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Gauteng-based Psychologists' Constructions of Polyamorous Clients

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Abstract

Polyamory is a relationship practice rooted in the belief that it is possible to pursue meaningful romantic, sexual, and/or emotional partnerships with more than one person simultaneously. This research sought to explore how South African psychologists construct polyamory, as international research suggests polyamory is produced as problematic within mental health contexts. Six Gauteng-based psychologists were recruited using purposive sampling. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews. Interview transcripts were analysed using Foucauldian informed critical discourse analysis. Findings reveal that a discourse of damage informs psychologists' constructions of polyamory: Polyamorists are presented as pathological, primitive and infantile individuals. Their relationships are constructed as risky, complicated arrangements which oppress women and break up homes. These constructions justify the need for intervention and reproduce Western, Christian, cisgender and heterosexual monogamy as the pinnacle of 'healthy' and 'real' love. These findings form part of an initial critical engagement with polyamory in the South African context.

Key words: Polyamory, South Africa, Psychology