



"The ideal of lifelong monogamy as the only proper goal for relationships is so deeply buried in our culture that it's almost invisible."

Hardy, J.W & Easton, D (2017, The Ethical Slut)

"Today we have a cultural norm that insists we hide our racism from people of color and deny it among ourselves, but not that we actually challenge it."

DiAngelo, R (2019, White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism)

"I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group"

McIntosh, P (1989, White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack)

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Introduction

The skills associated with unlearning toxic monogamy culture (TMC) are cultivated by the assumed white poly person (WPP) in order to deconstruct implicit understandings of themselves in relation to and within a culture that is reinforced through power structures. In unlearning a 'common sense' understanding of ourselves, our relationships, and our society we have skills which can be turned to unlearning other 'common sense' understandings. One such application of these skills is in anti-racism work. This is the work of deconstructing systemic structures of white supremacy, in order to eliminate racial oppression. For a white people specifically it is the hard and necessary work to make apparent our privilege, understand its unintentional impacts, and leverage the implicit power that we have as a white person to address and deconstruct supremacy wherever possible.

This doc outlines a panel of skills that the WPP may have already cultivated in the unlearning and deconstruction of TMC, which can be utilised in anti-racism work. These skills fall into three categories - skills relating to internal work, skills related to communication with others, and skills related to culture and new-norm building.

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Skills on Internal Work:

These are skills relating to the internal work of the white poly person. Skills relating to emotional management, and personal development may be used to face your privilege and unlearn supremacy within.

Skill 1. Holding space for our feelings - being uncomfortable

In Non-Monogamy Work:

As a polyam person of whatever race, we often have uncomfortable emotions when deconstructing TMC. This is because the cultural scripts around monogamy are comfortable and systematically enforced and therefore feel 'normal'. Going against this encourages conflict and we must develop skills around emotional management. This includes holding space for discomfort - specifically emotional profiles of jealousy, anger, insecurity and guilt. Whilst a monogamous individual may face these emotions they have the hood of TMC to use - projecting, avoiding or weaponising these emotions in order to

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avoid sitting with them and understanding them. Without these scripts, and with far more opportunities for these feelings, the poly person will have developed either intentionally or not, techniques for holding space for these emotions, feeling them and labelling them. This will allow you to own them (see skill 2).

In Anti-Racism Work:

In anti-racism work holding space for uncomfortable feelings is a valuable skill. Specifically we will expect to use this skill in two areas - when checking our own privilege and when engaging in our own conversations about race. When checking your privilege the

Skill 2. Deconstructing emotional profiles

In Non-Monogamy Work:

As state above, intentionally or not, a person engaging in ENM/CNM will engage directly with emotional profiles which feel overwhelmingly negative. Being able to isolate when and how jealousy is being triggered and felt is a valuable skill - maybe it presents as anger, clinginess or demands whenever your partner is too busy, with someone else, making plans. We work to be able to isolate those factors as part of our work, and this skill is applicable in anti-racism work

In Anti-Racism Work:

Deconstruction of emotional profiles is a valuable skill in anti-racist work as there are difficult feelings of anger, guilt, etc when learning the ways that the WPP has systematically benefited from racism. When confronting yt privilege this is a helpful skill to have - including being able to label and hold space for uncomfortable feelings - see below

"If I believe that only bad people are racist, I will feel hurt, offended, and shamed when an unaware racist assumption of mine is pointed out. If I instead believe that having racist assumptions is inevitable (but possible to change), I will feel gratitude when an unaware racist assumption is pointed out; now I am aware of and can change that assumption."

— Robin DiAngelo, White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism

Skill 3. Owning ourselves

In Non-Monogamy Work:

In unlearning TMC we unlearn the myth that a partner is required to 'complete' us and therefore to fix our flaws. In doing so we understand that we are whole humans who need to engage in work to address areas of our lives that we are unhappy with, and a

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relationship does not mean we can delegate this to another human.
Eg. the WPP will unlearn that jealousy is a feeling inspired by our partner, and instead learn that it is a feeling that is within ourselves due to specific trigger.

In Anti-Racism Work:

In anti-racism work we must learn that it is not the work of black people to educate us as yt allies. It is the responsibility of ourselves, as a community and as individuals, to educate ourselves, own the privilege we have and work on it.

Skill 4. Understanding your insecurities are not the responsibility of your partner to address

In Non-Monogamy Work:

In unlearning TMC we unlearn the myths surrounding the responsibility of our partner to *accommodate* our perceived flaws. For example, we learn that feelings of insecurity are coming from within ourselves and these negative feelings are not the responsibility of a life partner to fix or mitigate.

In Anti-Racism Work:

In anti-racism work we must unlearn the myths surrounding the responsibility of the black person to accommodate or address our white guilt. For example we must learn that feelings of white guilt are coming from within ourselves and these negative feelings are not the responsibility of a black person to address in any way.

"It is white people's responsibility to be less fragile; people of color don't need to twist themselves into knots trying to navigate us as painlessly as possible.

— Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism.*

Skill 5. Implicit/Explicit differentiation

In Non-Monogamy Work:

TMC is both explicit and implicit - it is in the explicit is evident to us all but the WPP knows that the implicit is more dangerous precisely because it is hidden. The skill of differentiating between these is helpful.

In Anti-Racism Work:

In anti-racism work the WPP can apply this to an understanding of racism. Racism is explicit - in individual acts of meanness - but also in invisible systems conferring dominance on a specific group. Utilise this skill of differentiation to interrogate your

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understanding of racism and begin a conversation about privilege

Skills for Communicating with Others:

Communication skills are a valuable addition to a WPP CNM experience, which usually means communicating effectively with those in their immediate partnerships and wider polycole, and my include communicating with lawyers, career associates, and family members

Skill 6: Cultivating feelings of others - sympathy and compersion

In Non-Monogamy Work:

In unlearning TMC as a WPP we will become exposed to the activities of our partners and we will talk about them. Maybe your partner went on a date that went well or poorly. We have identified that these conversations include an emotional response, despite the activities being experienced second hand. We call the positive emotions compersion. This is the fall out of an internal and a communication skill - the ability to feel happy for someone who was happy.

In Anti-Racism Work:

We cannot know the experiences of black individuals, we cannot fully engage in empathy. However, in anti-racist work this does not mean that we are not emotionally engaged. Through the same channels of experiencing and communicating comparison, we can engage in sympathy in a real, emotional way. And similar to compersion this emotional response can bring the individuals sharing it closer together, and can be leveraged into action.

Skill 7: Talking about bodies and safety

In Non-Monogamy Work:

We most often use this skill in the form of talking about safe sex and consent. With this skill we are able to talk about the notion of 'feeling safe' and 'risk mitigation' We use this to unlearn the myth of TMC that the partner is always available to use.

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In Anti-Racism Work:

We can use this skills to talk about the ways that skin colour, race and black bodies, specifically relate to feeling safe in situations and therefore require different mitigation strategies. The black body does not feel safe in the same places that the white body does, and has to employ a prohibitively large burden of risk mitigation.

Suggested: Discussions around what safety means and how to help.

Skill 8: Talking about meaningful consent

In Non-Monogamy Work:

We use this when discussing our ability to consent - and often this includes topics around instances when consent may not be granted such as during specific kink scenes or whilst engaging in drugs/drink

In Anti-Racism Work:

We can use skills around consent to understand the nuance in issues relating to the ways in which power inform action.

The idea that the black body is perennially available to the white partner. In unlearning the myth that the partner is available physically to use all the time we already have the skills to do this and we must apply this in anti-racism work to an understanding of the ways in which the black body/culture has been continually accessed, used and appropriated without consent.

Skill 9: Talking to kids about hard stuff

In Non-Monogamy Work:

If you are a WPP and have children or are involved with children, you have used this skill to plan and execute an honest discussion about what children should and should not be exposed to, and may have continued to exercise communication of alternate relational choices to children

In Anti-Racism Work:

This skill is found in black households, within which parents have to engage in discussions with their children about safety and racism. This is a valuable skill often notably missing in white households.

As a WPP who has children, or is involved with a partner who has children, you should

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consider exercising communication strategies to have discussions about structural racism with your children.

For more:

<https://jenniferharvey.org/raising-white-kids/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/02/parenting/kids-books-racism-protest.html>

Skill 10: Talking disproportionate differences

In Non-Monogamy Work:

In TMC there is a myth that sufficiently intense love should be enough to overcome any practical incompatibilities. As a WPP we have had to engage in this myth and give adequate weight to the understanding of those practical differences in love language, goals, boundaries

In Anti-Racism Work:

In anti-racist there is a myth that sufficiently intense empathy, is sufficient in overcome practical differences. However you an a WPP cannot fully understand the experiences of a black person, and engaging with them entails giving adequate weight to those practical differences.

New Normal:

These skills are surrounding the ways that the WPP may seeks to actively deconstruct the TMC constructs through personal action

Skill 11. Seeking our representation in media

In Non-Monogamy Work:

The default for any familial structure on movie screens and tv series is nuclear and overwhelmingly hetero. The WPP will already have noticed and we understand that this has an impact on the ways that cultural scripts are narrated. Without representation of healthy platonic co-parenting relationships, or healthy metamour relationships, we have fewer established scripts through which to structure our real-world experiences.

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In Anti-Racist Work:

Anti-racist work applies a similar understanding of representation as a way to communicate norms. The lack of representation of black joy, black childhood, diverse portrayals of black manhood, black relationships, and black success are all noteworthy. As a WPP we can exercise an active understanding of the ways this lack of representation have most likely affected they ways we and others continue to structure real-world experiences and perceptions of blackness.

Skill 12: Conferring value on others

In Non-Monogamy Work:

The idea that the value to and for a partner is directly related to the amount of time you spend on them. In unlearning this myth there is suddenly value endowed on the time your partner spends doing things without you. That time including time spent with other friends, hobbies or partners is valuable to you as a partner despite it not being about you.

In Anti-Racist Work:

A WPP can use the skill of conferring value decoupled with oneself onto the value you have as an ally. It is not directly related to the amount of vocal work you do - there is space when unlearning this myth for non-optical allyship and the value of supporting work that does not centre yourself.

"Solidarity is nothing but self-satisfying if it is solely performative"

— Reni Eddo-Lodge, Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race

Skill 13. Combating assumptions through explication

In Non-Monogamy Work:

As a WPP we may employ a number of active strategies to eliminate assumptions that align with TMC. For example we might use the term 'partner' or 'playmate' which has a neutral gender and weight behind it. We may also actively address these through explication - calling our an assumption - of the gender or number of our partners - in appropriate and safe circumstances. Crucially as a WPP we might do these even when they are not about us. Because we understand that role these assumptions have in the implicit nature of TMC.

In Anti-Racist Work:

Microaggressions and racist assumptions operate using similar means of communication which require similar skills to address and redirect. Crucially we as a WPP have practiced

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calling out assumptions that do not specifically related to our individual current circumstance. We can apply a similar lens to comments/assumptions made by others around us and in our media and make those assumptions explicit as a functional active ally.

Skill 14. De-tokenising oneself and others

In Non-Monogamy Work:

As an out and proud WPP you will inevitably have had to provide an overview of the concepts of CNM to inquiring and well-meaning individuals. You will have been tokenised in a respect, and will therefore understand how exhausting and difficult it can be to suddenly have to speak for an entire subculture. In addition an understanding of TMC is that diverse understandings of relational choices = there is no single correct way to be non-monogamous.

In Anti-Racist Work:

Recognise when black people around you are being tokenised and offer responses that reduce the burden to educate in similar ways that you would want someone to do so. Remember and be explicit that there is no single correct way to be black.

Skill 15. Valuing spaces that are exclusionary

In Non-Monogamy Work:

The poly community has a long history of utilising the sub-culture to create spaces that are safe through exclusion. In other words, poly people like to hang out with other poly people, and we understand implicitly that this space feels safe precisely because it excludes individuals who are monogamous, because those that are not practicing CNM are assumed to still engage in a burden of TMC or may simply require a burden to 'code switch'. A exclusive sub-culture is often preferred. It is worth mentioning that those sub-cultures have often not been safe spaces for POC. You may also understand that there is no need for mono-centric spaces to be specified as the entire culture which implicitly engages with TMC is mono-centric.

In Anti-Racist Work:

As a WPP you may understand the need for spaces to exclude someone in order to be safe or of value to users. So expect to be excluded and extend your understanding to those spaces to which you are not allowed. Black only events, discussions, friendship circles, zoom calls, trainings, etc.

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You can therefore also understand that there is no need for white-only spaces to be specified as the entire culture implicitly built on white supremacy and therefore is white-centric

Skill 16: Humble Deference

In Non-Monogamy Work:

As a WPP we are likely to have at some point sought resources from someone who has already been engaged in CNM for a longer period of time, in order to get advice and grow. I am assuming this might include the vast body of literature, podcasts, or forums online, as well as to friends and family. But when you did this did you expect that the individuals would give you details on their intimate parts of their life? This mixture of deference and humility is a helpful skill to try to extend beyond your own sphere of interest

In Anti-Racist Work:

When actively promoting ally actions, seek out and follow black peoples guidance. Try to do this with humility as it is also not their responsibility to manage, educate, validate or direct your actions. Engaging in anti-racist work should be done with an air of humility, and without assumptions. [See: Clair & Denis "Sociology of Racism"](#)

Further notes on Racism in Non-Monogamous Spaces.

A substantial footnote needs to be made to all of the above, which concerns the inherent and implicit racism within our own polyamorous/CNM communities. The polyamorous community and our cultural artifacts are perennially whitewashed, and USA-centric. We are not immune to racism. And there are some key ways in which this presents within our subculture:

Othering: This is behavior that points to or emphasizes the characteristics that set a person apart from the monoculture. I am a white person and have never had an experience in a CNM community meet up of feeling that my ethnicity was pointed out. I have certainly never felt it was

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a source of discomfort, a potential source of contention between partners (eg a veto exists on interactions with me purely because of my race), or fetishization. But this othering does happen, frequently, for members of a CNM community that are black or POC.

Erasure: Does your CNM/poly space, polycule, or party have POC or black members? Probably not. If there are member who are non-white, does your space or party tend to meet their needs, do you tokenise them, do you actively include them in decision making?

Resources for Racism in Non-Monogamous Spaces:

[*Five Things White People Can Do to Make Their Poly Communities More Welcoming for People of Color*](#)

[*Polyamorous People of Color: An Unvarnished Look & Call-To-Action*](#)