

Sheff, Elisabeth. 2011. "Polyamorous Families, Same-Sex Marriage, and the Slippery Slope." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 40:487–520.

PRIMARY ARGUMENT: The author argues that polyamorous and lesbian families have strongly contributed to the shift of traditional family ideals and values and should be recognized as legitimate families.

IMPORTANT DEFINED CONCEPTS:

- Polyamory: When people openly court multiple romantic, sexual, and/or affective partners, with a goal of forming long-term relationships together (e.g., throuples, quads) or apart.
- Parsonian Families: Regarded as the typical (optimal?) family unit, these families consist of one man serving as the economic head of the family and one woman tending to everyone's emotional, physical and social needs. Polyamorous & same-sex families challenge this kind of monocentrism.
- Chosen Kinship: People who have chosen to establish a familial relationship with others with whom they are neither legally nor biologically related.

PRIMARY FINDINGS:

1. Polyamorous families are best compared to homosexual families because they are both considered "threats" to the typical family unit, facing considerable stigmas about their lifestyles and degradation by conservative politicians and journalists as the cause of non-normative behaviors (the "slippery slope") like incest, bestiality, and pedophilia.
2. A lot of polys and lesbian have to find new and creative ways to communicate or interact with their biological families and their families' reactions can be unpredictable when they "come out" to their family. Polys and lesbians often experience either acceptance or rejection from their family about their sexuality.
3. While lesbian couple seem to be far more personally and politically committed to getting married, polyamorists show less interest in it or they do not see legal plural marriage as their important goal. Instead of marriage, polyamorists have their own commitment ceremonies to publicly acknowledge each other as family members. During their ceremonies, they have their own ritual as a signal of their pledge.
4. Polyamorists also have a different view on divorce. Some transition to poly families as an alternative to divorce

KEY QUOTE: "While they differ in some ways, poly and lesbian families' similarities are more marked. Each constructs chosen families from a mélange of biolegal family members, lifelong friends, and/or current and former lovers. Such novel mixtures defy conventional familial categorization, and thus require poly and lesbian families to innovate new roles, options, and relationship configurations, offering a 'less fossilized' (Green 2006, 187) version of family." (508)

QUESTION: The author mentions that there are a lot of similarities between polyamorous families and same-sex families and although a lot of women who are in a poly relationship are bisexual, a lot of men are still heterosexual. And people are still more likely to accept heterosexual relationships so how is it similar to same-sex families? Also, father and mother figures will still exist in poly families. Meanwhile, there is no specific father or mother figure in same-sex families so how do it influence the growth of the children in poly and same-sex families?