Love and sex: polyamorous relationships are perceived more favourably than swinging and open relationships


Departments of Psychology and Women’s Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA

Published online: 02 Sep 2013.

To cite this article: Psychology & Sexuality (2013): Love and sex: polyamorous relationships are perceived more favourably than swinging and open relationships, Psychology & Sexuality

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2013.832934
Love and sex: polyamorous relationships are perceived more favourably than swinging and open relationships

Jes L. Matsick*, Terri D. Conley, Ali Ziegler, Amy C. Moors and Jennifer D. Rubin

Departments of Psychology and Women’s Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA
(Received 31 July 2013; accepted 6 August 2013)

Consensual non-monogamy (CNM) refers to romantic relationships in which all partners agree to engage in sexual, romantic and/or emotional relationships with others. Within the general framework of CNM, subtypes of relationships differ in the extent to which partners intend for love and emotional involvement to be a part of their multiple relationships (that is, some relationships may prioritise love over sex with multiple partners, or vice versa). The present study examined whether individuals were more likely to stigmatisate relationships that: (i) focus on loving more than one person (which is characteristic of polyamory), (ii) focus on having sex without love (which is characteristic of swinging lifestyles), or (iii) involve having sex without love without a partner’s participation (which is characteristic of open relationships). In the present research, participants were assigned to read a definition of one of the three CNM relationship types (i.e. a swinging, polyamorous or open relationship) and to indicate their attitudes towards individuals who participate in those relationships. Results show that swingers were overwhelmingly perceived more negatively (e.g. less responsible) than individuals in polyamorous relationships and that people in open relationships were sometimes perceived more negatively (e.g. less moral) than people in polyamorous relationships. Overall, findings suggest that people are more uncomfortable with the idea of strictly sexual relationships (i.e. swinging relationships) than relationships involving multiple romantic/emotional attachments (i.e. polyamorous relationships).

Keywords: consensual non-monogamy; love; swinging; polyamory; societal attitudes

Evaluating love and sex: societal attitudes towards consensually non-monogamous relationship configurations

Consensual non-monogamy (CNM) encompasses a broad range of relationships in which all individuals in the relationship(s) agree to engage in multiple sexual, romantic, and/or emotional relationships with others (Barker & Langdridge, 2010a; Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2012; Conley, Ziegler, Moors, Matsick, & Valentine, 2013). Whether CNM relationships are referred to as intentional non-monogamy (Noël, 2006), nonsecret negotiated non-monogamy (Jamieson, 2004) or responsible non-monogamy (Anapol, 1997; Klesse, 2006; Lano & Parry, 1995), the commonality across these relationship styles is that all partners are aware of and are in agreement with the non-monogamous aspect (be it emotional and/or sexual) of their relationship arrangements.

Despite the lack of consideration given to CNM in academic circles (Barker & Langdridge, 2010b; Conley et al., 2013; Rubin, 2001), emerging evidence indicates that
people are actively engaging in and identifying with CNM relationships. Researchers have found that roughly 4–5% of online samples identify as CNM, which is a figure comparable to the estimated numeric representation of individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or queer (Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2011; Rubin, Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, & Conley, under review). Given a growing trend towards involvement in this relationship style, it is important to define the unique features that characterise different types of CNM relationships. However, creating an accurate and comprehensive definition of CNM does present some difficulty. Across CNM relationships, individuals adopt divergent identities and arrangements of partners that lead to distinct CNM relationship configurations. As a result, we often conceptualise relationship agreements on a continuum, with one pole representing monogamous unions (i.e. sexual and romantic exclusivity) and the other pole representing CNM relationships. Although CNM relationships have more in common with one another than monogamy, such that partners have open and honest agreements to engage in extra-dyadic relationships, there are differences between different subtypes of CNM relationships. Previously, research has shown a robust halo effect that surrounds monogamous relationships and, likewise, stigma surrounding CNM relationships (Conley et al., 2012; Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, Rubin, & Conley, 2013). However, it is unknown if people unilaterally stigmatise CNM relationships, or if some CNM relationships are perceived more or less favourably than others. Thus, in the present study, we focus on the three main subtypes of CNM: swinging, polyamory and open relationships.

Defining consensually non-monogamous relationship types

A main characteristic of swinging relationships is engaging in sex with other people in social settings, including swinging parties or conventions (Jenks, 1998; Smith & Smith, 1970). Swinging behaviours might involve couples exchanging partners with another couple solely for sexual purposes or inviting a third person to engage in sexual activities with the couple (Buunk & van Driel, 1989; Walshok, 1971). Research from the 1970s indicates that approximately 2% of married couples in the United States were involved in a swinging relationship (e.g. Bartell, 1970; Cole & Spaniard, 1974), although these estimates are outdated. A more recent appraisal of swinging prevalence can be estimated from the more than 7 million profiles that exist on Swingers Date Club, a website that provides online dating services and travel resources to people who seek (consensual) sexual relationships outside of a dyad (Sklar, 2010).

Unlike swingers, those engaged in polyamorous relationships are more likely to describe their multiple relationships as having a romantic or emotional component, rather than being strictly sexual (Haritaworn, Lin, & Klesse, 2006; Klesse, 2006; Sheff, 2005; Sheff & Hammers, 2011). Within polyamorous relationships, partners might engage in several relationships simultaneously that are emotionally, romantically, and/or sexually intimate. Additionally, partners may intend to maintain those relationships for the long term (Klesse, 2006). Such relationship agreements might include one or two ‘primary’ partners and other ‘secondary’ partners, triads in which three people are involved with each other and quads (i.e. an arrangement in which two couples are involved with each other; Barker, 2005; Jamieson, 2004).

While polyamory and swinging are well defined, the meaning of the term ‘open relationship’ is somewhat more contested. The term open relationship has sometimes been used as an umbrella term for consensually non-monogamous (CNM) relationships (e.g. in describing relationships between gay men; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986). Conversely, this term has also been used to refer to an arrangement whereby the relationship partners seek...
sexual (neither romantic nor loving) relationships independently from one another (in contrast to swingers, who may pursue extra-dyadic sexual relationships while their partners are present). For the purposes of this study, we will be using the latter definition of open relationships.

**Prioritising emotional versus sexual intimacy**

Taken together, the defining characteristics of swinging, polyamorous and open relationships differ in the extent to which partners intend for love and emotional involvement to be part of their multiple relationships. Those who engage in polyamory embrace the idea of having multiple loving relationships or ‘many loves’ (e.g. Haritaworn et al., 2006). However, not all people who are in CNM relationships espouse this perspective; some couples may prefer to have a loving, emotional attachment only to each other (though they still desire sexual relationships outside the partnership). Therefore, in other types of relationship configurations (e.g. swinging relationships), emotional or loving intimacy is not characteristic of the extra-dyadic encounters of a couple. In particular, the extra-dyadic relationships of swingers and those in open relationships are more directly related to sex rather than establishing emotional or romantic connections with new partners (i.e. emphasising ‘emotional monogamy’ Bergstrand & Williams, 2000). For instance, swingers may become friends with other swinging couples; yet, oftentimes, swinging partners may enforce a relationship agreement that limits the amount of emotional connection permitted between a partner and a non-primary or spousal partner (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000).

In the current research, we addressed perceptions of different types of CNM relationships and, in particular, we were interested in how people respond differently to relationships that are exclusively sexual versus those that are more emotionally involved. It seems possible that people could feel more negatively towards polyamorous couples because they challenge the ideology that everyone has only ‘one true love’ (e.g. Medora, Larson, Hortačsu, & Dave, 2002) by engaging in multiple loving relationships. On the other hand, people might feel more negatively towards swingers or people in open relationships because they contest the belief that sex should only happen in the context of a committed, loving, and intimate relationship (Peplau, Rubin, & Hill, 1977). That is, swinging and open relationships challenge the notion that sex should be a meaningful experience reserved for only romantic partners that are in love with one another. By examining perceptions of different types of CNM couples, this research provides insight into which ideology appears to be stronger: the idea of having only one true love, or the idea that sex should only occur within the context of love.

**Perceptions of CNM relationships**

Previous research has demonstrated that people have overwhelmingly negative reactions towards CNM relationships and those who are involved in them (Conley et al., 2012; Moors et al., 2013). In a series of studies, Conley et al. (2012) demonstrated that people engaged in CNM are thought to have poorer relationships, to be less responsible and to be perceived more negatively on completely arbitrary traits (such as dog-walking abilities) than people who are described as being monogamous in their relationships. However, in these studies, the description of the CNM relationship did not specify the type of CNM (e.g. a polyamorous relationship as opposed to an open relationship). The current study attends to this limitation by distinguishing between the types of CNM and investigating differences in attitudes towards subtypes of CNM.
Although no research has directly compared societal perceptions of various CNM relationships, there is evidence to suggest that swingers are generally seen in a negative light (see Jenks, 1998 for a review). For instance, Jenks (1998) found that swingers were perceived as deviant in relation to sex behaviours and personality qualities. Non-swingers overestimated swingers’ use of alcohol and other drugs, liberalism, ethnic diversity and affiliation with the Democratic Party compared to what swingers actually reported (Jenks, 1985, 1998). Likewise, non-swingers perceived swinging couples as being in greater need of counselling than other couples and believed that couples decide to swing or open up their relationships because they are in search of relief from an unhappy relationship together (Anapol, 1997; Easton & Hardy, 2009; Jenks, 1985); however, empirical research has shown that swingers report similar levels of relationship satisfaction as non-swinging couples (Dixon, 1985; Jenks, 1985). Overall, society’s perceptions of swingers are likely inaccurate which, we argue, unjustly contributes to the stigma surrounding CNM.

Perhaps more alarming is that people in other types of CNM relationships similarly endorse society’s negative attitudes towards swingers. In 44 interviews with people who have been in a CNM relationship, Klesse (2006) found that individuals in polyamorous relationships held negative attitudes towards swingers. Specifically, individuals engaged in polyamory explained their negative views of swinging stem from the notion that swingers engage in casual, recreational sex rather than meaningful, emotional and sexual relationships (more frequently found in polyamorous relationships). However, the idea that swinging relationships are evaluated negatively because they emphasise sex over love – and, thus, violate the belief that sex should exist in the context of a loving relationship – has not, to our knowledge, been empirically tested. Further, we know of no research that has compared perceptions of people in polyamorous relationships and in open relationships. Thus, the current research not only addresses the issue of which type of CNM relationships is perceived the most negatively but also investigates perceptions of different types of relationships in order to indirectly assess and compare beliefs about love and sexuality.

Examining perceptions of different types of CNM couples can help social scientists understand the lifestyles and associated ideologies that are most threatening to members of the public. This could help identify which CNM groups might be targeted for discrimination and help identify which groups might best politically represent CNM, or which ideologies might be best for CNM people to emphasise if CNM people desire to be more active in seeking civil rights. On a more conceptual level, examining these issues can provide us with a greater understanding of the different types of love beliefs that guide people’s perceptions of relationships and the people in them.

**The current research**

The purpose of the current research is to investigate societal attitudes towards individuals in various CNM relationship configurations. Participants indicated the extent to which they believed people in the specified type of relationship (swinging, polyamorous, or open relationship) possessed a number of positive and negative characteristics.

**Method**

The current study is part of a larger project involving multiple collaborators. For this reason, our original sample size was large ($N = 2277$). In the present research, we randomly selected 5% of the original sample for analysis.
Participants
Undergraduate student researchers recruited participants for an online research study by posting the survey link on classified advertisement websites (e.g. craigslist.org) and social networking websites (e.g. Facebook.com). Participants responded to a survey link that described the study as investigating attitudes towards relationships. The random sample ($N = 126$) used for analyses consisted of 55.6% women and 44.4% men. The sample was relatively young with a mean age of 25 (SD = 11.15) and 72.5% of the participants were undergraduate students. The majority of participants identified as heterosexual (78.6%), with a small subset identifying as gay/lesbian (3.8%) and bisexual (2.8%). In terms of ethnic identification, 87.9% of participants identified as European American, 4.7% as African-American, 3.7% as Latina/o, and 2.8% as Asian American.

Procedure
Qualtrics survey software randomly assigned participants to read only one of the three definitions of a type of CNM relationship (polyamorous relationship, open relationship or swinging relationship). After reading a relationship definition, participants provided their attitudes towards this relationship as well as the people in this type of a relationship on a number of semantic differential scales. The relationships styles were defined with the following descriptions:

**Swinging relationship definition.** 'Couples who engage in swinging are those who desire to have sexual relationships with people other than their primary partner (for example, with someone other than their spouse or significant other) and typically engage in these relationships at a party or in another social setting. People who “swing” and their partners all understand that they are not monogamous. A key component of swinging is that the primary couple views swinging as something that they do together as a couple. That is, swinging is viewed as a pastime for the couple. The relationships that occur outside of the relationship are only sexual and not romantic or emotional.'

**Polyamorous relationship definition.** 'Couples in polyamorous relationships desire to have emotional, romantic, and sexual relationships with more than one person. People in polyamorous relationships all understand that they are not monogamous. That is, that non-monogamy is consensual among all of the involved relationship partners. A key component of polyamory is the desire to have multiple relationships that are not just sexual, but also romantic/emotional.'

**Open relationship definition.** 'Couples in open relationships are those who desire to have sexual relationships with someone other than their primary partner (for example, with someone other than their spouse or significant other). People in open relationships and their partners all understand that they are not monogamous. That is, the non-monogamy is consensual among all of the involved relationship partners. A key component of open relationships is the desire to have multiple relationships that are only sexual, not romantic or emotional. Moreover, the individual members of the couple typically pursue relationships that occur outside of the primary relationship independently. For example, a member of the couple would meet with someone other than their primary partner without the primary partner present.'

Measures
After reading a definition of one of the aforementioned relationship styles, participants were presented with a series of semantic differential scales. Participants were asked to indicate whether they believe individuals involved in a certain type of relationship (that is, either a swinging, polyamorous, or open relationship) possess a series of characteristics.
Specifically, participants were asked to respond to the following statement: ‘Individuals in _____ relationships are . . .:’ clean/dirty, immoral/moral, ‘normal’/‘kinky,’ adventurous/non-adventurous, irresponsible/responsible, creepy/comforting, traditional/radical, unsatisfied in their relationship/satisfied in their relationship, motivated by pleasure/motivated by duty; selfish/selfless, immature/mature, family-oriented/self-oriented, chauvinistic/feminist, happy/unhappy, satisfied with life/unsatisfied with life, conventional/unconventional, not open to new experiences/open to new experiences and unable to express emotions/able to express emotions. All ratings were made on a 5-point scale.

Results

Given the large number of dependent variables, the 18 dependent variables were analysed using MANOVA to compare impressions of people in swinging, polyamorous and open relationships. The results of the MANOVA show that there are significant differences in people’s perceptions of the three relationship styles, $F(36, 202) = 1.60, p = 0.02$. Each dependent variable contributed significantly to the overall effect, with the exception of five variables that did not significantly differ across conditions: satisfied in their relationship, selfless, feminist, unhappy and unsatisfied with life. See Table 1 for presentation of the individual effects.

Specific characteristics

Tukey post hoc tests revealed that impressions of the three relationship styles significantly differed on 13 items, such that polyamorous relationships were oftentimes perceived as more favourable to both swinging and open relationships; likewise, swinging

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall effect</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>36,202</td>
<td>0.023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirty</td>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral</td>
<td>8.24</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Kinky’</td>
<td>7.44</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-adventurous</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>13.14</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comforting</td>
<td>6.21</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radical</td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied in their relationship</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>0.261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated by duty</td>
<td>7.84</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfless</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>0.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>0.045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-oriented</td>
<td>6.08</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>0.640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhappy</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>0.622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfied with life</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>0.787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unconventional</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>0.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open to new experiences</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>0.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to express emotions</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>2118</td>
<td>0.048</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $N = 126$, MANOVA = multivariate analysis of variance.
Table 2. Means (standard deviations) of perceptions of relationship types.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship type</th>
<th>Swinging</th>
<th>Polyamorous</th>
<th>Open</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dirty</td>
<td>4.05 (0.68)</td>
<td>3.39 (0.97)</td>
<td>3.58 (0.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral</td>
<td>2.00 (0.85)</td>
<td>3.66 (0.94)</td>
<td>3.89 (1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Kinky’</td>
<td>2.20 (0.72)</td>
<td>3.68 (0.82)</td>
<td>2.31 (0.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-adventurous</td>
<td>1.60 (0.81)</td>
<td>1.84 (0.85)</td>
<td>1.80 (0.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>1.80 (0.91)</td>
<td>2.42 (0.99)</td>
<td>2.49 (0.90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comforting</td>
<td>2.12 (0.82)</td>
<td>2.49 (0.70)</td>
<td>2.76 (0.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radical</td>
<td>4.45 (0.60)</td>
<td>4.34 (0.71)</td>
<td>4.00 (0.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied in their relationship</td>
<td>1.87 (0.86)</td>
<td>2.00 (0.99)</td>
<td>2.21 (0.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivated by duty</td>
<td>1.38 (0.49)</td>
<td>1.55 (0.70)</td>
<td>1.95 (0.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfless</td>
<td>1.95 (0.99)</td>
<td>1.86 (0.88)</td>
<td>2.32 (0.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature</td>
<td>2.15 (0.92)</td>
<td>2.27 (1.13)</td>
<td>2.66 (0.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-oriented</td>
<td>4.38 (0.71)</td>
<td>4.32 (0.80)</td>
<td>3.80 (0.81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist</td>
<td>2.68 (0.69)</td>
<td>2.64 (0.84)</td>
<td>2.79 (0.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhappy</td>
<td>3.11 (0.91)</td>
<td>3.25 (1.14)</td>
<td>3.05 (0.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfied with life</td>
<td>3.50 (1.09)</td>
<td>3.55 (1.25)</td>
<td>3.38 (0.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unconventional</td>
<td>4.45 (0.68)</td>
<td>4.39 (0.66)</td>
<td>4.13 (0.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open to new experiences</td>
<td>4.58 (0.86)</td>
<td>4.34 (0.96)</td>
<td>3.92 (1.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to express emotions</td>
<td>2.84 (0.97)</td>
<td>2.64 (1.04)</td>
<td>3.18 (0.97)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Standard deviations are in parentheses. Means that do not share subscripts differ by \( p < 0.05 \) and means that do not have subscripts indicate that the mean does not significantly differ from that of the other relationship types.

relationships were oftentimes viewed more negatively than polyamorous and open relationships. Participants perceived people in polyamorous relationships as significantly more moral, more motivated by duty (rather than motivated by pleasure) and less self-oriented (i.e. more family-oriented) than both people in swinging and open relationships. Further, people in polyamorous relationships were found to be more able to express emotions than people in open relationships and were perceived as more mature, conventional and comforting than swingers.

Swingers were rated as more ‘kinky’ and less responsible than people in polyamorous and open relationships. Moreover, swingers, compared to people in polyamorous relationships, were perceived as dirtier, more adventurous, more radical and more open to new experiences. In other words, participants viewed individuals in polyamorous relationships as the most favourable (specifically on dimensions that conveyed maturity, responsibility and comfort), individuals in open relationships were viewed as next most positively and swingers were seen as most negatively (in terms of being unconventional, radical, creepy and generally adventurous). See Table 2 for means and standard deviations of perceptions of the different relationship types.

Discussion

Prior research demonstrates that people overwhelmingly perceive CNM relationships less positively than monogamous relationships (Conley et al., 2012; Moors et al., 2013). The current research addressed the subtleties in the distinctions among different types of CNM relationships. We found that swinging relationships are perceived significantly more negatively than polyamorous relationships, with open relationships perceived somewhat more
positively than swinging relationships, but less positively than polyamorous relationships. However, in general, all of the CNM relationships are perceived in slightly negative terms, thus providing further evidence for the relationship stigma found in other research. In sum, results illustrate that people hold more positive attitudes towards CNM relationships when these relationships prioritise love rather than sex.

There are several implications of this trend in societal attitudes. For one, the findings suggest that swinging relationships likely receive the brunt of negative perceptions of CNM relationships. This finding dovetails with research suggesting that swingers are perceived negatively even within CNM communities. Specifically, Klesse (2006) found that individuals in polyamorous relationships drew contrasts between their own loving relationships and the relationships of swingers, which they seemed to perceive to be shallower. Understanding this negativity surrounding swinging relationships may be of importance for future policy and lawmakers given the implications of prejudice (e.g. for swinging couples who want to adopt children or in disclosing one’s swinging relationship to friends, colleagues and family members).

Additionally, the examination of different types of relational styles also provides some insight into participants’ attitude towards different beliefs about sex and love. Swingers (prototypically, at least) have sexual relationships outside of the context of a loving, romantic or continuous relationship. These relationships were perceived particularly negatively. By contrast, individuals in polyamorous relationships, who have romantic relationships with more than one person, were perceived relatively more positively than swingers. Thus, our findings suggest that people, or specifically young people given the current sample, seem to hold the belief that love and sex should go together more strongly than the belief that a person can love only one person at a time. Likewise, participants appear to disapprove of the idea that sex can or should occur in the absence of any emotional attachment.

Finally, the results of the present study are consistent with previous research that finds that people who engage in extramarital sex (i.e. cheating, not CNM) were more positively viewed if the affair entailed love than if the affair was purely sexual (Hartnett, Mahoney, & Bernstein, 1977). That is, whether sex outside of one’s primary relationship is consensual or not, both non-monogamies are evaluated more positively when love is involved and, conversely, evaluated more negatively when engaging with multiple partners is for purely sexual reasons.

Limitations and future directions
The current research was based on the responses of a convenience sample of participants from the United States that identified as mostly white and heterosexual; therefore, this study is limited in its generalisability to other samples. A more representative study would give us a better sense of the generalisability of these perceptions across the greater population. Moreover, the use of relationship definitions may not accurately map onto perceptions of actual CNM couples and may not be the most effective means of establishing which romantic love ideals are more strongly endorsed. A combination of more explicit measures, along with indirect ones such as this, might provide the most accurate picture of love beliefs.

Conclusion
The current research sheds light on public perceptions of different types of CNM relationships, revealing that swingers are perceived more negatively than other types of consensual
non-monogamous relationships. In the process, we also revealed information about the relative strengths of different beliefs about love and sex.

Notes
1. Notably, we recognise that these categories are not mutually exclusive and that the definitions we provided are clearly contested. However, in order to best address our hypotheses, it was necessary to formulate distinct definitions, even though these definitions may be inaccurate as applied to any given set of partners and their relationship dynamics.

2. This study is part of a larger project with multiple collaborators; therefore, for the purpose of this particular study, we were only interested in analysing three of the five conditions of the original design. The conditions excluded from the current study were monogamous and polygynous relationship types.

Notes on contributors
Jes L. Matsick, M.S. is a doctoral candidate in the departments of Psychology and Women’s Studies at the University of Michigan. Her research examines attitudes that minority group members have towards dominant groups, with a specific focus on sexual minorities.

Terri D. Conley, Ph.D., is a faculty member in the departments of Psychology and Women’s Studies at the University of Michigan. Her primary research interests are in the areas of gender and sexuality. She is currently focusing on understanding gender differences in sex behaviour and addressing the limitations of monogamous relationships.

Ali Ziegler, M.S. is a doctoral candidate in the departments of Psychology and Women’s Studies at the University of Michigan. Her research examines socio-cultural explanations for gender differences in sexual desires, fantasies and behaviours. She is currently focusing on research related to gender differences in sexual fantasies.

Amy C. Moors, M.S. is a doctoral candidate in the departments of Psychology and Women’s Studies at the University of Michigan. Her research examines social norms surrounding sexuality and gender. Her current research focuses on reasons why people defend the institution of marriage and presumed gender differences in engagement in CNM.

Jennifer D. Rubin, M.A., is a graduate student in the departments of Psychology and Women’s Studies at the University of Michigan. Her research focuses on social contexts and messages that account for gender differences in sexual desire.

References

Barker, M. (2005). This is my partner, and this is my . . . partner’s partner: Constructing a polyamorous identity in a monogamous world. Journal of Constructivist Psychology, 18, 75–88.


