but not a sexual one (Ritchie & Barker, 2006, p. 593). There are also terms used to describe more complicated links; for example, a partner's children, a third parent, a metamour's partner. However, these terms are not used consistently enough to have appeared in any academic research or even in the literature I read produced by the community.

Whilst the emotions involved in polyamorous relationships are not completely unique to polyamory, the approach to them might be slightly different. This is reflected in the manipulation of language to show a degree of distinctness. "New relationship energy" (NRE) is essentially what is considered to be the 'honeymoon' phase of a new relationship and is also present in monogamous relationships (Hardy & Easton, 2017, p. 216). It is the feeling of giddy excitement and infatuation that often accompanies the beginning of a relationship and typically lasts a few months, but can linger for longer (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 3; Winston, 2017, p. 152). NRE might negatively impact existing relationships as it can lead to skewed perceptions due to their being relatively less exciting and may ultimately result in their being neglected. Jealousy is a term that the polyamorous community has challenged through their creation of new language around the concept. Wosick-Correa (2010, p. 44) suggests that this might reflect a "a resistance towards mononormative language". Saying that you are feeling "wobbly", "the wibbles", or "shaky" describes milder feelings of discomfort or insecurity than using "jealous" and has less negative connotations (Conley, Ziegler, et al., 2013, p. 130; Ritchie & Barker, 2006, p. 592; Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 3). A unique concept, "compersion" is the opposite of jealousy and describes happiness arising from a partner's enjoyment of their relationship with another partner (Klesse, 2011, p. 15; Ritchie & Barker, 2006, p. 595). These alternate terms, and the creation of its antonym, reflect the polyamory's complex approach to jealousy.

You Me Her

You Me Her is an American-Canadian television show set in Portland, Oregon. It focuses on a married couple (Jack and Emma) who form a polyamorous triad with a younger woman (Izzy).

There are two seasons of *You Me Her* and each has 10 episodes that run for roughly 30 minutes. The official description for the show is:

What begins as an impulsive "date" between suburban husband Jack and neophyte escort Izzy spins into a whirlwind three-way affair including Jack's wife Emma, who's been keeping secrets of her own. Over a span of just 10 days, their "arrangement" becomes something else entirely: A real romance with real stakes involving three real people. In Season 2, the complex realities of polyamory and "throupling" set in: What happens when this peculiar rom-com fades to black? Can they prove their best, truest, happiest lives really are together, even when it's complicated and difficult and more conventional alternatives beckon?

On the official site for *You Me Her*, the show is described as "TV's first polyromantic comedy". John Scott Shepherd, the show's writer, wanted to make polyamory relatable to a broader audience (Miller, 2016). This might be why the main roles are filled by white middle-class Americans with professional careers and/or career goals. Shepherd aimed to make it about more than just polyamory, and create a commentary on "love and sex and the important of sex in relationships" (Grobar, 2016). Sex is a central theme throughout the show, not just in the lead 'throuple' but in the more traditional monogamous relationships around them. *You Me Her* is a ground-breaking show for polyamorous representation which is why it is vitally important that it is accurate and sensitive.

The first season opens with Jack and Emma seeking therapy for the lack of sex in their relationship. Jack's hires an escort to help him practice his flirting and regain some of his sexual confidence. The escort is a psychology graduate student called Izzy reluctantly become an escort like her best friend Nina to pay for her studies and rent. Jack becomes infatuated with Izzy and cannot stop thinking about her after their one encounter. Emma finds out about Jack hiring Izzy and demands to know all the details. Jack and Emma end up having the passionate sexual encounter they have both been missing. Emma finds Izzy by pretending to hire her because she wants to find out who Jack was so interested in. They end up having chemistry and Emma finds herself falling for Izzy just like Jack is. The next nine days (the whole first season spans ten days), is filled with drama as they try to negotiate pressures from their friends, society, and Jack's conservative job. Initially they try to frame the relationship between the three of them as a business relationship where Jack and Emma hire Izzy, and they take it in turns to have dates with her. Izzy becomes uncomfortable when she develops romantic feelings towards them but is still treated like an escort. This leads her to try to form her own romantic relationship with an on-and-off fling (Andy). Ultimately, her relationship with Andy is unsuccessful because she is too distracted by her feelings for Jack and Emma. Eventually, they end the business relationship (Izzy rips up the check) and they try to form a romantic relationship. However, everything goes awry, and Jack and Emma end up trying to

contain the situation by reinstating the business arrangement – which Izzy is not at all happy with. They break up and Izzy decides to move back home to Colorado to get space. Everyone is miserable with the prospect so Jack and Emma chase Izzy to the airport and manage to intercept her. They invite her to come home with her and the season ends. Along the way, Emma comes out as bisexual to Jack and Jack quits his job.

Season two picks up right where the first season left off, with Jack and Emma picking Izzy up from the airport. This season deals with the consequences of their decision to continue the triad relationship. Jack, Emma, and Izzy come out to all their neighbours (and Jack's brother) at a party, and after initially trying to hide Izzy from Emma's parents they also reveal their relationship to them. Jack becomes increasingly jealous about the connection between Izzy and Emma which leads to a huge fight and him briefly moving out. During this jealous phase, Jack reconnects with a former lover called Ruby who never really got over breaking up with. The triad struggles with what their future will look like, especially as Jack and Emma had been trying to conceive for some time. Jack proposes that Izzy should be their surrogate and they should live together, ideas that the triad embrace quickly and without much discussion. Throughout the season Emma becomes dissatisfied with her job but is offered an incredibly attractive job opportunity in another city – something she fails to discuss with Jack. The season ends with Emma getting on a private jet having taken the new job without telling Jack or Izzy where she is going.

Jack and Emma are both professionals with full-time careers: Jack is a school counsellor and Emma is an architect. They are well-established with their own home in a nice suburban neighbourhood and have been trying to conceive. Izzy is in a very different life stage to Jack and Emma and is much younger. She is a graduate student who engages in sex work to pay her tuition and her rent. Izzy clarifies that she does not have sex for money, she simply provides company. It is something she does reluctantly and wants to quit, which is a contrast to Nina who seems to relish her job. However, both Nina and Izzy quit their escort jobs when they enter serious relationships. Despite escorting being how Izzy meets Jack at the whole story starts, it is not something that is explored in the show.

Chapter 2: Power

The second chapter of this thesis scrutinizes power dynamics within polyamorous relationships and how this is reflected in *You Me Her.* Gender, age, socioeconomic background, and education are all factors that can influence power dynamics in intimate relationships. These intersecting factors are critical issues within the fields of feminism and gender studies. In *You Me Her*, these issues are reflected in Emma, Jack, and Izzy's relationship. Izzy is not only far younger than Jack and Emma, but she is a woman who is struggling financially to pay for a level of education already achieved by the other two. Whilst an intentional relationship hierarchy can be part of polyamory, this is not explored in *You Me Her* and a desired equality is implied. In *You Me Her*, there is an imbalance of power between Jack and Emma as the original couple and Izzy who enters the pre-established relationship. This results in a level of marginalisation of Izzy as the third in the triad and is a recognized issue in polyamory. How triads are formed often involves a practice known as "unicorn hunting" which aggravates this power gap between the original couple and the new person. Izzy is shown to have reduced power in *You Me Her* and I briefly discuss examples of this. One way in which Izzy is disempowered is her treatment as disposable by Jack and Emma. Their reluctance to commit to her or a shared future leaves Izzy perpetually scrambling for stability. Throughout this chapter it is important to remember that Jack met Izzy through her sex work, where he paid her for simulated intimacy. An arrangement was then struck up that Izzy would escort exclusively for Jack and Emma, dating them each in turn. This employer/client relationship power dynamic persists even after the arrangement is dissolved and is therefore crucial to understanding the relationship.

Dominance of the couple and marginalisation of the third

In polyamory, power dynamics are complicated by how complex the arrangement might be and the fact they are likely in flux due to the addition and subtraction of partners (Jordan et al., 2016, p. 1). In *You Me Her* we see a version of hierarchical polyamory that is not explicitly depicted or stated but vaguely hinted at. This dynamic results in the marginalisation of Izzy in favour of Jack and Emma who are the primary couple.

Hierarchical polyamory, as previously mentioned, involves labelling the level of priority assigned to partners, for example primary partners get more time and attention than secondary partners. Primary partners are "privileged" in terms of time commitment, emotional involvement, and decision-making (Brunning, 2016, p. 3). In a hierarchical polyamory structure, secondary or tertiary partners tend to have less decision making power than primary partners (Jordan et al., 2016, p. 6). For secondary or lower partners there might be a pressure to conform to the desires of the primary partners to remain in the relationship or from a lack of power to resist (Jordan et al., 2016, p. 7). A hierarchical structure can also

affect how financial and emotional resources are distributed between partners (Jordan et al., 2016, p. 7). Jack and Emma are consistently positioned together with Izzy as an addition. While there is a no hierarchy explicitly described in *You Me Her*, Izzy is treated like a secondary. Izzy is often at the mercy of the decisions made by Jack and Emma and must go along with what they want so she can stay with them. She clearly wants more than a business arrangement to begin with, but Jack and Emma make that decision before she can really get her voice heard. Mid-first season, Izzy wants to move in with Jack and Emma, but they are hesitant, so the discussion does not happen until several months later, (late in the second season). Jack and Emma set the pace of the relationship and make decisions whilst Izzy is more passive and unable to have an active role. Considerations of Izzy's welfare and future are sidelined in favour of the concerns of the primary couple, Emma and Jack. Emma says in season 1, episode 7: "Jack, where's it possibly gonna go from here? I mean, h... how does she realistically fit into our... our work, our jobs, our lives?". After breaking up with Izzy (season 1, episode 9), Jack and Emma lie in bed discussing their future and the possibility of having children together. Jack says "long after Izzy has moved on with another guy and another family, this story will still be about you and me, Em, okay? Always was, always will be." This reinforces the idea that the show is not focused on Jack and Emma and Izzy and their respective relationships with each other but rather Jack and Emma's relationship and their relationship with Izzy.

Deborah Anapol (2010, Kindle Location 1553) makes the distinction between "power with" where decision-making is mutually agreed upon, and "power over" where someone is more dominant and has more power than another. In relationships practising "power with", it is still possible for one person to take on more leadership responsibilities, but the crucial difference is that everyone has agreed this is acceptable. When a couple adds a new partner, there is the tendency for the couple to set the terms of the relationship. This gives them the power even if they believe they are offering equality because it is ultimately something they are *giving* on their terms (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 24). When Emma, Izzy, and Jack first sit down to discuss what has happened and how to move forward, Emma says "… we, that is, Jack and I, have crossed a threshold…" (season 1, episode 3). This comment is ostensibly about how the three of them will move forward but it ends up being shaped as how Emma and Jack will, together, move forward with Izzy. When discussing moving forward there is the tone that Izzy needs to fit in with Jack and Emma's lives rather than an equally considered amalgamation. Jack and Emma prioritise each other's vulnerabilities and fear without giving the same consideration to Izzy. This is a common pitfall for couples opening up their relationship as they fail to recognise that the new partner is also assuming risk entering into the relationship (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 36). Jack and Emma often talk about how their

lives could be damaged or negatively affected if people found out about Izzy, but they do not discuss how Izzy's life is being impacted by their relationship.

Unicorn hunting and "the couple"

When a heterosexual couple opens up their relationship they often try to date together and want a bisexual woman to complete a polyfidelitous triad (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 8). The couple are essentially a "package deal" so the woman must date and/or be sexually intimate with them both (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 303). By keeping themselves together and the third at arm's length, the couple hopes to avoid jealousy, one partner being left out, and any uncomfortable feelings (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 36). The woman must also only date the couple so they will not feel "threatened by her other partners" (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 56). This arrangement is commonly referred to as "unicorn hunting". A bisexual woman who is willing to become involved sexually and romantically with a couple, is referred to as a "unicorn" because they are as rare as the mythical creature (Sheff, 2013, p. 12; Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 303; Winston, 2017, p. 129). "Unicorn hunting" is a common way for couples to try polyamory and is generally treated as a negative practice (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 303; Winston, 2017, p. 129). This arrangement is tricky to find and then hard to sustain (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 303). In YMH, Izzy is essentially a 'unicorn'. *You Me Her* uncritically presents Izzy as a unicorn but it is an important representation of a common issue in polyamorous relationships.

At the beginning of season 2, Izzy calls Jack and Emma out on their treatment of her in the relationship. When Jack and Emma go automatically to sit in the front of the car with Izzy in the back, Izzy says "Uh, no. What's happening here, it's called "couples privilege […] You both assume the unicorn would ride in the back. That's me. The unicorn… the third." Izzy falls into many of the criteria that characterise a "unicorn": she is not allowed to date outside the triad, must "disappear" when friends, family or co-workers are around or it is otherwise inconvenient, and has very little say in how the relationship is structured or the conditions that have been set (Sheff, 2013, p. 12; Winston, 2017, p. 129). Izzy is forced to end her romantic relationship with Andy and numerous plotlines are based around hiding her from those outside the triad and a few trusted friends. There is also an element of an "us" (Jack and Emma) and "her" (Izzy) that is often present in unicorn hunting. The show's title reflects this as Izzy is the "her" and the language distances her from the couple, "You" and "Me". When describing a typical unicorn, Winston (2017, p. 129) describes that they are often only allowed to interact with the couple together, without one-on-one dates or intimacy in order to develop an equal relationship with both. From the beginning Jack and Emma pursued a relationship with Izzy that involved one-on-one dates rather than following the previously

described arrangement. However, they are frequently shown hanging out as a triad and having threesomes. While Izzy would undoubtedly fit the description of a unicorn, Jack and Emma did not initially seek out this arrangement purposefully so are only questionably "unicorn *hunters*".

The idea of Izzy being added to the couple is stated outright in season 1 episode 5, when Jack says: "I don't think there's anything passive about inviting a third party into our marriage". Whilst this might seem innocuous as it's still relatively early on, it is pervasive throughout both seasons. Izzy refers to herself as "the third" in season 2, episode 1, which is an acknowledgement of her positioning within the triad. Not once does Emma or Jack refer to themselves as being "the third" because they are the primary relationship. In season 2 episode 6, when Jack is explaining the relationship to Ruby (an ex-girlfriend from college, and a colleague at his new job) he says: "Emma and I brought another woman into our relationship". When couples come together to add a third person and form a triad, there is often a feeling that the couple retains more power than the person who is added (Sheff, 2005, p. 17). When Izzy walks in on Emma and Jack talking about the relationship and questions whether they were talking behind her back, she is quickly rebuked by Emma who says: "Well, Isabelle, we're married, so we're kind of talking behind the whole world's back, like every day, all the time, so..." (season 1, episode 7). This is a use of couple's privilege to shut down Izzy's questions and reminds her that the relationship between Emma and Jack is "special".

Izzy is often visually presented as being separate from Jack and Emma's relationship. In season 1 episode 8, Izzy visits Emma and Jack to hang out and afterwards they lie on the floor talking. Izzy is positioned in the middle of Jack and Emma but lying with her head by their feet. Conversations are shot with either Jack and Emma in view or Izzy alone. This camera work reflects the tone of the conversation where Jack and Emma are trying to work out *together* how to talk to Izzy about their desire to end the arrangement soon. Jack and Emma hold the power of their relationship between the three of them and this is influences how decisions are made in the triad. Jack and Emma support each other in discussions whilst Izzy is left to literally stand against them alone. This division is reflected on the show's official website, where on the character description page Emma and Jack have a shared biography and Izzy is separate.

Izzy's reduced power

Elisabeth Sheff conducted 40 in-depth interviews (split evenly between men and women), and undertook extensive participant observation at polyamory support group meetings, workshops, and national conferences (Sheff, 2005, p. 7). In one interview, an interviewee (Dylan) felt that the third person was often treated as a "fantasy" rather than a person or an

equal (Sheff, 2005, p. 20). In the first season of *You Me Her* Jack and Emma frequently speak about Izzy as though she is not there, even whilst she is sitting with them. This serves to dehumanise and objectify her, whilst diminishing her power in the relationship. In season 1 episode 3 Jack, Emma, and Izzy sit down to discuss the relationship:

Jack:	She's like our mutual hall pass.
Emma:	Yeah, we each get two sessions a week with her? I mean... I mean, you.
Izzy:	Thank you for remembering that I'm both present and a human being.

Emma and Jack realise that this was unfair to Izzy, however the next day Emma says: "So how do we decide who gets her first?" which shows a continuation of the same mindset. They are both shown realising that was a "gross" way to speak about her but these mistakes continue with only token resolutions. They frequently neglect to acknowledge Izzy's personhood and instead treat her as a one-dimensional person who exists to meet their sexual needs and enhance their relationship.

Whilst there are plenty of smaller examples throughout the two seasons of Jack and Emma making decisions without Izzy's input, in season 2 episode 8 a significant decision comes up. Jack and Emma begin discussing Izzy potentially being a birth surrogate for them (that is, [brief explanation of what surrogacy means in their case] without her being present. When Izzy enters the room, they stop the conversation and pretend that nothing was happening. After Izzy says she wants to move, Jack blurts "*We want you to have our baby.*". Emma does tell Izzy that they had only just discussed it, but it is nevertheless apparent that Jack and Emma had time to discuss the idea before involving Izzy.

Uncertainty around commitment to/in the relationship

One of Sheff's (2005, p. 20) polyamorous interviewees described the third partner as often being perceived as "the disposable partner". We can see this in *You Me Her* as Jack and Emma repeatedly break up with Izzy when things seem too hard. Emma acknowledges this tendency when they hide Izzy from Emma's visiting parents, saying "Do you think we're making a mistake sending Izzy away every time she's an inconvenience? I mean, we already broke up with her twice" (season 2, episode 7). In the same episode Izzy confides to her best friend, Nina, that she is worried that the relationship will end without her having any input. Jack and Emma show Izzy that she is "disposable" by pushing her away whenever there is a threat to their relationship or their reputations. In contrast, when Jack and Emma experience conflict in their relationship they stay together, talk it out, or fight for the relationship.

Season 1 deals frequently with the lack of clarity about the nature of the relationship, with many conversations dedicated to working it out. Nina (Izzy's friend) refers to it as "some freaky version of sex therapy" (season 1, episode 3), and as a "business arrangement" (season 1, episode 7). In season 1 episode 7, Nina says she thinks that Jack and Emma led Izzy on and then left her to simmer. Later, Nina tells Izzy that she needs to find out if Jack and Emma are really interested before wasting any more time (season 2, episode 7). This illustrates the ongoing issue that Izzy has with her position in the relationship and whether there is a relationship beyond casual sex.

In season 1 episode 8, when Izzy misconstrues a comment and asks if she was being invited to move in, Jack says "I'm just... I'm... I'm actually confused. Did you think this was permanent?" and follows it up with "I mean, we have careers. We have neighbours. I mean, we can't just bring you home to... to introduce you to the parents. As what?" (season 1, episode 8). Izzy is upset because she thought they would try and make the relationship work and saw a future together. Whilst Jack and Emma saw no future for the three of them, Izzy was convinced they could make it work. Jack and Emma seem to be shown as incapable of conceiving of a future that is non-monogamous or non-traditional.

Representation of power dynamics

You Me Her is mixed in its representation of power dynamics in polyamory and in the relationship between Jack, Emma, and Izzy. Whilst the show does include Izzy calling Jack and Emma out on their treatment of her as the third in their relationship and challenges their couple privilege, there is a lot that goes unquestioned or unexamined. There is no critical exploration of how Izzy navigates her precarious position somewhere between being a primary or secondary partner. Instead, the show focuses more on how Jack and Emma try to wedge Izzy into their existing relationship dynamic and their lives. Izzy lacks power in her relationship with Jack and Emma, but this is almost treated as an inevitability, as though it is only natural that she would float along with what they wanted rather than asserting her own desires. This begins from how Izzy is essentially positioned as a 'unicorn' by Jack and Emma. This is an example of the most heteronormative and conventionally desirable polyamory; especially as Izzy is an attractive and much younger woman than the primary couple. Izzy's freedom and self-determination are limited by the relationship from the offset: she is pressured to cease her relationship with Andy, keep her relationship with Jack and Emma secret, and disappear any time she might be inconvenient to them. The relationship is not something created for the three of them, but a version of the relationship between Jack and Emma that has been modified just enough to squeeze Izzy in. It focuses on how a relationship with Izzy can benefit Jack and Emma. As a result, Izzy is in a sort of limbo when considering her future. Jack and Emma have their marriage and their desire for children, which is a normative pathway, but they seem incapable of deciding what a future as a triad would look

like. Izzy is treated as a phase, or as some*thing* disposable rather than *someone* with needs, desire, and a future. The monogamous relationships in the show are presented as more certain and steady than the polyamorous triad. *You Me Her* dips its toe into representing power dynamics but fails to achieve the significant depth the subject deserves.

Chapter 3: Sexuality

Polyamory has the potential to challenge heteronormative assumptions about relationships, but, like power dynamics, sexuality is overlooked in *You Me Her*. This chapter focuses on two main areas of sexuality representation: of long-term monogamous relationships and bisexuality. *You Me Her* has three main heteronormative relationships it focuses on: Jack and Emma, Carmen and Dave (their close friends), and Jack's brother Gabe's marriage. All three have stagnant sex lives that they try to reinvigorate with various methods. Both Jack and Gabe hire escorts, whilst Dave works through the issues with his wife Carmen. *You Me Her* shows nonmonogamy – both polyamory and infidelity – as methods for revitalising long-term sexual relationships. The potential for polyamory to aid in addressing non-sexual relationship issues is overlooked as *You Me Her* focuses on the sexual aspects of relationships. This focus arguably reflects our cultural emphasis on a satisfying sex life being a crucial part of a happy relationship or marriage. As bisexual women are a significant proportion of polyamorous communities, their representation in *You Me Her* is important. Both Izzy and Emma are bisexual, but the rest of the cast is overwhelmingly straight. I take the time in this chapter to examine how *You Me Her* approaches Izzy and Emma's bisexuality and the overall necessity of bisexual representation in the media.

Sex in long-term relationships and the use of nonmonogamy to "revitalise" sex life

Culturally, sex is framed as "desirable, if not mandatory, to ensure marital harmony" (Elliott & Umberson, 2008, p. 391). There is a positive relationship between marital satisfaction and sexual satisfaction (Elliott & Umberson, 2008 p. 392). Sex can be used as a barometer of a marriage's health, and ultimately as a gauge of success (Elliott & Umberson, 2008, p. 396). This affects partners' behaviour towards sex, because to fall into a non-sexual marriage can be readily understood as failure. *You Me Her* opens with Jack and Emma lying to their therapist about how much sex they are having and offering excuses for why the number might seem low. This is supported by their friends Dave and Carmen who would not want people to know they had not had sex in two months. Later in the first episode Emma comes home from a friend's divorce party and tells Jack that the divorce was the result of the couple "falling deeply out of lust and into like" (season 1, episode 1). An inadequate sexual relationship is presented as a reason for ending a marriage, and thus the importance of sex in marriage is reinforced.

Elliott and Umberson (2008, p.391) conducted 62 in-depth interviews with 31 married couples who had been married for 7 years or longer. They interviewed couples separately so they would talk more openly about sensitive aspects of their sexual relationship that might cause conflict or where a hierarchical power relationship might influence responses. Elliott and Umberson (2008, p. 398) found 37% of respondents worked to change their "sexual feelings, attitudes, and behaviours" for the benefit of their relationships. Whilst there was no significant difference between the levels of men and women doing so, there was a gendered difference in the form of these alterations. Wives were found to make a greater effort to be sexual, to want more sex or at least be more willing to have sex (Elliott & Umberson, 2008, p. 398). In contrast, husbands tried to reduce their sexual desire and focus on the quality of their sexual encounters rather than how frequent they were (Elliott & Umberson, 2008, p. 398). Additionally, husbands expected their wives to perform desire even when they did not experience it (Elliott & Umberson, 2008, p. 398). We see this in Jack and Emma's relationship where Jack wants more sex and Emma seems indifferent. It is this imbalance in libido that leads Jack to seek out an escort (Izzy). They also seem more concerned about what a "normal" amount of sex is than what they want from their sexual relationship.

Research into the sex lives of married people commonly finds that over the course of the relationship there is a decline in the frequency of sexual activity (Morton & Gorzalka, 2015, p. 600). As marriage duration increases, both men and women find sex less "rewarding" (Elliott & Umberson, 2008, p. 392). There is no single clear cause for these issues, but partner familiarity is one likely culprit. Habituation is a process where repeated presentation of a stimulus results in the response strength or magnitude decreases (O'Donohue & Plaud, 1994, p. 323). Sexual habituation is the idea that partners become desensitised to one another as sexual stimulus (Ziegler, Matsick, Moors, Rubin, & Conley, 2014, p. 5). It is an area that is not heavily researched but studies have shown that female and male sexual arousal can habituate (O'Donohue & Plaud, 1994, p. 323). It seems likely therefore that in a long-term relationship, partners may habituate towards each other (Ziegler et al., 2014, p. 5). Across the two seasons of MYH there are numerous references to no longer being attracted to long-term partners. Jack's brother, Gabe, says: "Dude, honestly, does anyone fantasise about their wife?" (season 1, episode 2). Later, Dave offers up a similar sentiment: "Everybody imagines another person when they're with their partner". This fits in with the idea of sexual habituation: the imagery of an individual long-term partner is no longer arousing so they choose to imagine someone more novel.

There is a common perception (or misconception) that polyamory or non-monogamy can solve sexual and emotional relationship issues, and *You Me Her* taps into this. Conley and Moors (2014, p. 56) propose that by "adopting" the tenets of polyamory, monogamous

relationships might improve over time. In *You Me Her* we see Jack and Emma seek to address their mismatched sexual desires through their encounters, and then relationship, with Izzy.

Emma and Jack are clearly not meeting each other's sexual needs at the beginning of the series, and we see this echoed in the couples around them. Their best friends Dave and Carmen struggle with their sex life after becoming parents, and it is Jack's brother (Gabe) who suggests the idea of sleeping with an escort because that was his solution for his own wife not meeting his sexual needs. When Jack and Izzy first meet, Jack tells her: "The reason I hired you is to save my marriage" (season 1, episode 1). It was Jack's brother's suggestion for Jack to hire an escort to bring sexual passion back into his marriage because it had worked well for him. In both cases this plan was non-consensual non-monogamy because their wives were unaware. Both men were using non-monogamy as a method for revitalising their relationships or addressing some aspect that was seemingly lacking.

At the beginning of the first episode Jack and Emma are shown talking to a therapist about how much sex they have (six times a month, they say), and then later reveal in a conversation with Carmen and Dave it is far less than this. In contrast, at the end of the episode Jack and Emma have sex. This is after both Jack and Emma have met up with Izzy one-on-one, and Jack has told Izzy that he would not see her again. The next day, Jack describes the night before with Emma to his brother Gabe as being "crazy sex", "real sex", that they had made out for the first time in years, and that he thought they would do it again that night (season 1, episode 2). In a similar conversation with Carmen, Emma says "I kind of feel like I'm dangling my marriage out a 10-story window right now. But at the same time, I'm into him more than ever. You know, I want him again" (season 1, episode 2). From very early on, there is the narrative that Izzy's presence in Jack and Emma's lives and relationship has revitalised their sex life and rekindled their interest in one another. At the beginning of You Me Her Emma asks Jack if the idea of falling "out of lust and deeply into like" sounds familiar to him (season 1, episode 1). Jack reiterates this idea in a conversation with his brother where he says that he and Emma are "trying to manufacture passion" (season 1, episode 1). These comments suggest there is a lack of organic sexual excitement between them compared to when they first started dating. When Jack and Emma begin sleeping with Izzy, she is a novel stimulus and therefore more sexually exciting. The excitement they each feel towards Izzy seems to spill over into their own sexual relationship. When Jack and Emma evaluate what has happened with Izzy (season 1 episode 7), Jack says: "Crazy thing is, it worked. The plan worked. I mean, I don't know about you. It feels to me like we're having the best sex of our lives." It is a strong theme throughout both seasons and there are numerous examples of Jack and Emma discussing how Izzy's presence positively changed their (Jack and Emma's) sexual relationship.

Carmen and Dave's relationship as counter-point to Emma and Jack

At the beginning of *You Me Her*, Carmen and Dave's relationship is undergoing similar issues to Jack and Emma's – a lack of sexual excitement and frequency. However, they deal with this issue in a completely different manner to Jack and Emma. Carmen expresses a lack of sexual attraction to Dave, particularly in his basketball outfit. She complains to Emma, "Do you know how hard it is to unsee that shit so I can have sex with him again?". Jack acts alone in hiring an escort as (ostensibly?) an attempt to reinvigorate his sexual relationship with Emma. In contrast, Dave and Emma decide together to try to spice up their life by experimenting with S&M (sadomasochism). It does not seem to work for them as it is very awkward, and they get distracted when their children start crying. However, it does seem to spark something, and Carmen eventually initiates sex with Dave. Dave delightedly reports this to Jack and Gabe. This one encounter is potentially meant to serve as an indicator that Dave and Carmen are on the right track to "fixing" their sexual relationship and that their marriage will be fine. Dave and Emma are shown as being able to maintain a sexual relationship monogamously whilst Jack and Emma resort to polyamory.

Non-sexual "revitalisation"

Finkel, Hui, Carswell, and Larson (2014, p. 2) proposed a model of relationship needs based on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which goes from bottom to top: physiological needs, safety needs, belonging and love needs, esteem needs, and then self-actualisation needs (Finkel, Hui, Carswell, & Larson, 2014, p. 2). Finkel et al. (2014)'s hierarchy takes the form of a mountain (Mount Maslow) because with mountains the air becomes thinner as you scale it and only those with enough oxygen will be able to reach the peak. In this model, oxygen represents the emotional resource that a marriage could be when spouses have a deep emotional bond and a mutual insight (Finkel et al., 2014, p. 7). Finkel et al. (2014) propose that these factors make it easier to achieve the higher goals such as esteem or self-actualisation needs (like self-respect, or autonomy). Achieving higher-level needs is supposed to require greater self-insight and therefore sustained long-term cognitive and psychological effort, but doing so yields greater happiness than can be attained from fulfilling lower-level needs (Finkel et al., 2014, p. 21). It seems reasonable then to suggest that individuals are motivated to achieve the higher-level needs despite the investment required.

Following on from the "Mount Maslow" model, Finkel et al. (2014, p. 2) created the "Suffocation model of marriage in America" or "Suffocation model" for short. This model essentially proposes that Americans are increasingly using their marriage as a means to achieve higher-level needs and over time have become less dependent on their marriage for the lower needs (Finkel et al., 2014, p. 2). This necessitates that spouses have "substantial insight" into each other that is fostered through continual communication and responsiveness (Finkel et al., 2014, p. 3). However, this is undermined by the fact that

Americans are reducing their time and psychological investment in their marriages which then negatively affects marital quality and personal well-being (Finkel et al., 2014, p. 3). Ultimately Finkel et al. (2014) propose three options for countering these negative impacts: optimising use of existing resources, increasing time and psychological resource investment in the marriage ("investing in supplemental oxygen"), and/or depending less on the marriage for achieving higher needs ("requiring less oxygen") (Finkel et al., 2014, p. 29). These solutions are where polyamory becomes relevant as it can provide the "oxygen" required to counteract the suffocation of the relationship and subsequently to allow the scaling of "Mount Maslow".

Mitchell, Bartholomew, and Cobb (2014, p. 336) found that in polyamory relationships there was no support for a compensation model of need fulfilment. This is where an individual might seek another relationship when current ones are not satisfactorily meeting all needs. Instead they found that need fulfilment was consistently high for both partners for all needs studied (participants were restricted to responding about only two concurrent relationships) (Mitchell et al., 2014, p. 336). Those in polyamorous relationships might be "navigating [the] higher altitude needs" proposed by Finkel et al. (2014, p. 31) more effectively than those in monogamous relationships (Conley & Moors, 2014, p. 56). Whilst this is not focused on sexual needs, relationships where partners are having their needs met are likely to be healthier and happier which might have a follow-on effect to the sexual relationships.

Engaging in a polyamorous relationship could be considered both "investing in supplemental oxygen" and "requiring less oxygen". Additional partners are potential resources that could be utilised in reaching higher-level needs. At the end of season 2, Emma leaves Jack and Izzy behind to pursue a career opportunity in another city without having discussed the decision with either partner. In a way, it seems like she is comfortable leaving Jack because she knows he still has Izzy to meet his needs and Emma is no longer solely responsible for providing Jack the "oxygen" or support he needs. This then frees her up to more comfortably pursue her own higher-level needs. Finkel et al. (2014, p. 7) suggest that a significant emotional bond and reasonable level of insight are necessary for helping each other scale "Mount Maslow", perhaps casual sexual relationships would not be suitable. This is where polyamory's ability to "reoxygenate" relationships differs from other forms of consensual non-monogamy where relationships are limited in depth or restricted to being purely sexual.

You Me Her focuses on the sexual aspects of Jack, Emma, and Izzy's relationships and I would argue that this is a huge missed opportunity by the writers. Although sex is commonly considered an important element of romantic relationships, the emotional aspects are also significant. There could have been an exploration of how the three characters' emotional needs were addressed by polyamory and how it affected their personal growth. Instead they concentrated on the sexual aspects of polyamory which is a far more tantalising, but possibly

less accurate, representation. The inclusion of Carmen and Dave's relationship serves to reinforce the idea that a decline in sexual frequency is normal in a long-term relationship. They revitalise their sexual interest in each other but stay monogamous. I feel that this is almost designed to stop the show rocking the boat too much. Polyamory cannot be seen to be the only way that a couple might fix their relationship.

Bisexual representation in the media and You Me Her

Bisexuality is not well-understood as a valid sexual identity (McLean, 2008, p. 158). Research into sexuality prior to the 1980s took a dichotomous approach using the categories of heterosexual and homosexual (Klesse, 2014, p. 83; McLean, 2008, p. 158). This dichotomy frames bisexuality as a paradox, a sexuality that cannot fit into the existing models (Meyer, 2010, p. 367). Sexual orientation models often still marginalise or largely exclude bisexuality and force a rigid concept of sexuality rather than fluidity (Klesse, 2014, p. 83). Bisexual people are often assumed to be heterosexual or homosexual depending on the gender of their partner and there is a pressure internally and externally to "choose" one of those sexualities (McLean, 2008, p. 159). Failure to do so leads to being labelled indecisive, confused, more sexually promiscuous, or even sexually depraved (McLean, 2008, p. 159). The treatment of sexuality as a mutually-exclusive binary excludes bisexuality and pressures people into falsely identifying their sexuality to avoid stigma.

Bisexuality is prevalent in polyamory communities with overlapping membership and close connections with bisexual organisations and communities (Sheff, 2013, p. 20). Historically, bisexuality has often been marginalised or made invisible by the gay and lesbian communities (Sheff, 2013, p. 21). The development of the polyamory community created opportunities and room for bisexual people to find the acceptance that was lacking in other communities (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 302). Bisexual women are highly visible in the polyamorous community, and bisexual women were among the earliest and highest profile polyamory activists (Anapol, 2010, Kindle Location 1208). Whilst bisexual women are abundant in most polyamory communities, bisexual men "tend to be rare, absent, or invisible" (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 302).

Considering the ubiquitousness of bisexuality in polyamory, it would seem reasonable to expect that books on polyamory would be inclusive of bisexuality and other non-heterosexual sexualities. I have found that books produced by the polyamorous community are overwhelmingly heterosexually focused and lack significant representation of same-sex relationships. Winston (2017), Sheff (2013), and Hardy and Easton (2017) do include some level of representation. *In The Smart Girl's Guide to Polyamory*, Winston (2017) includes a section on *Sexuality and Fluidity* that discusses sexual orientation. Winston (2017, p. 109) encourages readers to think of sexuality as something "chaotic" or "Pollock-esque" rather

than a line indicating a continuum between "straightness" and "gayness". The section features brief definitions for some of the more common sexual orientations or identities and then a longer discussion of aromanticisim, asexuality, and bisexuality (Winston, 2017, p. 109). Winston (2017, p. 109) acknowledges the perception of an individual's bisexuality is affected by their gender; with female-female relationships treated as sexualised, fleeting, and meaningless whilst male-male relationships are stigmatised and emasculated. Winston (2017, p. 147) also takes the time to reassure the reader that the women she interviewed to research her book were diverse in their sexualities, cultures, religions, etc. However, this information is stripped from the interviewees unless it is specifically mentioned in the interview to avoid "tokenism" (Winston, 2017, p. 147). Hardy and Easton (2017) include sections on lesbian women, gay men, and then group bisexuality with pansexuality. Throughout *The Ethical Slut* there are mentions and considerations of different sexualities and how identity might affect or influence experience (Hardy & Easton, 2017). Sheff (2013, p. 20) includes sexual orientation in her section about the group characteristics of those who "do polyamory". Other research conducted by Sheff found that mainstream polyamorous communities consist mostly of bisexual women and heterosexual men, with a minority of heterosexual women and an even smaller minority of bisexual men (Sheff, 2013, p. 25). Sheff (2013, p. 25) suggests that this reflects bisexual men's lower social status and the desirability of bisexual women in broader society. In contrast, Anapol (2010) fails to include diverse sexualities in her profiles of polyamorous people. The "quintessential polyamorous women" written about by Anapol (2010), in her *The Polyamorous Personality* chapter either have boyfriends or husbands mentioned or there is no comment about the gender of their partners. Similarly, the "quintessential polyamorous men" all have girlfriends or wives, and there is an absence of male partners (Anapol, 2010, Kindle Location 1765). However, a partner of the "quintessential polyamorous man" is described as being a bisexual woman (Anapol, 2010, Kindle Location 1766). Anapol (2010) does not include any lesbian, gay, or bisexual representation in her description of quintessential polyamorous individuals except as a side-note about one of men's partners. *More Than Two* includes a small section about the intersection of the polyamorous and LGBTQ communities in which the authors discuss the "turbulent" history between the two (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 433). This section is where the bulk of the mentions of sexual orientation are included, but the majority of their relationship examples are based on heterosexual relationships (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 433). Taormino (2008) (*Opening Up*), and Michaels and Johnson (2015) (*Designer Relationships*) fail to include any discussion of sexuality and is very heteronormative. Overall the picture of polyamory presented by these books is very heteronormative and quite different from the academic research on sexuality and polyamory. To be more? accurate and inclusive, the books would need to include more bisexual and same-sex relationships in their examples and discussions.

One of the commonly espoused benefits of polyamory for bisexuals is that it presents the opportunity to explore relationships with partners of different genders concurrently rather than being pressured to choose (Brunning, 2016, p. 4). However, Halpern (1999, p. 157) suggests that bisexual women choose polyamory for the same reasons that lesbians and heterosexual women might and not just to date multiple genders at the same time. The reasons that people choose polyamory are individual, but the idea that bisexual people choose polyamory for variety in partners might be born of the "greedy bisexual" stereotype.

In polyamory, there is the cliché of the "hot bi babe". This is where a bisexual woman is hotly sought out for triad relationships by male-female couples – typically where the man is heterosexual and the woman is "bisexual, bicurious, or heteroflexible" (Anapol, 2010, Kindle Location 1211; Sheff, 2013, p. 37). According to Anapol (2010, Kindle Location 1211), more than half of women in "committed polyamorous triads" are bisexual. Sheff (2013, p. 37) describes three reasons for the hot bi babe phenomenon: "greater social acceptance of sex between women, stigma of bisexual men, and the scarcity of available female partners". These factors have resulted in a kind of fetishization of bisexual women in the polyamorous community (Sheff, 2013, p. 38). Sex between women is sometimes treated as a heteronormative spectacle (Sheff, 2013, p. 37). Sheff (2006, p. 625) found that polyamorous men pursued triadic sex between a man and two bisexual women more than any other relationship form. In contrast, sex between men is seen as "threatening to heterosexual masculinity", and is even frowned upon in some swinger communities (Hardy & Easton, 2017, p. 275; Sheff, 2013, p. 50). There is not the same status attached to men's bisexuality and they are far less commonly represented than heterosexual or homosexual men (Sheff, 2013, p. 45). This minority status might partially be due to a greater reluctance to come out for bisexual men than other identities because of the stigma they face (Anapol, 2010, Kindle Location 1212).

The need for bisexual representation

The representation of bisexuality in television programming is lacking and the rare appearances are fraught with problematic content and negativity. The stereotypical bisexual person is shown to be "sexually voracious, confused, predatory, and emotionally unstable" (Diamond, 2005, p. 106). Participants in Alexander (2007a, p. 116) study described bisexual representation as "sensationalised, brief, uneven, and unexamined". Which groups are included and excluded in the media sends messages to viewers about those groups (Browne Graves, 1999, p. 708). Absent groups are implied to be less important, significant, and powerful than those that are included (Browne Graves, 1999, p. 708). Cultivation theory proposes that television content creates a view of society that influences viewers' "worldview" regarding social norms (Browne Graves, 1999, p. 712). When groups are not included in television content, viewers do not receive information about them and how they

fit into their social reality (Browne Graves, 1999, p. 712). By including only homosexuality and/or heterosexual characters, the dichotomy is reinforced and bisexuals are erased (Alexander, 2007b, p. 11). There is also a reluctance on the part of writers to have their characters actually refer to themselves as "bisexual" (Alexander, 2007a, p. 117). It is rarely even considered as being an option for a character's identity, so writers avoid the term completely (Diamond, 2005, p. 108). The invisibility of bisexuality in mainstream media potentially contributes to the group's persistent marginalisation.

There has been an increase in bisexual women characters on television since 2000 (Diamond, 2005, p. 104). With this increase has come characters who are "heteroflexible", heterosexual women who experiment with same-sex partners (Diamond, 2005, p. 104). This dabbling with sexuality is typically between white middle-class women and ends with the women realising that they are actually straight (Diamond, 2005, p. 106). Meyer (2010, p. 370) proposes several different categories of bisexual representation:

- situational bisexuality (bisexual under certain circumstances),
- transitional sexuality (bridging identity change between heterosexual to homosexual),
- heteroflexibility (same-sex behaviour used to cultivate social acceptance),
- historic bisexuality (where an individual's sexual history includes behaviours contrary to their current sexual identification),
- technical bisexuality (where they engage in bisexual behaviour but eschew the label),
- cop-out bisexuality (where individuals refuse to commit to a particular partner or lifestyle),
- sequential bisexuality (sexual identity is viewed as contingent on current partner's gender),
- concurrent bisexuality (partners of both genders at the same time), and
- experimental bisexuality (like transitional but they're not looking for a label, just playing around with sex).

Many of these different representations of bisexuality carry harmful stereotypes and connotations, and a number are deployed in YMH.

Bisexuality in *You Me Her*

The triad in *You Me Her* falls under the most coveted formulation – a bisexual woman joining an existing relationship between a heterosexual man and a bisexual woman. Izzy is Jack and Emma's "hot bi babe". However, as discussed previously, Izzy was not sought out as a third but rather the situation emerged through Jack's infidelity. The show would be very different if Izzy and Emma had not been bisexual because a triad would have been impossible. Instead

they would have had to contend with Jack's desire to have an extra-dyadic relationship with Izzy and (possibly?) Emma's decision to date another man. I doubt the show would have even been made if it had been pitched with Jack as bisexual and the triad being female-male-male as the writers and showrunners would have had to portray the least acceptable form of male sexuality. Bisexual representation is important as it is absent from our television screens, but *You Me Her* is a convenient presentation designed to be palatable to a mainstream audience.

There is a reluctance in season 1 of *You Me Her* to refer to Emma as bisexual. After Jack finds out about Emma's past relationships with women, Emma says "It wasn't a thing" (season 1, episode 2). Emma plays down her past relationships with women because there had only been three of them. The next day Jack refers to it as a "girl-girl-girl phase" (season 1, episode 2). This would have been an excellent opportunity to set the tone for bisexual representation in the show by having Emma unashamedly claim her bisexuality. Instead it is passed off as something between "historic bisexuality" and "technical bisexuality". Emma's previous sexual relationships with women are presented as conflicting with her current identification as heterosexual. However, the bisexual behaviour remains current because Emma is interested in Izzy. The refusal to use the label makes *You Me Her*'s representation of Emma's sexuality consistent with Meyer's (2010, p. 371) category of 'technical bisexuality'. In season 2 there is a move to embrace Emma and Izzy's concurrent bisexuality, as they both openly engage in a relationship with a man and a woman. After the triad comes out to their friends, someone asks if Emma is "bisexual now" to which she replies, "I guess, yeah". Izzy then chimes in with "We both are" which seems to lend Emma the courage to state: "I'm bisexual" (season 2, episode 2). Later in the season Emma even comes out to her parents as being bisexual and uses the label (season 2, episode 8). Whilst this is a more positive representation of Emma and Izzy's self-identification as bisexual, there are issues with how other characters treat their sexuality.

In *You Me Her*, Emma's own definition of her sexuality is constantly undermined, and she faces biphobia from those around her. Emma's best friend Carmen refers to her as a "big lesbo" and keeps making lesbian jokes about her, (season 1, episodes 2 and 3). After hanging out with Emma and Izzy, Carmen says "the untrained eye might mistake you two for a couple of full-blooded lesbians, not bisexuals" (season 2, episode 3). This follows the tendency for bisexual individuals to be pressured into "choosing" between heterosexuality and homosexuality. The writers could have had Carmen take on a supportive role and advocate for Emma's identity when others questioned her, but instead used her to undermine Emma. Jack's brother Gabe tells Jack that "it's entirely possible that you just introduced your first wife to her first wife" (season 2, episode 2). Gabe seems to believe that Emma will eventually choose a woman or a man. He also tells Jack that "lesbians are deceptive. They look just like real chicks. You know, they wear dresses, they wear makeup, they marry dudes" (season 2,

episode 5). Gabe is obviously referring to Emma and accusing her of being a lesbian rather than bisexual. The doubts coming from Gabe, Carmen, and Dave influence Jack's feelings towards Emma's sexuality. When Carmen asks him if he thinks Emma is gay, Jack replies that he doesn't know what to think (season 2, episode 2). In an argument with Izzy, Jack says he feels the triad "consists of two lesbians, a happy gay couple, who just have this inconvenient dude who's like a goddamn beard around them all the time" (season 2, episode 5). Instead of having Jack believe how his wife defines her own sexuality, the writers make him doubt her constantly. It is an unhealthy representation of a relationship between a bisexual woman and straight man.

It is vital to consider how bisexuality is presented because it can significantly affect viewer's perspectives towards the group. *You Me Her* features two openly bisexual women, Emma and Izzy, which is a rare representation. I feel that the representation in *You Me Her* is consistent with the picture painted by the self-help/advice texts produced by polyamorous practitioners and maybe even the mainstream community. The polyamory in *You Me Her* is filtered through a heteronormative or socially acceptable lens. The triad is the most conventionally coveted formation, with Izzy as the couple's hot bi babe unicorn. Whilst this might reflect a section of polyamorous relationships, it seems like lazy bisexual representation or even biphobic. *You Me Her* would have been more challenging to stereotypes if it showed male bisexuality, but it's young attractive bisexual women which potentially feeds the male fantasy of threesomes. There is an abundance of biphobic comments and attitudes that have no place in a show that seeks to represent a community in which bisexuals are the majority. There is basically no mention of gay or lesbian sexuality except for when characters refer to the perception that Emma is confused about whether she is heterosexual or a lesbian. *You Me Her* had the opportunity and the potential to fill a void in bisexual and polyamorous representation but ultimately chose the path of least resistance.

Chapter 4: Jealousy

Jealousy is a significant issue in both monogamous and polyamorous relationships but is perhaps more complicated where more than two people are involved. In this chapter, I begin by briefly exploring jealousy in both mononormative society and in polyamory. I have included gendered experiences of jealousy and some methods of dealing with jealousy in polyamorous relationships. Compersion is a response to jealousy unique to polyamory and is often considered a crucial element in successful polyamorous relationships. *You Me Her*'s representation of jealousy can be described by three main categories: within the triad, towards Izzy's other relationships (Andy), and Jack's feelings towards Emma's bisexuality. Jack's response to Emma coming out as bisexual is a huge source of jealousy in the show which ties in with issues of bisexual representation mentioned in the previous chapter. Throughout the chapter I try to remain critical of how jealousy is often glorified in intimate relationships and treated as a litmus test for the strength of feelings.

Jealousy in mononormative society

Culturally, jealousy has numerous meanings and one of these is that it can be a measure of love and how strong that love is (Puente & Cohen, 2003, p. 449). However, jealousy is also about possessiveness and sexual control (Klesse, 2016, p. 1353; Overall, 1998, p. 2). Love and sex are perceived by some as finite resources and so any energy spent on these with one partner must therefore result in a loss for another (Overall, 1998, p. 6). It can also be evoked by the threat of a loss of a relationship or damage to self-esteem (de Visser & McDonald, 2007, p. 460). There is the perception that if a romantic partner does not regularly display some level of jealousy this may be an indication that they do not really love you or care about potentially losing you (Winston, 2017, p. 80). Jealousy can be destructive to relationships and is recognised at as "one of the primary causes of marital discord and relationship failure" (de Visser & McDonald, 2007 p. 461).

Men and women have been found to have different experiences of jealousy and approaches to it. Winston (2017, p. 80) writes about the bad reputation ascribed to women for being especially jealous and how this behaviour is encouraged by the culture of competition surrounding women and their relationships. Women are encouraged to compare themselves to those around them and be protective of what is 'theirs' – such as a romantic partner (Winston, 2017, p. 81). Aumer, Bellew, Ito, Hatfield, and Heck (2014, p. 2) describe an evolutionary approach to understanding jealousy. Men were "programmed" to be concerned about the paternity of their children and their investment of resources into children that might not be theirs and so are typically focused on sexual fidelity. In comparison, women should be concerned with emotional fidelity and the potential that their partner might be using their limited resources on an emotional attachment to another (Aumer et al., 2014, p.2). This theory relies on the idea that men and women want to "maximise the provision of

resources for their offspring*" and that jealousy is hardwired (de Visser & McDonald, 2007, p.461). However, this is obviously only applicable to heterosexual relationships and sexual activity for the purpose of procreation (de Visser & McDonald, 2007, p. 462). An alternative theory is that jealousy is a cultural phenomenon that occurs when a person seems to be a threat to a key relationship or self-esteem (de Visser & McDonald, 2007, p. 462). This approach assumes that jealousy is something learned rather than hardwired or innate. This theory covers more situations than the rather limited evolutionary perspective proposed by Aumer et al. (2014) and goes some way towards explaining differences in jealousy between cultures.

There is also a gendered aspect to jealousy that "tends to legitimise male violence exerted during fits of jealousy" (Klesse, 2016, p. 1353). Research into jealousy has found that it has significant and complex links to domestic violence and abuse in intimate relationships. Violence can be perceived as a tolerable response to a jealousy-invoking scenario (Puente & Cohen, 2003, p. 450). In their study, Puente and Cohen (2003, p. 453) state that the "construal of jealousy as love can negate considerably the meaning of a violent act". The essence of the violent act is almost stripped away because of the context in which it occurred, and it becomes a benign action that is different somehow from violence occurring without jealousy. Puente and Cohen (2003, p. 457) found that participants rated a man who was violent towards his wife in a jealousy-related conflict as being equally (or slightly more) romantically in love with his wife than a man who was not violent. In contrast, when the conflict was not jealousy-related, the man who was violent towards his wife was rated as less romantically loving towards his wife than the man who was violent (Puente & Cohen, 2003, p. 457). The violence was made palatable or acceptable by the context involving jealous emotions.

Jealousy in polyamory

Polyamorous culture has different ways of handling and thinking about jealousy than the dominant western approach. Polyamory encourages the renegotiation of how jealousy is experienced and how one should react to it (Winston, 2017, p. 34; Ziegler et al., 2014, p. 6). Jealousy is treated as an inevitable and natural feeling that is "just an emotion like any other emotion" and it must be worked with and dealt with like any other emotion (Hardy & Easton, 2017, p. 134; Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 52). This might be hard work, but it is presented as being critical for success.

Winston (2017, p. 80) begins her chapter on jealousy by stating that "Don't you get jealous?" is the question more frequently asked to those in non-monogamous relationships. Winston (2017, p. 80) states that for a functional non-monogamous relationship it is necessary to remove the "façade of nobility" from jealousy. Jealousy needs to be "disempowered" and challenged to reduce its influence over the relationship (Hardy &

Easton, 2017, p. 142). Veaux and Rickert (2014, p. 36) assert that jealousy is "poisonous" for polyamorous relationships. An inability to manage jealous feelings would make non-monogamous relationships incredibly difficult and produce a conflict-ridden situation. Anapol (2010, Kindle Location 1912) writes that jealousy is the most difficult emotional challenge that individuals face when entering a polyamorous arrangement. This is partly because of the different role that jealousy plays in monogamous and polyamorous relationships. In monogamy there is some logic to being worried about a partner engaging with others because relationships are "an either/or proposition" (Anapol, 2010, Kindle Location 1931). In polyamory however, additional partners are not necessarily dangerous or a threat to the relationship because existing partners do not need to be replaced for them to 'fit' (Anapol, 2010, Kindle Location 2069).

For Veaux and Rickert (2014), jealousy is "the feeling that we are about to lose something important to us... to someone else" and it "thrives on secrecy and silence". They suggest that jealousy is often triggered by a fear of losing the social status associated with being in a couple or from evidence of physical intimacy between a partner and someone else. This ties in with the idea that when a partner has sex with someone else, there is something lost that requires grieving (Hardy & Easton, 2017, p. 140). Winston (2017, p. 80) suggests that jealousy is most often prompted by "comparisons, competition, fear" which can "highlight the lack of control" over relationships. It is not always easy or simple to recognise when one is experiencing jealousy because it is made up of and can cause many different emotions (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 124). These emotions could be broken down into feelings of betrayal, envy, abandonment, embarrassment, competitiveness, insecurity, inadequacy, and shame (Hardy & Easton, 2017, p. 138; Taormino, 2008, p. 47; Winston, 2017, p. 61).

Talking about jealous feelings is promoted as being an important step in dealing with the issues involved. Winston (2017, p. 98) includes this as the final step in dealing with jealousy, and as something to be done only once you have spent time alone trying to understand the feelings. Talking about the feelings could involve the individual's wider support system such as family, friends, or even a therapist (Hardy & Easton, 2017, p. 92; Taormino, 2008, p. 47). They are less close to the situation and might be able to provide an objective evaluation. Dede Visser and McDonald (2007, p. 459) found that couples credited communication as the most valuable tool for dealing with jealousy early in relationships. When talking to a partner it is important to consider the desired outcome. Their role in dealing with your jealousy is to "listen, sympathise, and validate" rather than make grand promises about ending other relationships (Hardy & Easton, 2017, p. 155). This is an opportunity to connect, to feel loved, and to be supported that would be missed if the jealousy were denied or dealt with in an argumentative manner (Hardy & Easton, 2017, p. 155). For Hardy and Easton (2017, p. 155) it is not just a chance to receive this treatment from a partner but to be

compassionate towards yourself. This can provide opportunities for significant personal development as growth for the couple (de Visser & McDonald, 2007 p. 460).

A common response to jealousy is to try to take back control over the situation that is causing fear or anxiety and this might involve trying to change the other person's behaviour (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 124). Winston (2017, p. 88) lists three ways that one might try to take back control: controlling information, controlling partners, and controlling the relationship. Controlling information might involve knowing everything that your partner does or wanting absolutely no information about their other relationships. The desire to have no information is often referred to as a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" or DADT situation. There are problems? with this method as it may violate the privacy of the partner's partner or make it impossible for the partner to be open or honest with you. Controlling the partner and the relationship might entail the creation of restrictive rules or relationship structures. For example, the partner might need to ask permission before doing certain things or the relationship might be strictly hierarchical with an enforced primary and secondary relationship system. These controlling behaviours are potentially unhealthy and might put a strain on the relationship. It is not the ideal way to deal with jealousy.

Veaux and Rickert (2014, p. 124) title their chapter on jealousy: "Taming the green-eyed monster'. This is indicative of their treatment of jealousy as something to be worked with, not fought against. For Veaux and Rickert (2014) the way to deal with jealousy is to acknowledge the feeling then try to understand and confront the jealousy personally rather than trying to put blame elsewhere. They state that this might take uncomfortable work to get right, but that it can be done (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 124). In their process for dealing with jealousy, Veaux and Rickert (2014) finish with a step called "Practice security" which is where the individual experiencing jealousy should take time to practise feeling valued in their relationship and by their partner (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 70). This serves to counter feelings of insecurity that are often present in jealousy. Anapol (2010) and Winston (2017, p. 94) similarly state that the only way to deal with jealousy is to go through the feeling and that polyamory is rife with chances to practise doing so. Across all the self-help texts there is an emphasis on the importance of being honest with partners and yourself about what you are feeling. This is consistent with the significant value placed on honesty in polyamory.

Compersion

'Compersion' is ever-present in discussions of jealousy in polyamorous relationships. It is the idea of feeling "joy and delight when one's beloved loves or is being loved by another" (Anapol, 2010, Kindle Location 2215). To experience compersion, when experiencing the negative emotions and discomfort of jealousy one should instead try to think of the "happiness and pleasure your partner may be experiencing" or a time you were excited for

them about the relationship (Anapol, 2010, Kindle Location 2223; Taormino, 2008, p. 50). It requires relinquishing the control that you might think you have over the relationship and taking a step back (Taormino, 2008, p. 159). The term is commonly used to describe the opposite emotion to jealousy (Anapol, 2010, Kindle Location 511; Aumer et al., 2014, p. 2; Taormino, 2008, p. 50). Michaels and Johnson (2015, p. 65) propose that jealousy and compersion are not strict opposites, but rather compersion is a form of empathy that can be used as an "antidote" to jealous feelings. Compersion has been described as one of the core features of the emotional work that characterises polyamory and marks it as distinct from other forms of consensual non-monogamy (Brunning, 2016, p. 11; Klesse, 2006, p. 572). Wosick-Correa (2010, p. 46) suggests that a focus on compersion rather than jealousy is part of an overall resistance to mononormative language and practices in polyamory. There are those who describe compersion as a vital part of polyamory and suggest that it is impossible to be successful without it (Taormino, 2008, p. 178). Aumer et al. (2014) used a 25-item questionnaire to measure the compersion of their monogamous, polyamorous, and open relationship participants. These questions were answered on a 7-point Likert Scale. Aumer et al. (2014, p. 10) found that relationship satisfaction for men and women in polyamorous relationships was not contingent on their compersion scores. However, it was significantly related to relationship satisfaction for women who were single or in open relationships, but not for men in any relationship style (Aumer et al., 2014, p. 10). These findings challenge the idea that compersion is crucial for happy polyamory or even impacts relationship satisfaction.

Jealousy in You Me Her

After Emma and Izzy's first date, Jack expresses that he feels jealous about how romantic the date sounded and how excited Emma seemed afterwards (season 1, episode 3). Jack says: "[S]eeing you like this is freaking me out a bit, I'm being honest. That's my honesty. Let's bring on the honesty. It's really… It's really working for me" (season 1, episode 3). This preference for honest dialogue is consistent with the advice offered by Veaux and Rickert (2014, p. 52) and Anapol (2010, Kindle Location 1456). Emma and Jack also both recognise that what Jack is feeling is jealousy which the authors of both books stress as being very important. Emma and Jack do not treat the jealousy as reason to end their interactions with Izzy, but Emma instead says: "Maybe a little jealousy's good for both of us" with Jack agreeing (season 1, episode 3). In season 1, episode 5 there is a significant conversation between Jack and Emma about jealousy. Emma begins by saying that she's feeling jealous, but also scared and excited. This points to the complex array of emotions that can occur around jealousy. In this case Emma is not only experiencing jealousy relating to Jack's relationship with Izzy but also the excitement of new relationship energy from her own relationship with Izzy. Jack then admits that he feels jealousy focused towards not just Emma's relationship with Izzy, but also Izzy's relationship with Emma; moreover, Emma says she feels similarly towards Jack and Izzy. The

tone of the show around these realisations is that the characters have realised their emotional investment in the relationships through experiencing jealousy.

Initially the relationships between Jack, Emma, and Izzy are restricted by rules and agreements. It is framed as a business arrangement because Izzy is paid as an escort, Jack and Emma agree to alternate dates with Izzy with two sessions a week each with her, and they put a timeframe of a month on it when they will then revisit the idea. Intimacy is agreed to be non-penetration only, and Jack suggests that boundaries are important so that they do not develop romantic feelings for Izzy. Trying to take control over the jealousy-provoking situation is one way that people try to deal with their anxiety or jealousy (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 124). Jack and Emma are trying to do what Winston (2017, p. 88) refers to as controlling partners and controlling the relationship. They are creating a relationship structure and rules that put strict limits on how they can interact with Izzy and what kind of relationship they can develop. These boundaries are quickly broken by both Jack and Emma, but the hurt inflicted on Izzy lingers and taints interactions throughout both seasons.

Jealousy towards Andy

When Izzy first meets Jack and Emma she is already casually dating Andy, a fellow university student. After striking up the paid dating arrangement with Jack and Emma she continues to casually date Andy. In the fifth episode of season 1, Izzy kisses Andy in front of Jack and Nina. After Andy leaves, Jack angrily refers to himself as just being "a client" before throwing money down on the kitchen counter and leaving. This was prompted by Nina asking in the previous episode who Jack really was to Izzy and the nature of their relationship. Clearly Jack is jealous of her kiss with Andy, which Nina accuses Izzy of causing intentionally. Izzy also uses Andy to make Emma jealous in the same episode. When Emma calls to arrange to meet Izzy, Izzy hangs up on her early and says that it is because Andy is calling. This leads Emma to tell Carmen that she hates Andy. Later in the episode, Izzy admits to Jack and Emma that she was trying to make them jealous and they confirm that she was successful. Izzy rationalises her actions as being a way to find out how Jack and Emma really felt about her. This is a manipulative device and seems a contradiction of the basic tenants of polyamory – honest and open communication. The fact that Izzy tried to hurt them to force them to admit they liked her before they were potentially ready to be open is an issue that is not addressed.

Following the advice of Anapol (2010, Kindle Location 2223) and Taormino (2008, p. 178), Jack and Emma should have focused on how happy Andy made Izzy and the pleasure she received from him. Rather than trying to embrace compersion and be open to Izzy's relationship with Andy, Emma and Jack feed each other's jealousy with discussions of how much they hate him and what a bad person he is (season 1, episode 5). The conversations

seem to serve the purpose of protecting their self-esteem from the threat Andy seemed to be; self-esteem threat is recognised as a trigger for jealousy in many of the self-help texts.

Jealousy regarding Emma's bisexuality

One of the major storylines in season two is Jack's jealousy regarding Emma's bisexuality and attraction to Izzy. The seeds are sown in season 1 when Jack finds out that Emma had dated women before, but he had thought she had only been in heterosexual relationships (season 1, episode 1). Jack seems to feel betrayed or misled by Emma's failure to have told him before despite the significant length of their relationship. However, the jealousy seems to intensify after a counselling session in which Emma admits that she was in love with her first woman partner. Jack does not seem to want to hear about it and keeps interrupting to mock elements of the story. Their counsellor tells them that it is "unhealthy to deny the past" which ties in with the idea that there is a need for openness and honesty. The element of secrecy surrounding Emma's bisexuality serves to feed and intensify Jack's feelings of jealousy (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 124). Jack's jealous feelings towards Izzy regarding Emma's bisexuality are largely unaddressed for the rest of season 1, bar some snarky biphobic comments peppered throughout conversations.

At the beginning of season 2, after bringing Izzy home from the airport, Emma, Jack, and Izzy are showing lying on the floor post-sex, with Emma positioned in the middle. Emma spoons Izzy and whispers to her "I thought I lost you" with Jack shown looking over Emma's shoulder. He has a very serious expression on his face that seems incongruent with the happiness you might expect him to be feeling now they are happily reunited. This is the first sign that Jack is feeling some sort of discomfort towards Emma and Izzy's closeness; this unease grows into jealousy. Jack's insecurity and feelings of inadequacy come to light when the "throuple" go clubbing with Carmen and Dave (season 2, episode 2). Whilst Emma and Izzy dance together provocatively and intimately, the others stand bored and uncomfortable at the bar. They walk out and Jack asks, upset, "Think they even noticed that we left?". Izzy is offering Emma something that he either cannot or will not – dancing at a club like they did when they were younger. Izzy's youthfulness is a threat to Jack who feels he is at a different place in his life; he is comparing himself to her which can often evoke jealousy (Winston, 2017, p. 83). In the next episode, Nina tells Izzy that Jack is "insecure in his place in this wacky new relationship" (season 2, episode 3). In an argument about Jack being secretive about getting close with his ex-partner Ruby, Jack yells that Izzy and Emma have been "third-wheeling the shit out of [him]" (season 2, episode 3). Emma had been pressuring him to be honest about what was going on with him emotionally and when he admits how he was feeling there is a brief argument. Emma then apologises for making him "feel like the odd man out" and for

keeping her bisexuality from him. She says that she knows that is a significant contributing factor to why he feels so insecure. Jack then apologises for acting out rather than just talking about it. This seems a very surface-level manner of dealing with the issues in the relationship leading to Jack feeling jealous. The idea of the problem being jealousy is not explicitly floated and they do not discuss concrete ways to deal with it going forward. The next day, the three of them go to their counsellor which is a positive and important step towards managing jealousy. However, Emma calls the idea that Jack is a third-wheel "absurd" even though the previous night she had apologised for making him feel that way (season 2, episode 4). Rather than taking the opportunity to "listen, sympathise, and validate", Emma and Izzy deny the jealousy in an argumentative manner (Hardy & Easton, 2017, p. 155). In failing to address the jealousy in a positive and healthy manner, they fail to support Jack. After walking in on Emma and Izzy taking a bubble bath together, Jack takes the step to leave after the ensuing argument. This is something he had not done before in Jack and Emma's relationship and shows an escalation of the issue.

Jack is clearly feeling as though he is losing Emma to Izzy, and possibly also Izzy to Emma and this is causing strong feelings of jealousy. If they had been more open and honest – Emma about her relationship history, and Jack about his feelings of insecurity – then this could have been nipped in the bud earlier. They could have discussed their feelings honestly and supported Jack in working through how he felt. There might still have been arguments, but there would have been the opportunity for personal and relationship growth. Practising some degree of compersion might have helped ease Jack's struggle. Instead of sulking jealously at the nightclub, he could have tried to enjoy seeing Emma and Izzy's happiness in dancing together. It would have been nice to see the writers of *You Me Her* work with compersion as it is such a ubiquitous idea in polyamory relationship management techniques.

Jealousy is a significant issue in polyamory and features in YMH's representation of polyamory. Jack is portrayed as being the most jealous member of the triad, particularly towards Emma's bisexuality. This is consistent with the idea that jealousy commonly arises from comparisons, fear of loss, and threats to self-esteem. Jack is scared that Emma is not actually bisexual but is instead a lesbian, and that he is therefore at risk of losing his relationship with her. Again, the show focuses on sex rather than emotion, and the writers fail to explore jealousy that might arise from other aspects of romantic relationships. We do see the triad try to work through problems of jealousy but not in a manner entirely consistent with the approaches suggested in the texts on polyamory. Initially they try to place strict boundaries on the relationship, something that is described as unhealthy in many of the books. After these restrictions fail there seems to be no plan at all on how to work through the jealousy that might almost inevitably arise, and instead they fall into negative patterns. There is a lack of honesty in how Jack communicates his jealousy to Emma and Izzy, and

instead he behaves in an angry and aggressive manner. When they discuss what has happened, the focus is on Emma apologising for not having been more open initially about her sexuality rather than on Jack apologising for his poor behaviour. This reflects society's glamorisation of jealousy as something acceptable and even as a sign that a partner is invested in the relationship. The approach in polyamory is to remove this glamorisation and to work through jealousy rather than embracing or feeding it. The writers could have used the jealousy to foster character growth and show emotional development rather than using it to create drama. For many, compersion is a cornerstone of polyamorous relationships but it is noticeably absent from the show. Perhaps this is because it would be tricky for audiences to understand initially, but it is a missed opportunity for representing polyamorous relationships in a way that is consistent with polyamorous people's understandings. The failure to properly engage with polyamorous techniques for dealing with jealousy, has left *You Me Her* portraying jealousy from a largely mononormative perspective.

Conclusion

Polyamory encompasses a huge spectrum of relationships where the number of participants and their relationships with each other can vary significantly. It is inconceivable that any show could represent all of polyamory; you would need a massive cast and it would take so long to explain all the relationships that there would be no room left for any plot. I think this is something that it is important to bear in mind when criticising *You Me Her*. Not everyone can watch the show and see a reflection of their relationship and their experiences, someone will always be left asking "what about me?" (This is not a problem exclusive to polyamory and its representations—the same questions arise in relation to any 'marked' identities and practices). Throughout this process one question has settled at the corner of my mind: "Whose polyamory is this?". Whether I was reading an academic article, one of the books, or watching *You Me Her* I wrestled with this question. I feel that because there are arguably different 0target audiences for each of these, there is a different side of polyamory represented.

You Me Her is supposed to appeal to a mainstream audience, so the writers have an investment in viewers being intrigued by polyamory rather than being made to feel uncomfortable. However, they would also be wary of twisting polyamory so far as to be offensive to those in the community, because to do so would alienate one of their strongest potential demographics. The writers must also straddle the fine line of controversy; the topic of polyamory is radical and threatening to the stranglehold of mononormativity and heteronormativity. This immediately positions the show to be met with contention and ultimately rejection by those who might perceive polyamory as a threat to their lifestyle or an affront to moral decency. The representation of polyamory must therefore by rendered palatable to the majority, but not all the salaciousness and accuracy can be removed. Like most tv drama, *You Me Her* is essentially a balancing act between reality and what makes for popular mainstream television.

Whose polyamory is represented in *You Me Her*? It is the polyamory of a white middle-class American suburban couple with professional careers who add a unicorn to their relationship and form a polyfidelitous couple. That is the polyamory that Jack, Emma, and Izzy represent, and it is a very narrow category. It conforms to the mononormative and heteronormative ideals around power, jealousy, sexuality, and ultimately what constitutes an acceptable relationship. The power dynamics in the show reflect the idea that the couple as a unit are priority above all other relationships, a concept that is at the core of mononormativity. *You Me Her* skirts around the sexuality aspects of polyamory, a fault that is also present in the non-academic texts. Only one bisexual relationship is shown, and that is between two conventionally attractive white women. This is arguably the most palatable non-heterosexual relationship the writers could have chosen to include, and the way Emma's

bisexuality is treated as a phase or confusion does a disservice to the queer polyamorous community and more broadly to all bisexuals.

In my opinion, the show's biggest missed opportunities lie in its treatment of jealousy. One of polyamory's distinguishing features is the approach to jealousy that has been developed and advocated. In polyamory, jealousy is seen as something that is to be worked through, an opportunity for growth, and if left unaddressed, potentially very unhealthy. *You Me Her* uses the characters' jealousy to show that they really do love each other, and the characters even use it to manipulate each other into revealing their feelings. Jealousy is a major plot point and the writers use it to create drama, thus falling into harmful mononormative narratives. The writers could have delved into polyamorous techniques for dealing with jealousy to better represent the struggles that do occur in non-monogamy. The fact that compersion was not even mentioned is an obvious sign that the representation of polyamory is lacking substance and depth.

You Me Her is an inherently important show because it is the first mainstream unambiguous representation of any kind of polyamory. For many viewers it would be their first introduction to polyamory and a first impression is often an enduring one. Any misstep or inaccuracy is likely to resist correction from future television shows or other exposures. While *You Me Her* explores some aspects of polyamory, it unfortunately depicts a heteronormative and mononormative take on polyamorous identity. *You Me Her* is not unsalvageable in its representation of polyamory; the show is currently filming a third season and it has the potential to delve into other forms of polyamory rather than continuing with the polyfidelitous triad. By removing the polyfidelitous aspect there would be room to explore other types of polyamorous relationships and sexuality. Alternatively, if the characters were simply to interact with their local polyamorous community then there would be plentiful opportunities for diversity in sexualities and polyamorous relationship forms. These are just two very simple ways for the show to improve the nature of its polyamory representations. While improving the representation in the third season would not erase the issues of the first and second seasons, it would be progress.

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