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Cassandra Lange, LCSW, MEd (she/they) is the owner of Queer City Therapy, a private practice in Buffalo, NY that focuses on work with queer, trans, non-monogamous, and kinky clients. Cassandra completed a unique clinical sexology graduate program at Widener University where she entered determined not to work with couples and exited surprisingly passionate about relationship work. Cassandra has been working as a therapist for nearly a decade and provided DBT in Philadelphia and sex and marriage therapy in North Carolina before returning home to Buffalo to open their practice.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So, I am here with Cassandra Lange, and we're going to be talking about consensual non-monogamy, and how you, therapists, can really, not screw up as much as we might currently be screwing up, just because not all of us are well-trained, and how you can really help support your clients in a better informed way. So, thanks for being here.

Cassandra Lange: Thank you.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So, yeah, let's... let's start with kind of, like, where do we begin with clients and relationships in general? Because I think we probably start in the same place, whether our clients are consensually non-monogamous, or whether they are monogamous.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So, kind of walk us through the assessment process.

Cassandra Lange: Yeah, so I... work from attachment, like a lot of us do, so I like to explore...

Cassandra Lange: You know, as much...

Cassandra Lange: breadth of their life as I can. So I like to go into, what was your childhood like, what were your parents like? But when I'm assessing for relationships, I also ask, what was your parents' relationship like?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Hmm.

Cassandra Lange: Did you see them fight? Did you see them be affectionate with each other ever? Were they affectionate with you? And kind of, like, pulling out those attachment pieces that show up in our relationships as adults.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yes.

Cassandra Lange: Of course, you want to know about early relationships, you know, even if they kind of brush off middle school, high school, those things still build a foundation for their adult relationships. And then.

Cassandra Lange: And their first sexual experiences, their early ones, and then any traumas that they've had, of course. We always want to assess that. But find out, have they had relational traumas, have they had sexual traumas? Because that all comes into your work with them as an adult having relationships.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, 100%. And I think for clients that are similar to my typical client, kind of people-pleasing, protective of their parents, often when I ask about their parents' relationship, they're like, oh, you know, they were good, they were, you know, normal level of affection, and like, what's normal?

Allison Puryear (she/her): And one of the questions I always ask is, would you... do you want a relationship like the one your parents had?

Allison Puryear (she/her): And that one is like a sparkler, like, it always brings in some good stuff.

Cassandra Lange: Yeah. And we know as therapists, we see this over and over, that people tend to have relationships like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): their parents had, or tend to find partners, like, one or sometimes both of their parents. Really important to explore that so that you're able to bring up, like.

Cassandra Lange: Hey, do you see the sort of patterns that are happening in your relationships?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Okay, so we're getting, you know, our typical basic background of, like, what have relationships been like for you, throughout the history of your life, both the observed relationships and the ones you've participated in.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And then how do we get to, like, just talking about what non-monogamy has looked like for them? Like, do they have examples of it? Are they... like, how long have they been

Allison Puryear (she/her): thinking about it, pondering it, those kinds of things, or participating. How do you go about that?

Cassandra Lange: So, I approached that... Often, kind of how you approach orientation.

Cassandra Lange: there's kind of...

Cassandra Lange: when we talk about ethical non-monogamy, consensual non-monogamy, there's kind of this idea that there's two kinds, and one is orientation, and one is a lifestyle choice. So, some people feel

Cassandra Lange: wrong in monogamous relationships, just like a queer person might feel wrong in a heterosexual relationship. So kind of exploring, like.

Cassandra Lange: when did you start to feel like maybe monogamy wasn't the right fit for you? Some people maybe have cheated in the past, even though it's really not aligned with their values, or some people may have realized, you know, 6 months or a year into every relationship, they get restless, and they end the relationship. And some people come to non-monogamy because their partners were interested in it, or their friends were interested in it, and they're trying it that way. And maybe monogamy or non-monogamy

Cassandra Lange: monogamy fits for them, and that's when it's more of, like, a lifestyle choice.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So, is there... and I think that from the outside, there is judgment on one of those, and, confusion on the other.

Cassandra Lange: Hmm...

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right? Within the culture of non-monogamous people, is there... is that reflected?

Cassandra Lange: That's a good question. I think the only time I've seen judgment is when people aren't doing it for reasons that feel ethical or consensual. So...

Cassandra Lange: people who are choosing non-monogamy as a lifestyle choice because they're too afraid of losing their partner, or because they're exerting control over their partner. People who are choosing it as a lifestyle choice because they're really cheating instead of wanting more, like.

Cassandra Lange: abundant and, like, consensual relationships. And there's a real clear difference between people who compulsively cheat and want to deceive their partners, and people who are non-monogamous and really are just drawn to connecting with people however they connect with people.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right, right.

Cassandra Lange: So it feels really less about how you come to it in terms of, like, orientation or lifestyle, and more how you behave once you're there.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. So, and I think, like, we're... depending on where you live.

Cassandra Lange: This can be something that is very.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Like, more understood.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Or less understood, outside of the non-monogamous

Allison Puryear (she/her): culture or crew. And so, I'm curious to...

Allison Puryear (she/her): For our clients, especially in areas where it's not supported, it's judged.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I'm skipping ahead, but we're here and I want to know. Like, how are you supporting your clients

Allison Puryear (she/her): Is it different if it's lifestyle versus...

Allison Puryear (she/her): Just... this is my orientation. Or is it the same?

Cassandra Lange: I think it does end up looking a little different, because... when it's orientation, I work with them the same way I work with my queer and trans clients, so...

Cassandra Lange: regardless of how they approach it, it is going to be like, let's talk about who you want to know about this. Let's talk about how out you are, let's talk about the dangers of being out potentially at work or on social media. It's not a protected

Cassandra Lange: like, characteristic about people, like being queer or trans is, for now.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Great.

Cassandra Lange: Depending on when this airs.

Cassandra Lange: But non-monogamy is not protected legally pretty much whatsoever, so it can have ramifications if you have children, potentially, you know, for your job.

Cassandra Lange: So talking about that, but that is going to have a different impact on people who feel inherently non-monogamous versus someone who it's a lifestyle choice.

Allison Puryear (she/her): You know, people...

Cassandra Lange: I bring up swinging, because I just think of that as often a lifestyle choice for folks.

Cassandra Lange: Or previously, you know, a more accessible way to practice non-monogamy.

Cassandra Lange: a lot of people, that's a... they consider it a private thing. Something they do in their bedroom, or other people's bedrooms, and something they don't need other people to know about, where it's, like, actively polyamorous, like, kitchen table polyamorous, where they

want all of their partners to come together and be part of their life. It's gonna be a lot harder to be in the closet.

Cassandra Lange: Then it's just something they think of as, like, their sexual behavior that they share with their partner.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right, right.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And I think about how, like, you were saying swinging is, like, that was an outlet, and I think it was, like, kind of the more acceptable outlet for decades and decades.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And it is not necessarily the same thing as how a lot of people frame their own Consensual monogamy.

Cassandra Lange: Right. It's under the ethical non-monogamy umbrella.

Cassandra Lange: But it is really just, like, sexual, open relationship, usually not with the emotional connections that a lot of people who want ethical non-monogamy really crave.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And I kinda wanna...

Allison Puryear (she/her): Because I'm realizing, like, this could be... this conversation right now could be, like, ethical non-monogamy 101 for some people listening. Like, they might not...

Allison Puryear (she/her): come into this conversation knowing anything. I feel like you've done such a clear job of explaining, like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): the orientation versus the lifestyle.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And I think that there's still such a idea of right and wrong around monogamy in our culture that whether... like, I've seen... I have a really good friend who...

Allison Puryear (she/her): Is more in the... Orientation realm.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And it's this...

Allison Puryear (she/her): It reminds me of, like, some of my gay friends in the 90s, of, like, I wish I wasn't like this.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Like, she's had to do a lot of work around accepting herself, that this is... this is her, and there's nothing wrong.

Allison Puryear (she/her): With her. And then I have a handful of friends who... it's a lifestyle, like, it's...

Allison Puryear (she/her): just, like, the way that they want to be in relationship, and maybe it'll change in the future, maybe it won't. They're like, you know, not committed to that either, you know? Like, it's... they're... they're not trying to put themselves into a box. They want to be able to enjoy the people that they enjoy in whatever way they want to consensually enjoy one another.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And they seem to have a lot less of that angst.

Cassandra Lange: Hmm, yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Because it feels more like a choice for them.

Cassandra Lange: Right.

Cassandra Lange: Turn it off.

Allison Puryear (she/her): If...

Cassandra Lange: There's, you know, pressure on them to be or appear more monogamous.

Cassandra Lange: That's okay with them. That makes sense.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right, right. And so I'm just, like, that's why I ask if there's, like, a different way in supporting these two different groups, which it sounds like there is, because I think that's an important thing to assess so that you're not, like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): trying to work on identity stuff, and like, the struggle of it with somebody who's like, no, this is fun for me. Like, this is how I want it.

Cassandra Lange: So... And I think with clients who come to me and say things like, my partner really wants to open up, I need support in making this happen in a way where I can tolerate it, it is more about boundaries and communication, and less an exploration of identity.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right.

Cassandra Lange: But really, there's a big overlap between both groups.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right, because you're going to need boundaries and communication with everybody.

Cassandra Lange: Yes. Everybody all the time, in any circumstance, whether you're non-monogamous or not.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Okay, got it. And so, like, what I'm hearing is there's individualized treatment plans.

Allison Puryear (she/her): For people, depending on so many different factors, like what you've assessed already around the relationships they've been in, whether this is lifestyle or, orientation, and a lot of those individual treatment plans are gonna have overlaps.

Cassandra Lange: With somebody who might be different, but there's... there's tweaks.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And that it's all gonna involve... communication and boundaries.

Cassandra Lange: Yes, absolutely.

Cassandra Lange: And attachment also comes into play.

Cassandra Lange: When you're trying to figure out what things to focus on with your client, in terms of exploring how they want the relationships to work, and trying to sort of...

Cassandra Lange: figure out what they might especially struggle with in non-monogamy. There's an amazing book called Polysecure by Jessica Fern that talks about attachment and non-monogamy, and previously.

Cassandra Lange: being non-monogamous, wanting to be non-monogamous, was seen as kind of an attachment failure. It was seen as insecure attachment, or, like, maybe avoidant attachment you can't commit to people, something that you need to healing yourself so that you can be successfully monogamous.

Cassandra Lange: know that that's not the truth of most people's experiences with non-monogamy.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right.

Cassandra Lange: And again, it comes back to...

Cassandra Lange: someone who cheats regularly on all of their partners, maybe that's avoiding intimacy, versus someone who's really inherently drawn to non-monogamy, or who is open to

practicing it in a more ethical way. And by ethical, I really mean consensual for everyone involved.

Allison Puryear (she/her): There's no...

Cassandra Lange: Clear boundaries, clear trans... like, transparency and communication, everyone knowing that there is non-monogamy happening, that...

Allison Puryear (she/her): It's a good basic, yeah.

Cassandra Lange: Is, and it is...

Allison Puryear (she/her): Not something that everyone has as their baseline.

Cassandra Lange: And that's, you know, there's lots of types of non-monogamy that are not ethical, not consensual. Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: But...

Cassandra Lange: Jessica Fern talks about it as a different way for adults to relate, because we know that growing up

Cassandra Lange: Most of us have multiple parents, and we're able to have secure attachments, or different attachments with multiple parents, so exploring how adults are able to have that with multiple partners, too.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And...

Cassandra Lange: again, our experience with our caregivers informs how that's gonna look. So...

Cassandra Lange: If people have avoidant attachment,

Cassandra Lange: Maybe they don't feel comfortable asking for help, or asking for lots of support or care from partners, so they shut down their needs.

Cassandra Lange: Right? It's more like an anxious or preoccupied person, they might act like they're okay with everything, when they're really not, which I, you know, gender aside, call cool girl syndrome.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right, right.

Cassandra Lange: my class.

Allison Puryear (she/her): As you were talking about both of those, I'm like, or anybody raised as a girl or woman.

Cassandra Lange: Yes, where it's just like, I'm trying non-monogamy, I'm dating, maybe other people have more experience than me, so I just need to be okay with whatever they do. Like, unpacking that with clients.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: And then, if clients are maybe disorganized or fearful avoidant.

Cassandra Lange: maybe they've had some abuse from their parents, so figuring out, like.

Cassandra Lange: what they need to avoid that again. Maybe doing some psychoad on, like, cycle of abuse, or indicators of abuse, so that they avoid repeating that with other partners.

Cassandra Lange: And again, Dissimilar from what we would do with individual clients.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, and just thinking about how, like, like you said, it's the same if you were doing this with a monogamous client, like, it's...

Allison Puryear (she/her): the non-monogamy is not a symptom of these attachment styles. The attachment styles inform how you work with all your clients.

Cassandra Lange: Absolutely.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So I think, like, I had a really close friend in the... God, I guess, like, 20 years ago, who, was a sex therapist. And so, like, that's when I first started hearing about ethical non-monogamy.

Allison Puryear (she/her): outside of, like, swinging, which I'd heard of swinging. And for it to be something that's more out, and more, like, not just...

Allison Puryear (she/her): sex-related, that it's, like, full relationship-related as well. But I still had judgment, like...

Allison Puryear (she/her): I mean, it's just my head, I had such a hard time wrapping my head around it, because I am oriented and lifestyle-wise, just, like, it's easy for me to be monogamous. Like, it's harder

Allison Puryear (she/her): the relationships I stayed in for so long that I should have left. Like, I'm like, well, I'm committed, I'm loyal. And so, like, again, like, monogamy isn't always the healthier choice.

Cassandra Lange: Yeah, but it feels like the safer choice. Yes. And it's the roadmap that we have.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yes.

Cassandra Lange: I mean, non-monogamy is so different in 2025 than it has been ever. I've been non-monogamous since 2012, and that's a completely different world than it is now, and I think... Right.

Cassandra Lange: non-monogamous folks were really fortunate that it is so widely known, and

Cassandra Lange: way more accepted. But we still... I cannot really think of a non-monogamous character from media.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Hmm.

Cassandra Lange: Have any depictions of non-monogamy.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right.

Cassandra Lange: around us at all. We're still kind of fumbling around trying to figure it out.

Cassandra Lange: Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: I mean, I would say most people still believe monogamy to be the default, or what you'll end up doing.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: Yeah, so it is really hard to navigate.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, and I mean, I bring that up because I think it's easy for us to sit here and be like, yeah, these other people that have judgment or have biases, but therapists really need to evaluate their own biases.

Allison Puryear (she/her): deeply. And...

Allison Puryear (she/her): I'd love for us to talk about that, because I was so glad I had this friend of mine who introduced this idea to me.

Allison Puryear (she/her): so long ago, because it was still years before I had a non-monogamous client, and I had, like, worked through it enough, because, you know, like most sex therapists I know, she was like, well, let's talk about your reaction, you know?

Allison Puryear (she/her): And so I was able to change the way I was thinking about it, but not everybody has a close sex therapist friend who's gonna, like, keep their thumb on them to examine things.

Cassandra Lange: Right. And, of course, it's pretty inappropriate as a therapist to examine that with your client in the.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Oh, yeah. Yes.

Cassandra Lange: And, you know, therapists are not immune to that. I...

Allison Puryear (she/her): I advertise my practice as somewhere that clients can come and talk to someone who knows what they're talking about, because.

Cassandra Lange: So many of them have had therapists in the past who are like, oh, what's ethical non-monogamy? Or, like, constantly learning about it through their client, which, of course, not therapeutic, not appropriate.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right.

Cassandra Lange: So, doing this work ourselves, like this training, to kind of

Cassandra Lange: Start to figure out, like, okay.

Cassandra Lange: I'm learning these concepts, I'm thinking about it for myself.

Cassandra Lange: yeah, what does make me uncomfortable about it? Is it... is it multiple loving relationships? Am I pretty okay with swinging? I can understand where you maybe open up your relationship sexually, because...

Cassandra Lange: We know it's really hard to maintain a sexual relationship with a partner over time, so okay, that makes sense, but I can't see dating multiple people seriously. Or is it the sexual thing that kind of feels ick to us? Is it like, okay, I can see loving multiple people, but...

Cassandra Lange: not being sexually monogamous feels uncomfortable or unsafe. And that, again, is also therapist bias. I think a lot of therapists worry about safety for their clients, but really.

Cassandra Lange: It's a bias against people who have multiple sexual partners, or...

Cassandra Lange: who experience their sexuality differently. And that's something you want to unpack with your client, but also with yourself. I see sex negativity come into it a lot. I see...

Cassandra Lange: clients who are exploring non-monogamy, saying, okay, but I can't date anyone who has more than X number of sexual partners, because it's unsafe, and really reminding ourselves that, well, one, we live in the time of COVID.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So...

Cassandra Lange: going to the supermarket is unsafe, if you look at it from a disease perspective. And also, again, 2025, even HIV-AIDS, we have really good treatments, and most STIs

Cassandra Lange: antibiotics and they're gone. It's like a cold. So really, are we talking about safety?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Oh my god.

Cassandra Lange: That we're uncomfortable with.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right, and where does that, sense of, like, superior morality come from?

Cassandra Lange: Yeah. Like, what's it rooted in?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Because I think, you know, we can just... we could be as tricky as anybody else as therapists, and we can convince ourselves that this is about safety, when it is about, like...

Allison Puryear (she/her): we were raised in a different way, or, you know, it scares you. Like, imagining doing it yourself scares you, and so you assume it's dangerous for them, too.

Cassandra Lange: Right. And... You know, true crime has become so popular.

Cassandra Lange: You know, we can convince ourselves that it's really unsafe to meet a stranger in public.

Cassandra Lange: We have to trust our clients to be taking measured risks in everything they do, and that includes dating. And the internet also, you know, we can do a little psycho-ed with our clients about, here's how you can notice red flags in dating profiles, just like we would with our single, monogamous clients.

Cassandra Lange: But that's another way, I think, that we can kind of...

Cassandra Lange: Mask our discomfort in concerns about safety.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And I think, too, about, like, the, like, where you live. Like, where I live in Asheville, there's a very large, strong, non-monogamous.

Allison Puryear (she/her): community. But about, I don't know, maybe about 7 years ago, I had a young client in her early 20s who was, like, going to these meetups, and everybody was, like, my age. You know, like, they were all in their 40s, and she's like, I'm not really...

Allison Puryear (she/her): I'm not really interested in these old men, or these old women, but I feel like these are my options, and like, I have to choose between not great options, and just having to navigate that, because I don't want her to... I don't want anybody to settle for anything, so...

Cassandra Lange: Right.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, figuring out... eventually, the community expanded significantly, luckily, for that crew, but I think that also it was Meetup.com and maybe just what old people went to, so...

Cassandra Lange: Right.

Allison Puryear (she/her): with quotations.

Cassandra Lange: Yeah, old people to a 20-year-old.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: And a lot of the more established non-monogamous folks

Cassandra Lange: tend to be a little older. They've maybe been doing this for a while, they're more comfortable with it. Maybe they're just less socially anxious in general, more willing to, like, put themselves out there and meet people. I know...

Cassandra Lange: In my experience, sex parties tend to be a little bit of an older crowd, but apps now, this is mind-blowing to me, again, as someone who

Cassandra Lange: Oh gosh, 13, 14 years ago, started practicing non-monogamy.

Cassandra Lange: Apps have... you list if you're monogamous or not. It's not a default anymore.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right.

Cassandra Lange: There's the Field app, which is just for non-monogamy. There's lots of options, and if people can't find community locally, again, like with any orientation.

Cassandra Lange: I encourage them to explore the internet, read people's experiences, connect with people online, and a lot of people find people they want to date online. Long-distance relationships are less untenable in non-monogamy, because they're not your only support system. They're not your person, and your person's long distance. You can have these connections with people in different locations, see them occasionally, and still have really good relationships.

Cassandra Lange: Even if someone does live somewhere rural, and maybe there's not a lot of, like, app activity, they don't need to be limited by that if they're willing to travel, or willing to, like, build a connection online.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And I love that, like...

Allison Puryear (she/her): there's flexibility, and I think it's really good for us therapists to know about these kinds of resources, because if we're working with somebody who's exploring that, but just isn't in the community yet, so they don't know that there are options.

Cassandra Lange: Yes. Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: I also like to...

Cassandra Lange: kind of warn my clients about things that are pretty common to see when exploring non-monogamy for the first time. And this is something that it's important for therapists to be aware that these things happen in the community. So...

Cassandra Lange: You may have heard of Unicorn hunters.

Cassandra Lange: For anyone who doesn't know, it's... generally, a...

Cassandra Lange: cis male, cis female couple, the male is straight, the woman is bisexual. The idea is that they're gonna find a bisexual woman for them both to date, so that, you know, there's no jealousy, because

Cassandra Lange: There's also this concept in non-monogamy called a one-penis policy, where... OPP.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I haven't heard that. Where...

Cassandra Lange: Men are okay with their female partners dating other women, but not other men, because that feels threatening.

Cassandra Lange: So, unicorn hunters are looking for this perfect woman who is bisexual and wants to have sex with both of them, and maybe date both of them, so that they can have this, like, equal relationship with one person, and that there's less chance of, like, jealousy.

Cassandra Lange: It's probably... You know, explaining it already, clear what some of the problems are there.

Cassandra Lange: But...

Cassandra Lange: sometimes that looks like a good opportunity for someone who is maybe a bisexual woman exploring with women for the first time. It feels a little safer, or it feels safer to have this couple who seems experienced in non-monogamy to, like, teach them things.

Cassandra Lange: But unicorn hunters really... they're looking for an ideal and not a person.

Cassandra Lange: And those kind of restrictions in their relationship means there's probably something going on in their dynamic that they're not willing to address, so they're trying to kind of paper over it.

Cassandra Lange: And the unicorn, bisexual woman who's unattached, unicorns in the community, they tend to get triangulated into that relationship.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Hmm.

Cassandra Lange: So that's... I mean, and I would say a lot of the non-monogamy community considers unicorn hunters to be unethical non-monogamy.

Allison Puryear (she/her): What are the, like, I mean, how do... like, I'm thinking about that client I had, that young client, like, how...

Allison Puryear (she/her): Who, yeah, would have looked like a great unicorn.

Cassandra Lange: Okay.

Allison Puryear (she/her): how...

Allison Puryear (she/her): should clients look out for that? Like, how can we help support new clients, or clients new in the community, in making sure that they're not getting snatched up by unicorn hunters?

Cassandra Lange: I think just letting them know that this happens, and...

Cassandra Lange: it's something they'll start to notice once they're aware of it.

Cassandra Lange: And just telling them, you know, how it could unfold, but letting them make that choice. Some people want to be unicorn hunted.

Cassandra Lange: sometimes it works for people. It's an entry into non-monogamy, or it's a relationship that really works for them.

Cassandra Lange: We can't make those decisions for our clients, but we can just let them know, like.

Cassandra Lange: hey, these are some potential pitfalls, or if we realize our client starts to date unicorn hunters, just to, like, explore with them, ask some questions about how the couple is treating them, if they feel like they're being respected as a partner, if they feel like

Cassandra Lange: there's couples' privilege constantly being hung over them, if they feel like they're not being treated like a full person, if they feel like they're being used for sex. Like, we know that this happens, so we can just kind of watch out for it.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right, and if it's framed as just sex, that's different than if it's framed as, like, this is to be, like...

Cassandra Lange: Yep.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. Can you talk more about couples privilege?

Cassandra Lange: Yes. So... It's complicated.

Cassandra Lange: Couples privilege is the idea that an established couple who's opening their relationship, or who's just nested, which is what we call when people live together, maybe married, have a certain amount of privilege, just kind of automatically. They might know each other better, they might have legal protections if they're married, and...

Cassandra Lange: A lot of times, there is this hierarchy.

Cassandra Lange: Where, you know, if... you're with...

Cassandra Lange: Your newer partner and your spouse needs something.

Cassandra Lange: you're probably gonna be pulled towards your spouse. That's the established relationship, you have a certain feeling of obligation there, which can really make other partners feel less than.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: And so, this is a bit 201, but in ethical non-monogamy, there's hierarchical polyamory, and then there's non-hierarchical polyamory. And hierarchical is...

Cassandra Lange: I have a primary partner, or a nesting partner who's gonna come first. And then there's non-hierarchical, which is everyone is equal, like, nobody takes precedence over each other.

Cassandra Lange: That is a really beautiful ideal, and a lot of people see it as the only ethical way to practice polyamory.

Cassandra Lange: In practice, I think it's really unrealistic to ignore the reality that we have

Cassandra Lange: longer-term or stronger relationships with other people sometimes that are gonna come first. That's just natural. If you live with someone, you're going to be spending more time with them, you're going to be...

Cassandra Lange: you know, doing things for each other, where a partner who you see less frequently, that's not necessarily gonna happen. So I personally don't think that...

Cassandra Lange: hierarchy is necessarily bad. It's when there's couples privilege that is overshadowing everything that's going on, that's making other partners feel like they're not important, they're discarded. That's when it really becomes a problem.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Got it. And can we talk about some other terms, like... Relationship anarchy, for instance.

Cassandra Lange: Yes. So, relationship anarchy is the idea that all relationships are equally important, and that's platonic familial.

Cassandra Lange: romantic, sexual, all level playing field. So... your spouse is not more important than one of your friends.

Cassandra Lange: And in our culture, that's kind of hard to wrap our brains around, because we have this idea that you find your person, and you get married, and that's your, like.

Cassandra Lange: person who you go to for everything. And relationship anarchy says, no, my friends are just important. Who cares that I don't have a sexual connection with them? My family's just import... just as important. So relationship anarchy is really, like, leveling that and saying, I'm not privileging one type of relationship over another.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right.

Cassandra Lange: Right.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And then what, like, what's the difference between polyamory and open relationships, and, like, what are some of the distinctions under the umbrella?

Cassandra Lange: Yes. Of consensual non-monogamy.

Cassandra Lange: So, I would say most people conceive of open relationships as being open sexually, but not emotionally. I don't think that's true all the time.

Cassandra Lange: But that's how a lot of people think of it. I think it's a more sort of vague term, where polyamory is about multiple loves. It's about...

Cassandra Lange: I'm going to make full connections with other people. It's not gonna be... sometimes it might end up being just sexual, but I'm gonna actively be seeking out multiple romantic partners, and, like, fostering those connections, because I believe that love is abundant, and that we can have more than one romantic sexual partner.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Okay, so...

Cassandra Lange: Polyamory has more of, like, an ethos about it, when open relationship is more just kind of, we're not exclusive.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So I'm thinking about, like, unicorn hunters, people who are, like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Like, having sexual relationships with people without telling their partner, even if they've been...

Allison Puryear (she/her): in open relationships with them, historically, or things like that. So, like, what are some of the ways that...

Allison Puryear (she/her): People are, like, non-ethically non-monogamous, and maybe hiding behind being ethically non-monogamous.

Cassandra Lange: Yes. So... People who have relationships without telling their partners...

Cassandra Lange: there's two main ways that can go, and one is cheating. People cheat in non-monogamy. It's...

Cassandra Lange: pretty common. Some people feel like it's too good to be true, so they don't feel like they can actually tell their partner when it happens, even though they have permission, and so they hide it. Either, like, putting it off, downplaying things.

Cassandra Lange: Or just not.

Allison Puryear (she/her): forward about it at all. So it's the hiding that's the problem in that circumstance, not the sex.

Cassandra Lange: Right, yes, depending on your agreement with your partner. Because some people have agreements that...

Cassandra Lange: you can make out with someone, but not have sex with them. And maybe they say they made out with someone, but they went farther than they really did, and that breaks that agreement. So it's really about whatever your agreement is in your relationship, if you're breaking that and not telling your partner.

Cassandra Lange: then it's really, you know, I would consider that infidelity.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, yeah.

Cassandra Lange: And then there are some couples, often, when they're just starting out with non-monogamy, who practice don't ask, don't tell. So, you can do whatever you want, with whoever you want, as long as I don't know about it.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And...

Cassandra Lange: I would say that in the ethical non-monogamy community, there might be a camp that considers that to be ethical, because it's agreed upon, it's consensual, and there might be a camp that considers it to be unethical, because

Cassandra Lange: I don't feel like that ends well.

Cassandra Lange: And maybe with two people who are truly just, like, carefree, and...

Cassandra Lange: that's just how they live their life. They don't like knowing things that are maybe a little challenging. Maybe that really does work for them? Who am I to say? But, to me, I want to know, why do you not want to know? Are you really actually not okay with it, but you feel like you have to be?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, and that's where the... is it really consensual?

Cassandra Lange: Right.

Allison Puryear (she/her): comes in, because you're not... You're not able to really look at what the choice means.

Cassandra Lange: Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Okay, got it.

Cassandra Lange: it's that kind of gray area consent. I mean, if you think about, like, having sex when drunk.

Cassandra Lange: It's a gray area consent. Like, would you have consented if you weren't drunk? Would you consent to your partner being with other people if you knew about it?

Cassandra Lange: It's just kind of a messy space to be in, and some people have to start that way, or feel like they have to start that way to, like, ease into it.

Cassandra Lange: But I think it's really worth exploring why.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: And another unethical way that I often see people practicing polyamory is what's called cowpokes in the community. So cowgirls, cowboys, cowpokes.

Cassandra Lange: It's called that because they're basically trying to lasso your partner and bring them in.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Oh, that...

Cassandra Lange: their partner.

Cassandra Lange: It's not something you can recognize off the bat with people generally, it's just...

Cassandra Lange: Something that becomes evident as your partner starts dating someone new, or someone starts dating someone new, that they're really trying to, like, undermine the existing relationship or relationships, and kind of, like, pull that person into a more, like, primary or nesting situation.

Cassandra Lange: And I think that's gross behavior. It's really problematic in the community.

Cassandra Lange: That it's usually under the guise of polyamory and non-monogamy, but really just subconsciously or consciously trying to undermine established relationships, causes a lot of stress and tension, because often the person in the new relationship isn't able to see it.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Got it. So it's like the polyamorous version of a homewrecker.

Cassandra Lange: Yes.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And so...

Allison Puryear (she/her): I mean, is that usually, like, like, the cowpoke is the person who does that over and over and over, or is it sometimes... are they still considered a cowpoke if it's, like, their connection with this person is so deep, and they really like them so much that they... like, maybe they wanted to be secondary, but now they want to be primary?

Cassandra Lange: that is just a normal progression of feelings, and I think what makes it...

Cassandra Lange: A cow poke versus someone who's just experiencing that is kind of... The insidiousness of undermining.

Allison Puryear (she/her): relationship. I think if there's a lot of transparency and, like.

Cassandra Lange: Still respecting... Established relationships, but when it's trying to chip away at them, maybe, like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Maybe, like, triangulation, or, like, those kinds of things.

Cassandra Lange: little nasty comments about the partner, or, you know, when it's problematic. When it's really, like, painting partners against each other, kind of.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, okay.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So think about how, like, in every relationship, whether it's a romantic relationship, a friendship, parents and children.

Allison Puryear (she/her): communication is just hard. Like, when it's truly honest and real.

Allison Puryear (she/her): It has very hard moments, and how the more people we bring into our lives, whether that's romantic or not, the more hard conversations we're signing ourselves up for.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And I think that's always been the thing that stuck with me the most about, particularly polyamorous people, because there's... it's not just the sex, as, like, that's just... this sounds like a lot of work.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So, how do you help clients come up with boundaries, or, like, feel...

Allison Puryear (she/her): okay having boundaries, like, because I can imagine there's some validation that needs to happen sometimes, and the agreements and, like, just the transparency, all of it.

Cassandra Lange: So, a thing I work with with all my clients, but especially people navigating non-monogamy.

Cassandra Lange: this concept of boundaries versus rules, and I think it's really important, again, in our current age, where we have a lot of mental health content on social media that's telling us things that's not exactly accurate, really, realistic.

Cassandra Lange: So, boundaries are things we create for ourselves.

Cassandra Lange: a boundary, you know, is I will not have sex without a barrier. A boundary is...

Cassandra Lange: You know, if you don't communicate with me for a week.

Cassandra Lange: I will probably pull back emotionally, because that's something I really want in a relationship. Those are boundaries, those are things that we can control in ourselves.

Cassandra Lange: Rules are very tempting in non-monogamy, especially starting out.

Cassandra Lange: What other people can and can't do.

Cassandra Lange: And... I really discourage rules.

Cassandra Lange: people, I really try to interrogate what's this rule doing? And especially if the rule is based in fear, then I think that the rule is probably something we need to work on. So...

Cassandra Lange: A lot of people try to create this sense of safety, especially if they're opening an existing relationship, by saying.

Cassandra Lange: okay, you can go out and do whatever you want with this person, you just can't go to our restaurant. Or you just can't have this specific kind of sex. Or you just can't have a sleepover.

Cassandra Lange: And there is such a difference between, like, building up your tolerance.

Cassandra Lange: of your partner doing more, like, escalated things with a person. Like.

Cassandra Lange: you know, maybe I'm not comfortable right now with you going on vacation with someone, but if you want that, we can work towards it, versus you are never allowed to do this specific thing because I feel threatened by it.

Cassandra Lange: And so, really unpacking, like, what is the threat? What is the emotion that you're feeling? And what is the boundary you can create for yourself?

Cassandra Lange: Where your partner still has autonomy, because this is such an important part of non-monogamy. It's the autonomy of every person involved to do what feels good and right for them, and it's our job to respond to that.

Cassandra Lange: Versus creating these rules, which get broken.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Of course.

Cassandra Lange: And then...

Cassandra Lange: creating, like, conflict that didn't need to be there, necessarily, instead of really digging into what does this mean for me, what do I need to feel safe?

Cassandra Lange: And that kind of leads into a really important emotional conversation with non-monogamous folks, which is...

Cassandra Lange: this idea of jealousy that comes up a lot, versus envy. And I like to really clarify that with clients, you know, jealousy is when you're afraid something's gonna be taken away from you. Envy is when you really want something you don't have.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Hmm, okay.

Cassandra Lange: distinguishing between what they're feeling when someone they're dating is with someone else, or they think about someone they're dating with someone else, and then working on it. So...

Cassandra Lange: You're not failing at monogamy if you feel jealousy.

Cassandra Lange: That's such an important thing. Non-monogamous people feel jealousy, they feel envy, they feel insecurity and fear and sadness about their partners going out to see other people sometimes. But it still aligns with their values, so it's worth sitting with.

Cassandra Lange: Who's jealous.

Allison Puryear (she/her): That's such an important distinction. Will you say that again?

Cassandra Lange: Which part?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Well, just that, like, feeling these... like, because I think about how envy and jealousy feel, like, they've... they're miserable, but that it's worth sitting with because it's in line with your values.

Cassandra Lange: Yes, absolutely. And so many people say, I could never be non-monogamous. I'm so jealous.

Cassandra Lange: And I'm just like...

Cassandra Lange: That doesn't matter! It does! It's your willingness to sit with it and work through it, because it's a skill like anything else. There's going to be envy and jealousy. But there's also, in non-monogamy, what's called compersion, which is the feeling of joy seeing your partner with someone else, or hearing about your partner be with someone else.

Cassandra Lange: And not everyone feels it, some people feel it really easily.

Cassandra Lange: But that's really the goal, is that satisfaction of, someone I love is having a really good time with someone they care about, and it doesn't threaten me.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right. And I think, like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): most people have some experience with that, of like, maybe it's your partner and their brother, or maybe it's your partner and a friend, and it's like, oh, you guys had so fun, like, I didn't want to go to that show, or I didn't want to throw axes, or I didn't want to... whatever. And I'm so glad you had such a good time with so-and-so, it sounds like a blast.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Nope.

Cassandra Lange: So important to remember is that all of us have multiple relationships in our lives.

Cassandra Lange: We can really expand how we think about relationships.

Cassandra Lange: you know, for a lot of us, it's like, oh, right. When someone has fun with someone else.

Cassandra Lange: it's not taking away from their bond with me. So if someone has sex with someone else, or someone experiences romance with someone else, it also doesn't need to take away from their bond with me. With some people, it does. If you're oriented monogamous, sometimes you can only feel that with one person. But non-monogamous folks, or some people who can choose either way.

Cassandra Lange: It really doesn't actually have an impact.

Cassandra Lange: So when you're feeling jealousy, when you're feeling like, if my partner dates someone else, they're gonna leave me.

Cassandra Lange: You ask for reassurance, just like you would if you were in a monogamous relationship. You say, hey, can you just remind me how much you care about me? Can you just,

like, give me a little time? I know I'm supposed to know this, but my gut doesn't know it right now, my heart doesn't know it, just remind me how much you care about me.

Cassandra Lange: Like, feed that part of you and ask for support from your partner. And if you're feeling envy, I can't believe that they went to that place, I wanted to go to that place, go do it.

Cassandra Lange: If you feel any that your partner is having new relationships and you're not.

Cassandra Lange: Go date more, go meet more people, go spend time with friends. Like, look for the core of those emotions and then treat that instead of maybe trying to restrict what your partner is doing.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Which seems like such a logical, knee-jerk thing to try to do, because none of us want to feel the feelings and explore the hard feelings.

Allison Puryear (she/her): we want to, like, mitigate ever feeling it again. Yeah, yeah. So I see how that would be so easy for people. And I think, too, when you're doing something that's not really been modeled for you, I can see how rules would feel like...

Allison Puryear (she/her): you know, like, ground rules. Like, it just... it sounds like it would be...

Allison Puryear (she/her): Helpful, but it also maybe defeats part of what each person is looking for with that autonomy.

Cassandra Lange: Yes, and I've worked with couples, polycules, where they're really struggling because they have these rules, and these rules feel really important.

Cassandra Lange: But maybe some of the partners, or one of the partners is feeling really limited by these rules, and the other person is like, I still feel miserable. Like, these rules are in place, because they need to be, because I'm too terrified to not have them, but I'm still not feeling secure. Yes, the rules are...

Allison Puryear (she/her): fear-based. You're not addressing the actual core of what's going on. You're just creating these roles which can create resentment, and, like.

Cassandra Lange: again, rules get broken, and then you're angry at your partner, and you have fights about it, and it doesn't help with your attachment to each other. It doesn't make you feel more secure.

Allison Puryear (she/her): It's so interesting, like, this parallel that's happening in my brain right now, I'm thinking about how, like, private practice forces personal development.

Cassandra Lange: Yes.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And it sounds to me like... like... Consensual non-monogamy forces personal development.

Cassandra Lange: Yes. Yes.

Cassandra Lange: Because you have to learn emotion regulation, or you're not gonna get through it. You have to learn self-soothing when your partner or partners are out with someone else.

Cassandra Lange: have to... I mean... Non-monogamous or monogamous, you have to learn those things when you're dating.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right. It's hard. You have to learn...

Cassandra Lange: when you're dating, you know, consistently, or often, you have to learn more how to take rejection, and how to soothe yourself with breakups, and how to reach out for support when things are happening. It's...

Allison Puryear (she/her): All the skills we need as people, but really magnified, especially because.

Cassandra Lange: practicing non-monogamy is saying, I'm not going to enter in this monogamous parallel where there is one person who is my support, which I think

Cassandra Lange: you know, cis men tend to really do that with their female partners. Like, this is the person I talk to when I'm upset. This is the person I talk to about any emotions.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: And when that person has other partners they're out with, or you have someone else

Cassandra Lange: You're starting to date, you have to learn how to kind of expand that.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): It's interesting, because I'm like, it forces personal development if it's done right. And just like a monogamous relationship, like, there's all sorts of various levels of shitshow that can happen.

Cassandra Lange: Absolutely.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Cow.

Cassandra Lange: And... I'm thinking about shitshows that can happen in non-monogamous relationships, and I think...

Cassandra Lange: Often, if your orientation is mismatched.

Cassandra Lange: that could be a shitshow, if one person is monogamous and one is non-monogamous. That could be really difficult to manage, which could be a whole other training of, like, mixed orientation.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Wow.

Cassandra Lange: and show.

Cassandra Lange: But just, like, really challenging yourself, and...

Cassandra Lange: really challenging yourself, are these relationships fitting what I want?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Because so much of non-monogamy is about abundance, which...

Cassandra Lange: Abundance, amazing.

Cassandra Lange: And monogamy really tends to privilege longevity of relationships. Like, you were talking about staying in relationships past when maybe you should, because there's security. There's some status to having a relationship. There's, you know...

Cassandra Lange: A stigma against being single sometimes in our culture.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right.

Cassandra Lange: But non-monogamy kind of eschews that and says, is this working for me all the time? Am I picking this person every single day because they're not my default, only option?

Cassandra Lange: kind of, like, stuck in this, well, this is who I'm with.

Cassandra Lange: Because...

Cassandra Lange: You have other people who are giving you support and love and sex, so you don't have to kind of live in the starvation economy of some marriages that have gone on for a long time.

Allison Puryear (she/her): The starvation economy, I like that. Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, and I think, like, we've all worked with those clients who are in marriages or committed relationships where you're like, break up, break up.

Allison Puryear (she/her): breakup. And... they don't.

Cassandra Lange: But if they...

Allison Puryear (she/her): If there was some...

Allison Puryear (she/her): counter to what they were experiencing. If there was a person that they could spend time with, and you know, I mean, also, when they do break up, it's so often because of infidelity, because they met somebody who made them feel alive again.

Cassandra Lange: And...

Allison Puryear (she/her): So, yeah, they are kind of choosing to let go because their eyes are open to what's available.

Cassandra Lange: Yes, and I think... Most of us have probably been through breakups where...

Cassandra Lange: As the breakup's happening, we think no one's ever gonna love me again.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Oh, yeah, every breakup, it's like a rule.

Cassandra Lange: Yes, absolutely. And when clients already have people who love them, even if it's what we call a comet partner, so a comet partner is someone who you see when they come around. So maybe they travel a lot, maybe they live in a different city, maybe you connect every 6 months, every 3 years.

Cassandra Lange: But even if you just have a comet partner in another city saying, I would love to see you, like, I think you're sexy, I think you're attractive, that is a reminder that, no, we can find more people to love.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: And so many people stay in relationships out of that fear.

Allison Puryear (she/her): That they're never...

Cassandra Lange: one again.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. Oh, that's so... yeah. It's a good point, because it's like, when we have friends, like, if we're monogamous and we have friends, we'd be like, I guess I'm lovable because my friends love me, but it's not the same. Right. But when you do have the same, and somebody that, like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): A person or people besides the one you're mourning that...

Allison Puryear (she/her): Sees all of you, like, gets all of you, you know?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: Yeah, and... Nope, my thought's gone.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Bye-bye, Thought. See you later.

Cassandra Lange: Yeah, it came back.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Good.

Cassandra Lange: I have seen also so many times with friends, We're with clients.

Cassandra Lange: People who've been in monogamous relationships for a long time, and maybe whose parents didn't model the most healthy

Cassandra Lange: monogamous relationship, opening up, starting to date someone, and all of a sudden, their standards are so much higher. Because they realize it's possible. A lot of people

Cassandra Lange: because of their upbringing, because of the relationships they've been in that maybe are mimicking what they saw when they were growing up, don't know that you can actually have a partner who shows up for you.

Cassandra Lange: who doesn't belittle you, who doesn't hurt you. A lot of people really believe that it's not possible.

Cassandra Lange: So even a brief experience of dating someone who treats you well, who does... gives you a thoughtful gift, who picks up something for you when they get something for themselves, that really raises the bar for people.

Cassandra Lange: Realizing, oh, this is possible, and I deserve more than I'm getting in relationships.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And I'm thinking of the converse, too, like, a good friend of mine who, they recently opened up their relationship exclusively, like, sexually, and it's making her appreciate...

Allison Puryear (she/her): her connection with her partner better, because there's not, like, resentment of differing sex drives, or one person wanting something sexually the other person's not interested in, like, they both have those sexual needs met, sometimes with each other, but also outside.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And it just took some of the tension out of their relationship that had been there before.

Cassandra Lange: Yes.

Cassandra Lange: Monogamy works for a lot of people.

Cassandra Lange: Feel like a really safe and secure relationship structure.

Cassandra Lange: Having one person to meet all of your sexual needs, and many, if not most, or all of your emotional needs, is a lot of pressure to put on one relationship.

Cassandra Lange: A lot of pressure, and...

Cassandra Lange: You know, it might be therapist bias that we mostly see couples who have things like libido mismatches, but often people have libido mismatches.

Cassandra Lange: Especially transitional times, hormonal transitions, family, like, having kids transitions, work transitions.

Cassandra Lange: having a partner who's starved for touch and sex, and having one who cannot imagine it, is really stressful. And sometimes it's really worth waiting out, you're both really monogamous, but sometimes it's such a pressure relief to say.

Cassandra Lange: Go out with your girlfriend. Go have fun. I will be here having my time, and then we can come back together more refreshed, more connected, because we're both getting our needs met in different ways.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So it's...

Allison Puryear (she/her): It can be supportive if there is a primary relationship, like, it's supportive of that primary relationship, not necessarily taking away from it.

Cassandra Lange: I really believe that non-monogamy and polyamory is additive once you get past those first hurdles.

Cassandra Lange: it just...

Cassandra Lange: it's really beautiful to see your partner having a connection with someone else. It's really beautiful to go out and have a really exciting date with someone who you're really into, and come home and maybe tell your partner all about it.

Cassandra Lange: And... again, that right... that new appreciation for your partner. Maybe you go out and have a terrible date, and you can both laugh about it, and you can remember, oh, right, my partner's really amazing in these ways that a lot of people aren't.

Cassandra Lange: And I think it really can benefit a relationship as long as you're both being really honest, having those hard conversations, supporting each other's needs, and, like, continuing to work on that secure attachment with each other.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. I'm thinking, too, about, you know, when I was younger, and this was not talked about so much, or it wasn't really explored, like, there was swinging, and that was kind of...

Allison Puryear (she/her): It, and...

Allison Puryear (she/her): like, I had so many friends who were in, like, half-relationships, like, nobody was wanting to be monogamous with one another. I mean, not nobody, but, like, in the...

Allison Puryear (she/her): some of the people that I'm thinking of.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And how back then, it was all like, oh yeah, like, he never commits to anybody, or, you know, she's just like that, or whatever. Like, there was... it was like a...

Allison Puryear (she/her): there's a model they're not fitting into. And there wasn't support and a name and, a community around it back then that would have had them feel like there wasn't something wrong with them, or had their friends maybe think that there was something wrong with them.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Like, I think about, like, generations of, like, oh, they just have commitment issues. Of, like, maybe it's not commitment issues, maybe it's just, like...

Allison Puryear (she/her): there's an abundance, and they want all of it when they can. Like, who doesn't want all of the good stuff? Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: solo polyamorous. Maybe they don't want to have someone who's their identified partner, and they just want to have the connections that they have, and, like, nurture those relationships in a way that feels good for them, but not have

Cassandra Lange: Someone who's what's on... who's on what's called the relationship escalator.

Cassandra Lange: So that's the idea, that relationships have this.

Cassandra Lange: predetermined path, where...

Cassandra Lange: You date, you become exclusive, maybe you move in, maybe you get married, you have kids, you grow old together.

Cassandra Lange: You know, and there's obviously other steps on the escalator, going on vacation together, meeting each other's family.

Cassandra Lange: But a lot of people don't necessarily want that with...

Cassandra Lange: anyone they're dating, with everyone they're dating, so being able to step off of that escalator and say, what do I really want in my relationships?

Cassandra Lange: I've mostly been talking about people who experience romantic and sexual attraction, but non-monogamy also creates so much space for people who might be asexual, but still romantic, who might be aromantic, but still be sexual. You have to not date.

Cassandra Lange: because you're holding someone back if you're partnered with them, and you don't want sex with them, or you don't want romance with them. There's so much room for people to get their needs met, even if they're not totally aligned. You don't have to... an asexual person doesn't have to date an asexual person in order for the relationship to work really well.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, how freeing.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Like, that just gives so many more options.

Cassandra Lange: Yes. And so many people don't realize that they're ace, because...

Cassandra Lange: There's not the conversation about it much, and also, you know, a lot of ace people feel like they need to provide sex to their partner because it's a need that their partner has, which is very real, but at the same time, that's so uncomfortable for so many people.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And I think, I mean, this would be a whole other podcast, but I think about how often asexual people are basically

Allison Puryear (she/her): Told, like, there's some trauma, or some reason they are like this, instead of just, like, this is how they're wired, this is who they are.

Cassandra Lange: And there's nothing wrong with that.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right, right.

Cassandra Lange: And I kind of mentioned this, but a lot of couples

Cassandra Lange: lose sexual attraction over time.

Cassandra Lange: Oh, I'm losing her name now. But.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Esther Perel? Yes, thank you. Of course.

Cassandra Lange: Meeting captivity, she talks about how familiarity

Cassandra Lange: like, just naturally reduces sexual attraction, that the erotic is part in the mysterious. So, a lot of couples, when they've known each other for 20, 30, 40 years, and they've been together since they were teenagers, or...

Cassandra Lange: like, have had very few sexual partners except their partner, that erotic goes away, but it doesn't mean you have to break up because of it. It doesn't mean your marriage is failing because you don't have sex anymore.

Cassandra Lange: you can explore that with other people and still have this amazing, like, old love, and I say that in a positive way, this.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: You have a life together,

it doesn't have to end because your sexual connection isn't there.

Allison Puryear (she/her): This is super tangential, but I had just finished that book before going on a girl's trip, it had just come out, and I finished it, and I was telling my friends about it.

Allison Puryear (she/her): And I was like, what was the name of that book? Sex in a Cave?

Allison Puryear (she/her): Meeting in Captivity. Close, but I like the image you conjure.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: So many ways to have relationships, and non-monogamy just gives you permission to explore that.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So, looking at it, I'm just kind of, like, thinking about the overarching themes of this conversation.

Allison Puryear (she/her): that, for many people, consensual non-monogamy is additive. It is not about taking away,

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yes, jealousy and envy are gonna happen just like all other feelings happen in our lives, and just like all other feelings, sitting and being with them and exploring them is the way. Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: Figuring out their root, and how to soothe them without rules, without fear-based action.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Right. That, like, the feelings are feelings, they're not what we base all our decisions and actions on.

Cassandra Lange: They're not a threat.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): That, like, this is... we need to be non-pathologizing, and for many of us, that means working on our biases.

Cassandra Lange: Yeah, and it's okay to not know everything that your clients are talking about, of course.

Cassandra Lange: But focusing more on what does this mean to you, instead of, oh, I've never heard of that, can you tell me about it?

Cassandra Lange: I feel so bad for clients, even if we have never heard about it. What does it mean to you? And then go later, do your own research, but they don't need to know you don't know.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: And... Every person's experience is different, so it's worth learning more about their experience with it.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I'm thinking, too, like, there are so many terms you've used, and I love the terms in this, like a cowpoke and, like, relationship anarchy. Like, I feel like...

Allison Puryear (she/her): they're fun terms. Is... do you know of any resources that can kind of... it's like the 101 for terms, that if somebody has a client that's just joined them, so they're not like, well, what's a cowpoke now? And what do you mean by relationship anarchy? That sounds bad.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Is there a resource you know of that could be helpful, or a website?

Cassandra Lange: I don't know of, like, a centralized place that has it. I can find that out,

Cassandra Lange: The... there's still not that many books out there about non-monogamy.

Cassandra Lange: the kind of core one is still "The Ethical Slut", Janet Hardy and Dossie Eaton, and it's pretty outdated, not everything in there kind of aligns with the community, but it still gives kind of a good foundation of how a lot of people approach polyamory and sort of some of the concepts.

Cassandra Lange: I mean, just a quick Google.

Cassandra Lange: If it's someone who's non-monogamous, and they have a glossary, it's probably pretty accurate.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, yeah. So that... that's probably the way to go. And that way, you can get...

Allison Puryear (she/her): just, like, the highlights. You know, like, your client's experience is still your client's experience, and that's what you're focused on, but then you're not interrupting their story, or pretending like you know what they're talking about when they're not, which...

Allison Puryear (she/her): I mean, I think we all do sometimes in therapy, anyway.

Cassandra Lange: Yeah, I know that street in our town.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, totally.

Cassandra Lange: Yeah, yeah, good to get the basics down. I mean, again, I've been non-monogamous for over a decade, I do this work professionally, people will still come to me and say things I'm like, I have no idea what you're talking about. And I think sometimes being honest about that, but...

Cassandra Lange: not if... It's your first non-monogamous person, not if you're really showing discomfort.

Cassandra Lange: the topic.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. And, and, I mean, what is your advice to a therapist who's like, I mean, I'm trying, but I'm still really struggling to feel like it's a legitimate choice for people to make? Like, I'm bumping up against this...

Allison Puryear (she/her): thing from my past, or the way I was raised.

Allison Puryear (she/her): would you advise that they refer out? Would you advise that they get consultation? Like, where's the line for that?

Cassandra Lange: I think that if you have a client you have a really good rapport with, an established relationship.

Cassandra Lange: and they say, I'm thinking about exploring ethical non-monogamy, go into that journey with them. Be honest about...

Cassandra Lange: I have these feelings about it, but let's talk about it. I think if someone is coming to you fresh.

Cassandra Lange: Probably refer out.

Cassandra Lange: Especially if what they want to work on is mostly relationships.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: I want to work on your niche.

Cassandra Lange: and they happen to be non-monogamous, I think that that would probably be fine, but if someone's really looking to explore non-monogamy, especially a couple looking to open up and you don't have experience with that, I think referring out is really the best thing to do.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Well, and I'll say, for other... having worked in eating disorder work for the last 20 years.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I have seen eating disorders resurface for people when they do make the decision to go, non-monogamous, simply because it feels like there's so much more... they're gonna be judged, just their fear. And they want to look good, and they want to be sexy, and their... their brains are still stuck in...

Allison Puryear (she/her): an old version of sexy, right? Like, a version of sexy that might not be realistic for them right now. And...

Allison Puryear (she/her): So, for eating disorder therapists, as you're asking questions, to, like, keep an eye on that.

Cassandra Lange: Yeah, and I think any kind of trauma response, or addiction, or habit in times of big transition like that, looking out for, is that coming up?

Cassandra Lange: And anyone entering non-monogamy for the first time, I think it's really important to explore their dream, right? Like, what's their why? What do they imagine? Once they've gotten through a lot of the hard stuff? Doesn't end, but...

Cassandra Lange: once they're familiar with non-monogamy, more experienced in it, what do they want their community to look like? What do they want? Do they want a polycule? Which is, you know.

Cassandra Lange: their partner and their partner's partners. Do they want, like, polycule vacations? Do they want... maybe...

Cassandra Lange: to date multiple people who are dating each other, which is very complicated, but maybe that's what they dream of. Maybe they want a spouse, and they're both dating other people, and they don't really know each other, but they're happy that way.

Cassandra Lange: Really, like, finding that dream, and then normalizing that it's not easy to get there.

Cassandra Lange: dating at any point, dating is really, really hard.

Cassandra Lange: The apps have become so... extra...

Cassandra Lange: like, profit-driven and meet marketing, they don't want you to make a connection, because then you're off the app. So, like, really normalizing, it's hard. People are not good to each other, necessarily, when they're dating.

Cassandra Lange: they're going to have a lot of trouble, and I think that's maybe the thing my newly non-monogamous people struggle with the most, or maybe your partner's having a lot of connections and you aren't, but just normalizing that it takes time, that it...

Cassandra Lange: you know, these connections are possible, but you're gonna have to have some heartbreak, and, like, have some bad dates. And...

Cassandra Lange: You know, figure out what you really want through going through it.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah. Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: just really normalizing that you can't just, like, go out there and... and a lot of people, like we've talked about, this has not been common for very long, at least publicly. People have been practicing non-monogamy forever, but...

Cassandra Lange: A lot of people are new to it, and a lot of people are bad at it, because they're learning.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: you're gonna date people who are shitty at it, and that it's not a reflection on you or non-monogamy. It's just, like, building this resilience around dating, which is really stressful regardless of your relationship orientation. But just normalizing that it takes time to build this, like, ideal situation.

Cassandra Lange: And you may be in and out of it.

Cassandra Lange: You know, you may be...

Cassandra Lange: Your partner may be dating multiple people, and you might not have anyone else, and just, like...

Cassandra Lange: The flux of it can be really challenging, when they're actually, like, boots on the ground trying non-monogamy.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, and I think about some of my...

Allison Puryear (she/her): like, friends in the LGBTQ community, and how they're like, I'm not interested in dating somebody who just came out. It's just too much of a rollercoaster. And how that is probably reflected of the folks who have been non-monogamous for, you know, a decade. They're probably not like, oh, you decided this week, let's try this.

Cassandra Lange: Yep, that's very much the case in non-monogamy, too. A lot of people...

Cassandra Lange: yeah, if you're monogamish, or, like, mostly monogamous, except there's a few exceptions, if you're just opening up with your partner, if you're only sexually open, if you have a lot of rules, we haven't talked about veto power, which is when.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Your primary or nesting partner is able to say, actually, no, you can't date this person. Oh, wow.

Cassandra Lange: is not... I can say pretty clear, like, not good, but very common. Very common, and it's really dehumanizing to be in that position.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: Yeah, a lot of experienced non-monogamous people are like, you go have your time, take a year or two, figure it out, deal with your stuff.

Cassandra Lange: We can talk about it.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): I can understand that. And then it's like, the people who are being messy with it, as they're learning, are being messy with it together, and hopefully finding some, like, nuggets of wisdom as they go.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Cassandra Lange: And a lot of... just like everything, it's just experiencing it and realizing, okay, maybe that boundary isn't working for me.

Cassandra Lange: going through it. And the beautiful thing about non-monogamy is that you can start to have a connection with someone, realize it's not the right time, and then explore it again in a few years, when maybe.

Cassandra Lange: places, because, again, there's not that scarcity of, oh, they're in a relationship now, so that connection's not possible. Things can really, like, boom over time.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah.

Allison Puryear (she/her): This was so helpful.

Cassandra Lange: I mean, I feel like I knew some things, but I learned a lot, and I hope that, like.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Other people listening had the same experience.

Allison Puryear (she/her): So, thank you so much for your time, and I really... I do think that this is going to help therapists be more...

Allison Puryear (she/her): Informed and more supportive, and... and also, you know, it's some personal development for therapists, always, when we explore our own biases, so...

Cassandra Lange: Yes, and monogamous and non-monogamous therapists have biases around how non-monogamy should be done, too.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Oh, good point, yeah.

Cassandra Lange: Even non-monogamous therapists, sitting with your own idea of what ethical means, and how people should do it, and being willing to really question that for yourself, too.

Allison Puryear (she/her): Yeah, yeah, amazing. Well, thank you so much, Cassandra. Thank you.

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