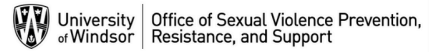




**Season 3 Episode 4:
Non-Monogamy 101**
with Sadie Smith



Prevent Resist Support Podcast

Season 3 Episode 4: Non-Monogamy 101 with Sadie Smith

Anne Rudzinski: Hi everyone, I'm Anne and this is Prevent Resist Support, a podcast by the Office of Sexual Violence at the University of Windsor.

Music: I got your back my dear and I know that you got mine. I feel that hope and fear but I know we'll hold the line. Keep your head up. Keep your hand out when your breath is feeling short. Prevent, Resist, Support.

Anne: Hi everyone. Today we have an exciting episode with Sadie Smith. This is the second time that Sadie has visited our podcast. They did a really great episode with us in season two, episode twelve, where we talked about BDSM one on one. This time Sadie is chatting with me about polyamory, ethical non-monogamy and all of the things that go along with that. So I'm excited for you to listen!

(intro music)

All right, welcome, Sadie. We're so excited to have you back on our podcast for a second ep with us.

Sadie Smith: Yeah, I'm really excited to be here to talk about non monogamy, it's one of my favorites.

Anne: Yeah. I'm so excited to chat about this with you. Before we get started, would you mind just giving our listeners, like a little bit of who are you? What do you do? Why are you here talking about this with us today?

Sadie: I'm Sadie and my pronouns are they/them. I am the founder of Crescendo Counseling, which is a safer space for queer, polyamorous, kinky and creative. I hold a bachelor's of Social Work from the University of Windsor, a Masters of Social Work and Human Rights from Allison and Hoekstra in Berlin. And I am a guided imagery and music therapist, level two in training.

Anne: Yeah, I love that. So I think you know, as we prepped for this episode, we talked about the idea that we're not here to say that monogamy or polyamory are better approaches to dating. We're just here to give you information about both. And we're hoping to kind of challenge some of those social norms and make it more of a choice, maybe, what style of relationship you engage in.

Sadie: Yeah, and I think it's important to add that there can be healthy monogamy, there can be very unhealthy monogamy, there can be healthy non monogamy, polyamory, however you like to call it. And there can also be very unhealthy non monogamy, polyamory, it's more about making an active choice about what kind of relationships you want for yourself.

Anne: I love that. So let's start by chatting about monogamy, what are some of the expectations or assumptions that we make with monogamy that maybe aren't the most healthy? Because I think this is, as we said, kind of the default expectation for how relationships work.

Sadie: If we look at society, we see that people who are in dyadic partnerships, those with just two people involved, are encouraged to be do so by so much media, in that like it glorifies, privileges folks who choose that form of relationship, right, and encourages folks to kind of follow the relationship escalator being that like you start dating someone with the intention of like, "Oh, perhaps we're going to get married", "Oh, perhaps after that, we're going to have children", or "Perhaps after that we're going to buy a home, buy a house together"- those things and as you go down those paths, like you're rewarded by the state, like by the Canadian state, by any other country that you're under, there is benefits for being in a married partnerships that you get from like taxes, to

medical benefits and various other forms of health care. You get additional money for children and things like that, and that kind of context.

And it's assumed that monogamous parents, monogamous relationships, are kind of the best form of relationship. And I think that- that can be really a dangerous idea, because it prevents us from having a lot of different connections. And often monogamy forces us to think of this other person who we might most likely have a sexual relationship with as being the person who is supposed to fulfill all of our needs. Like that is a whole lot of pressure (laughs), because one person cannot fulfill all of one person's needs. Like that's just, that's impossible. We're such complex and dynamic creatures, beings, but we can't be everything for someone all the time.

Anne: Yeah, I think the thing that I always think about when I want to hear those pieces- is and I- I always don't know, like how to say this, but like "monoga-normativity"- I don't know if that's a thing, is that a word? I don't know.

Sadie: Modern normativity? Yeah, that's the word.

Anne: Yeah, that's the word! But I feel like it- really like tells us that our romantic partner is number one. And then our friendships are less important. So it tells us we have to get all the things from the one person who is like- I married my best friend, they're my soulmate, they're my other half. But then, what happens is that, like, all these other relationships are like deprioritized in our lives. And that's not to say that everybody does things this way, but that's kind of the messaging that we get about it. Right? And I think that- that's maybe not the best way to go about things.

Anne: Absolutely. So just valuing- one of the things that I love is just valuing all of the relationships in our lives and the unique values that they bring to us and the ideas that we don't have to get all the things from one person.

Sadie: Totally. And that, we inherently can love more than one person. I think monogamy also encouraged us to think of love as in only this one person that we're having this kind of romantic or sexual relationship with, and devalues these other forms of love, but, really, we have different forms of love in our life, and so many other places, like with our friends, our pets, maybe children in our lives, like maybe, parents or other folks like, that's all another form of love and care. And I think monogamy does a really disservice and not valuing, as highly.

Anne: I agree with that and I also think there's a lot of, um, like jealousy about other forms of relationships in our lives. And sometimes we see that play out as well, you can't have friends of the opposite, opposite in quotation marks, gender, or, you know, you can't maintain friendships with EX partners, um, or just even like jealousy about time spent with friends or family. And I think that- that, you know, is one of the aspects of monogamous relationships that I really don't like.

Sadie: Yeah. And I think, you know, not to say that, like, domestic violence does not happen in non monogamous or polyamorous relationships, but like, this notion of like, jealousy and control, are very much intertwined in monogamous relationships, right? And part of what we see with domestic violence is like that the person who is the victim of the domestic violence is often pulled into isolation, because of the devaluation of friends and family and other forms of connection fueled possibly by jealousy.

Anne: Yeah, absolutely. So what I love about that is, I think our goal, like our shared goal, is to kind of unpack that, and lay it all out. And then I think folks can take as much or as little as they would like, from, the things that we lay out as options, right, and hopefully, kind of disentangle from some of those unhealthy expectations that we have for relationships.

Sadie: Yeah, kinda like a relationship buffet, you get to pick and choose what they look like, they can all be healthy, and they can all be unhealthy. Just, it really varies on the people and where people are at, and how will people know each other, themselves and their own experiences?

Anne: But yeah, let's talk about what are some alternatives to monogamy? So if you're thinking about like, maybe this isn't the right fit, what else is out there?

Sadie: Yeah, so I think like the big umbrella term is like, ethical or consensual non monogamy. And that's kind of the umbrella term for all of the ways to be non monogamous. So within that you've got, like open relationships, which different people might have different boundaries and negotiations on what an open relationship might mean.

It might mean that people can go out and explore different sexually diverse connections. Maybe there's like, different limits on how romantically involved people can get. Um, maybe some folks identify with the term polyamorous which often is associated with having multiple deeply emotional connected relationships and/or sexual relationships.

You can have things like relationship anarchy, where the whole notion of hierarchy is attempted to be thrown out the window. There's the person and they have different connections and none of those connections are more valuable than the other, they're all valuable within their own right and not really ranked against each other. What else would you add in there?

Anne: I don't know, I think we covered all of them. We talked about polyamory, open relationships, ethical non monogamy, relationship anarchy, those are the big ones.

Sadie: I think the thing too with non monogamy, is that unlike ethical or consensual non monogamy, is that it can really be whatever the people in the relationship want it to be because there is no predetermined map. There isn't a non monogamy escalator, so to speak, right? I think it's really about the different ways people connect with each other and choose to want to continue to connect with each other, and the different boundaries that people have.

Anne: Yeah, so okay, that was almost exactly what I was about to say, which is just that people define these things differently. People might use the

term polyamory and might operate in very different ways. And so I think, you know, exploring these topics is important, but knowing that they do play out in different ways, and I love that you brought up boundaries. Can we talk about boundaries for a moment?

Sadie: Absolutely. Well, where would you like to start with those?

Anne: I guess, you know, how would you say that boundaries function in relation to non monogamy? Like, how does that work? What does that look like?

Sadie: That's a really big question.

Anne: It is, it is. I'm hoping for like, just like a one on one level, like-

Sadie: Yeah, so when we like boil boundaries down to like, what are they, there ways that we teach other people to interact with us. You know, sometimes we might not know where- especially when we're first exploring non monogamy, we might not know where a boundary is, it might take accidentally having someone crossed that boundary, or us crossing our own boundary, to then be like, oh, shoot, there was a boundary there, and I didn't know it.

And then it becomes about talking about and communicating that boundary with the folks you're exploring different relationships with. That way, if you see someone continually crossing that boundary, and then having, you know, addressing it again, as they that was a boundary that was crossed, and then continuing to cross it. Like that's a- that's a violation, right?

And I think that the big piece about consensual and ethical non monogamy in all of its forms, is everybody in that connection of relationships is doing so consensually, and understands what the different boundaries are, and what the different expectations are for another.

Anne: Yeah. So I think the thing that I always want to like talk about about boundaries is the idea that boundaries are meant to protect ourselves, not meant to control other people. And so sometimes, you know, I see

boundaries being used as a rule that sounds like, you can't do XYZ with another partner, you can only do that with me.

And I don't think that that's really a boundary, a boundary might sound like, you know, I'm not okay with you doing this thing, if then you want to engage with me right afterwards, or, you know, if we're going to be in a relationship, these are the things that I need to feel safe. But the idea is that it's your job to maintain your boundaries, right?

And if people crossed them, then what are the consequences? So can we talk a little bit about that, because I feel like boundaries, somebody's playing with in really intense ways in non monogamy.

Sadie: Yeah. And I think I like what you said about how boundaries are meant to keep us safe. That's totally what they're about. They're not about us hurting other people, they, other people might feel hurt, because of a boundary. But that's theirs to work through, not yours. Your boundary is there to keep you safe. And boundaries should be kind of adaptable and changeable based on- on you and how you grow, and how you experience the world. Where like rules are very hard and fast, and hard to change and break, and shouldn't be broken. So the boundary being adaptable and flexible means that it can change over time, as we grow and learn through polyamory. And they can get really complicated and really intense when we start to add more people in.

Anne: I just kind of feel like, you know, the idea is a boundary is about protecting yourself rather than controlling the other person. So instead of saying you can't do this, that crosses my boundary, it's more like, if you choose to do this, then, this is how I'm going to respond to keep myself safe.

Sadie: Yeah, and then that becomes part of like, the negotiation, almost like when we talk about it in kink like, you've got to really negotiate things, that's where part of your boundary say like, this is my boundary of, for example, if you are going to go engage in sexual activity, I want you to have a shower before having sexual activity with me because that makes me feel safer. And like if that person can't do that, or doesn't agree, like, they're not respecting your boundary, and that's not okay behavior to help keep you safe. So maybe that's not a safe connection at that point. And consent to right? Like you're not consenting to

having interaction with this person when they maybe haven't showered after sex with someone else because that's, like safer sex practices to.

Anne: Absolutely and I love that you're saying this is maybe not a safe connection and just normalizing that, just because you know we've chosen to be non monogamous doesn't mean that we have to maintain all these relationships, if something is not making us feel safe, if we notice our boundaries are not being respected or crossed, it's okay to say I don't think this is a safe relationship for me to be in.

So on that note, we could talk about what are some of the red flags or things to look out for, if you're thinking about dating in a non monogamous way? What are some things that you might look out for in the vein of keeping yourself safe?

Sadie: Having a sense of your own boundaries, right, and being able to communicate your boundaries, and also hold limits, like if we're using this example of this person doesn't want to have a shower after having sexual activity with someone before you, then like your kind of consequences like, well, then I guess I'm just not going to have sex with you if you can't have a shower in between. Right, and it can be really challenging, but really following through on what those limits mean, is really important.

And I think the other thing, people often associate, cheating to monogamy, because we so often see it in all kinds of media that like cheating is actually a function of monogamy. And I think understanding, cheating and polyamory really means like, it's when a lie occurs, when there's like something that is deceitful that has occurred, that- that's the cheating, it might not necessarily be like sexual activity, like we see so frequently in monogamy that it might be like, this person really didn't follow through and say what they did, then- then they did the opposite, like that is a violation of some kind of agreement that was there or some kind of boundary that was there.

Anne: Yeah, absolutely, or not sharing necessary information. And I think the information piece is so interesting, because people manage that in different ways, right? There are folks who don't want any information,

there are folks who want all the information, everybody in that situation has to be consenting to the information sharing.

But if there is a boundary around, this information has to be shared with me in order for me to be able to engage safely and that information is not shared, that could be a form of cheating, or that could be a form of boundary crossing.

Sadie: Yeah, and then you start getting into, like, don't ask, don't tell non monogamy. And I think that's a red flag, because if there's like this, don't ask, don't tell notion, then communication is not happening. And communication is so critical to being able to engage in multiple relationships, ongoingly, because that's where- how everybody continues to consent to being in these connections.

Anne: Yeah, absolutely. And then I think the other thing is that another red flag is the flip of that, when too much information is being shared, without consent, can you talk a little bit about what that might look like?

Sadie: Maybe using an example is easier, like in my polyamory, in particular, one of my partners in Brooklyn, like, he doesn't talk a lot about me, um, like a personal level, and like, that's okay. And then maybe if once we've met, I've met the other person, like then, and we form kind of like, our own friendship on our own, that's kind of when we communicate more about like ourselves on a personal level, right? And vice versa. So it's about also like me saying, like, this is how much information I feel comfortable about you, sharing about me with these other people.

Right, I'm all for them knowing that I am here and like our kind of dynamic, but like, you know, they don't need to know the nitty gritty, of who I am without us having some kind of a connection first. So I think maybe if you're exploring with someone, and they're telling you lots of details about this other person, that you don't know, that's probably, you know, that might be a red flag.

Anne: Yeah, absolutely. I think the other one that I sometimes see is sharing a lot of information about the sex that you're having with other people

without their consent. So there are some times when folks say, “yeah, you can tell your other partners as much as you want about the sex we have, that's totally fine with me”. But there are times when people say, “you know, that's like my private experience, and I don't want that to be shared”. Um, and so that's another one I see that comes up quite a bit.

Sadie: And that's again, that's, uh, part of consent, like you are consenting to information about you being shared or not. And then if that consent is broken, that's a boundary violation. I think another thing that's a really big red flag is like, when you have things like, a one penis policy or something like that, where one partner, one person in the relationship says like, oh, maybe because you are bisexual, like because I am of a specific gender like, I don't want you having relationships with someone that's the same gender as me. You can have as many other relationships and connections as people of various genders, but not the same one as here, like, that's also them putting a limit on what kind of connections you can have.

Anne: And devaluing queer relationship.

Sadie: Totally.

Anne: I feel like that's also saying like our heterosexual relationship is more meaningful than your queer relationships. And that is not okay. And I feel like this piece that you brought up also makes me think about unicorn hunting.

And I wonder if you could speak a little bit about that?

Sadie: Yeah, so unicorn hunting is often when there is a heteronormative or heteronormative appearing couple, kind of looking for that bi-hot babe. And the bi-hot babe is someone who is bisexual, and they want the bi-hot babe to interact with both of them. And when these people are unicorn hunting, the unicorn is often this bi-hot babe, and they're told that you can only have a relationship with both of us that is exactly the same. Or you can only see us both together. So having putting a lot of rules on someone about what kind of relationships they can form with, probably this, this couple of dynamic.

Anne: Yeah, I've never heard the phrase bi-hot babe before, but that's exactly what it is. I think that it's very much sexualizing, and it's treating people as an object for sexual pleasure rather than as like a fully determined human being that has their own goals and desires and boundaries and needs.

Sadie: Um, the notion of the bi-hot babe comes from how so frequently in media, bisexual women are praised for being bisexual because they're meeting this fantasy that men frequently have of women being together, which I think also feels why it can be more socially acceptable for women to be bisexual versus other people from different genders, because it's fueling and fulfilling this kind of very male gaze fantasy.

Anne: Yeah, absolutely. It's about the sexy experience that fulfills the fantasy rather than like the core beliefs about how relationships function. And I think that's what makes it a red flag for me. So are there any more negative things we should talk about, before we move on to talking about the good things?

Sadie: Yeah, I think it's just really important to know that there can be unhealthy relationships with any kind of dynamic. And that like, even though we kind of touched on a bit of domestic violence earlier, when talking about monogamy like that can still occur in polyamorous or non monogamous relationships, like that doesn't make any form of relationship immune to kind of harm.

Anne: Yeah, absolutely. So then, I guess, and this is great, because we're moving into kind of like the end bit of our chat today. What are some of the great things about non monogamous relationships? We've kind of outlined the red flags, I think that's super important. I think it's good for folks to know, like, what is the lay of the land? What should you look out for? But what are some really wonderful things that can happen in non monogamy?

Sadie: I think the big thing- I mean, for me, and my experience, and a lot of like the work that I've done with other polyamorous folk is that, it's the ability to be self autonomous, right, to continue to kind of be your own person, because I think that that's really valued in non monogamy,

because you're able to engage in lots of different types of connections that meet different types of needs. Because kind of like we were talking about before one person cannot meet all of our needs. Now we're able to create in- in non monogamy of whatever kind of assortment you choose, you're able to create the kind of relationships you want, that are needed to fulfill different sorts of needs, wishes or desires, and they're all valued.

Anne: Yeah. And I think another really wonderful thing that can happen is the relationships that you build with, metamours or the people who are dating your partners. Sometimes that happens, it's not mandatory, but it's a really nice cherry on top sometimes. Um, do you have any thoughts about metamour relationships?

Sadie: I think about they can be really great. They can be really great, but they don't have to be. And I think that sometimes there's a lot of pressure for folks to be friends with their metamour. But that doesn't necessarily have to be true. One thing I love about non monogamy and that I valued so much, is the ability to build, like, it really supports different ways queer families can build and connect.

Anne: Yeah, I love that. It's like that chosen family energy.

Sadie: Exactly, exactly. And I think it's just another way to build those kind of chosen families, and some of them being platonic, and some of them be built on romantic sexual relationships, but really enabling a variety of queer ways of relating.

Anne: Yeah, I love that. And I feel like the two jokes that I always hear are, being non monogamous so you can fill out your D&D party, got a whole group of people that you can play Dungeons and Dragons with, or you got a whole group of people that you can build like a queer commune with, out in the county somewhere and like raise chickens and live off the land, which I just think, those are both like really beautiful ideas.

Sadie: Yeah, I just I really appreciate that you can just build connections based on the types of connections that you wanna build. There's so much freedom and like, yes, jealousy is probably going to come up, but what

do you do? You find ways to communicate about it and like work through it, it doesn't have to be a big thing, it can be discussed. And I think the most important thing for folks kind of going out into the world and exploring non monogamy or polyamory, or whatever they want to call it, of ethical non monogamy is that a big part of that is unlearning. Unlearning a lot of these societal norms that have been ingrained in us since we were children about what our relationship is supposed to be and how we're supposed to feel about other people in different connections. And it's uncomfortable at first and getting comfortable with the uncomfortable and knowing that you're going to have to do learning and growing as an individual to start to build healthier, non monogamy.

Anne: I love that. And then so on that note, if you're in a non monogamous relationship, if you're maybe dipping your toe or maybe you are somebody who is non monogamous, I feel like sometimes it's hard to know like, where to go to get that support. If you're having those like classic relationship struggles, but your relationship maybe looks a little bit different than folks are typically used to seeing. And so maybe like, it might be a little bit harder to find a good therapist or to find, you know, good support.

So, where can somebody go if they need support, and they are engaging in non monogamous relationship styles?

Sadie: This question is exactly why I started doing the kind of counseling that I'm doing is, because there hasn't been a lot of options for folks to go to therapy and not be told, "Oh, your problems are just because you're trying to be non monogamous".

Um, so if you're going to go to counseling, like I always encourage folks to really talk to the person before they start the session to see if this person, you know, A) has lived experiences being polyamorous or non monogamous or is like, friendly, and has some kind of just understanding of what that means, kind of being picky about who you do therapy with. And like, the neat thing that's happened in the past couple of years, particularly because of COVID is, there are so many more options on- to do online therapy now than there ever has been,

which just opens up a whole new world of the types of therapists and the type of people and counseling that is available, because it can now be accessible from anywhere in the world.

There's also lots of podcasts, and lots of books, that are starting to come out around polyamory and non monogamy. So maybe it's connecting with a medium that you really enjoy. Some people really enjoy reading, some people really enjoy audiobooks, podcasts, and seeing what kind of resources are out there. One of the really big publishers for non monogamy right now is Thorn Tree Press. They have tons of books on polyamory.

Anne: I love that. So would you say, is that the best place to start? If you're curious about non monogamy, to start the podcasts and the books and like do the research? Or where- where should folks start if they're feeling curious about it?

Sadie: Uh, I think books are a great start, I think maybe finding a polyamorous community in your- in your area. In Berlin, there's like three or four, there's several different polyamorous communities for English speaking folk, for German speaking folk, for queer folk, like, I think connecting with the community must be really helpful.

Anne: I love that. So maybe we'll do like a little like reading list, podcast list that we can put out alongside the episode and just give some recommendations of cool things to read or cool things to listen to. But yeah, this has been really great. Is there any like one takeaway that you would like to leave folks with as we wrap up today?

Sadie: That non monogamy can be really wonderful. And that, I think the most important thing is people making an informed active decision about what types of relationships they want, and making it an active choice instead of just a societal default. And that it's okay for that to change. Like, there might be periods in times of your life are like, yeah, I'd like to be monogamous with this person. Or no, I like to continue being non monogamous. And that that can change and flux, just like our gender and sexuality, it's all a spectrum, um, and that the important pieces are just having boundaries respected and communication.

Anne: Yeah, I love that. Well, thank you so much for meeting with me today. And for taking the time to chat with us, so exciting to have you back on the podcast and I'm really excited for our listeners to have this piece of great information!

Sadie: Yeah, I hope that it is a useful resource for folks.

Anne: It's always so great chatting with Sadie and I'm glad that you could visit the podcast today and listen alongside with us. If you're looking for the episode transcript, you can find the link to that in our episode description. Thanks, folks.

Music plays

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You can contact us through the website or view a list of resources on our UWindsor campus and in our Windsor community. If you're not at UWindsor, you can learn about supports and your community through the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centers. Their website is sexualassaultsupport.ca