

Stigma Toward Individuals Engaged in Consensual Nonmonogamy: Robust and Worthy of Additional Research

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In our target article, “The Fewer the Merrier: Assessing Stigma Surrounding Consensual Nonmonogamous Relationships,” we documented a robust stigma toward consensual nonmonogamous relationships and a halo surrounding monogamous relationships. In the present piece, we respond to six commentaries of our target article with the aim of promoting future research and policy change. First, we address questions and concerns raised by commentators using existing data and found that regardless of perceived relationship happiness, sexual orientation, or gender (of experimental targets), individuals in consensual nonmonogamous relationships were more negatively viewed on a variety of qualities (both relationship-specific and nonrelationship specific) compared to those in monogamous relationships. Second, we suggest productive future research avenues with regards to implications for social change, and strengthening methodology used in consensual nonmonogamous research. Finally, we consider common ground among the commentators as an avenue to promote coalition building through the examinations of prejudice toward individuals in nonnormative romantic relationships. We conclude that this is only the beginning of a fruitful line of research and argue that the stigma toward departures from monogamy is robust and, of course, worthy of additional research.

The ultimate goal for our article, “The Fewer the Merrier: Assessing Stigma Surrounding Consensual Nonmonogamous Relationships,” was to begin a conversation with fellow social scientists and social justice advocates in an effort to

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rethink how we conceptualize the institution of monogamy and prioritize such relationships in research, policies, and everyday attitudes. To that end, we are utterly delighted that our article was not only chosen as a target article, but also elicited a wonderful collection of commentaries. Given the depth and breadth of commentary that our paper elicited, this conversation has been jump-started.

On the surface level it may seem like our contribution to the literature is that of a specialized topic—prejudice toward consensual nonmonogamy (CNM)—but, we hope readers can see the broader implications. It is, of course, not a big surprise that those who engage in deviations from the ideal of monogamy will be met with societal stigma (and potentially discrimination). However, as many of the commentators suggested, the implications for this work are much broader than merely documenting stigma, and there is much more nuanced research to be undertaken (Day, 2013; DePaulo, 2012; Hegarty, 2012).

As with examining any new topic, researchers have a plethora of choices about research directions; thus, we read the commentaries with the objective of understanding whether our original findings were modified by the insights of the commentators and in light of potential future research directions. Therefore, our response will address (1) study ideas raised by some of our commentators that we can address with our existing data; (2) research with implications for social change; (3) future methodological considerations; and finally (4) ideas for using the current line of research for coalition building and creating social change.

Research Findings: Addressing Insights

Our ongoing research allowed us to directly address a number of issues raised by the commentators with existing data. The next section will discuss methodological concerns and insights from the commentaries offered by Miller, Hegarty, and Salvatore.

Stigma toward CNM and Relationship Happiness (or Lack Thereof)

Miller (2013) raised a concern about how the CNM relationship was portrayed in our person perception paradigms (Studies 3 and 4), and if we had adequately captured prejudice toward CNM relationships. In the original vignettes, we described a happy monogamous couple (from the start of their relationship) and a happy CNM relationship (from the start of their CNM agreement, 1-year after being in a monogamous relationship). Arguably, participants could have inferred that the couple that decided to engage in relationships with others (after a year of being monogamous) was unhappy or bored with their relationship. Although this was a limitation in our target article, we suggest that the stigma toward CNM is strong enough (as indicated by the effect sizes in our previous research) that it should emerge even under ideal relationship conditions.

Table 1. Happy Relationships: MANOVA for the Effects of Relationship Type on the Dependent Variables

Scale	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i>	η^2	Relationship type	
					Monogamous	CNM
Overall effect (Wilks' Lambda = .294)	188.02	7,548	<.001	0.71		
Sexual riskiness scale	748.47	1,554	<.001	0.57	2.03 (1.18)	4.82 (1.21)
Acceptability scale	718.38	1,554	<.001	0.57	4.72 (0.96)	2.45 (1.03)
Relationship quality scale	461.37	1,554	<.001	0.45	4.74 (0.90)	2.87 (1.13)
Arbitrary benefits scale	108.47	1,554	<.001	0.16	4.34 (0.88)	3.57 (0.85)
Likely to use condoms (item)	86.34	1,554	<.001	0.14	2.88 (1.56)	4.14 (1.65)
Sexual satisfaction scale	26.91	1,554	<.001	0.05	3.87 (1.09)	3.35 (1.24)
Loneliness scale	26.54	1,554	<.001	0.05	2.35 (1.19)	2.90 (1.31)

Note. $N = 556$. Means (standard deviations) for targets in monogamous and consensual nonmonogamous relationships. Items are ordered by effect size between the monogamous and CNM conditions, beginning with the item with the largest partial eta squared.

In another study that better assessed the role of happiness with the CNM arrangement (as raised by Miller), we randomly assigned 554 participants to read about Sara and Dan, who were either in a monogamous or CNM relationship. Regardless of relationship type, Sara and Dan had been *happy* with their relationship arrangement, be it monogamy or consensual nonmonogamy, since the start of their five-year relationship (see Study 3 for similar procedures and materials; Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2012). The information about happiness that we added to our vignettes, as recommended by Miller, allowed us to parse individuals happily engaged in CNM from individuals who were (arguably) bored or dissatisfied with their present relationship. Participants rated the partners' relationship as a whole on several romantic relationship-specific traits and values in comparison to the average romantic relationship (e.g., overall relationship quality, sexual satisfaction; measures from Study 3 in Conley, Moors, Matsick et al., 2012 were used).

Indeed, the bias toward CNM was strong enough that it upheld under an explicit positive set of relationship conditions. Even when happiness was held constant across both relationship conditions, participants overwhelmingly viewed the monogamous couple as affording more relationship benefits than the individuals who engaged in CNM (see Table 1). Specifically, participants viewed the CNM relationship (and the individuals involved) as sexually riskier, less acceptable, lower in relationship quality, less sexually satisfied, and lonelier than the monogamous relationship. Participants also rated the individuals in the monogamous relationship more positively on arbitrary qualities (e.g., more likely to floss their teeth daily) and were less likely to use condoms (which is indicative of higher relationship quality; see Conley & Rabinowitz, 2009). We agree with Miller that

participants could have assumed people who engage in CNM do so because their current (or previously monogamous) relationship is somehow lacking (a limitation in our target article).

Although, not surprisingly, the results of the present study did not differ—that is, even when individuals engaged in CNM are *explicitly* happy with their particular arrangement, they are still stigmatized.

Perceptions of LGB Individuals Engaged in Monogamous and CNM Relationships

In our target article, we documented a robust effect—a large halo surrounds monogamous relationships and CNM relationships are largely stigmatized. Granted, this effect may differ based on one’s sexual orientation; as Hegarty (2012) pointed out, we only assessed the stigma surrounding (presumably) heterosexual individuals engaged in CNM. In a separate study that provided a more nuanced assessment of stigma toward CNM with the focal analysis on lesbian and gay relationships, we randomly assigned heterosexual participants ($N = 466$) to one of six conditions in which they read about a same-sex male couple, same-sex female couple, or an opposite sex–couple either engaged in a monogamous or CNM relationship (see Study 3 for similar procedures and materials; Conley, Moors et al., 2012). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they believed that various relationship-specific and arbitrary dimensions were characteristic of the relationship and of the individuals within the relationship (same measures used in Study 3; Conley, Moors et al., 2012). Using this design, we made participants aware of the targets’ sexual orientation in order to assess whether people differently perceive lesbian and gay individuals in CNM and monogamous relationships (compared to heterosexuals in such relationships).

Consistent with our previous findings, monogamous relationships were viewed as optimal and CNM relationships were stigmatized. We found that, regardless of the target’s sexual orientation, individuals who engaged in CNM were viewed more negatively than individuals who engaged in monogamy on all seven dimensions; see Table 2 for main effects and Table 3 for means.¹ Additionally, when looking within sexual orientation at the two types of relationships (simple main effects), the monogamous heterosexual, lesbian, and gay couples were perceived more positively on all seven dimensions compared to their respective counterparts in CNM relationships. When looking at CNM relationships, the

¹ A few main effects for sexual orientation emerged (see Table 2) and post hoc analyses revealed that the same-sex male couple was perceived as sexually riskier than the opposite-sex couple. Additionally, the opposite-sex couple was viewed as more (socially and morally) acceptable than both the same-sex male and female couples; and, the same-sex male couple was perceived to have greater arbitrary qualities than the same-sex female couple.

Table 2. The Role of Sexual Orientation on CNM Stigma: MANOVA for the Effects of Relationship Type and Sexual Orientation on the Dependent Variables

Scale	Wilks' Lambda	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Relationship type (overall)	0.277	169.18	7,454	<.001	0.72
Sexual riskiness scale		692.34	1,460	<.001	0.60
Relationship quality scale		533.48	1,460	<.001	0.54
Acceptability scale		426.12	1,460	<.001	0.48
Arbitrary benefits scale		125.33	1,460	<.001	0.21
Sexual satisfaction scale		119.62	1,460	<.001	0.21
Loneliness scale		64.79	1,460	<.001	0.12
Likely to use condoms (item)		48.42	1,460	<.001	0.10
Sexual orientation (Overall)	0.897	3.61	14,908	<.001	0.05
Sexual riskiness scale		4.15	1,460	0.02	0.02
Relationship quality scale		1.24	1,460	0.29	0.01
Acceptability scale		4.36	1,460	0.01	0.02
Arbitrary benefits scale		3.20	1,460	0.04	0.01
Sexual satisfaction scale		2.81	1,460	0.06	0.01
Loneliness scale		0.49	1,460	0.61	0.002
Likely to use condoms (item)		3.17	1,460	0.04	0.01
Relationship type \times sexual orientation	0.903	3.38	14,908	<.001	0.05
Sexual riskiness scale		6.46	1,460	0.002	0.03
Relationship quality scale		5.34	1,460	<.001	0.02
Acceptability scale		13.67	1,460	<.001	0.06
Arbitrary benefits scale		0.83	1,460	0.44	0.004
Sexual satisfaction scale		1.28	1,460	0.28	0.006
Loneliness scale		0.76	1,460	0.47	0.003
Likely to use condoms (item)		3.16	1,460	0.04	0.01

Table 3. The Role of Sexual Orientation on CNM Stigma: Means and Standard Deviations for Effects of Relationship Type and Sexual Orientation on the Dependent Variables

Scale	Sexual orientation					
	Heterosexual		Lesbian		Gay	
	Monogamous	CNM	Monogamous	CNM	Monogamous	CNM
Sexual riskiness scale	1.64 (0.88)	5.05 (1.12)	2.12 (1.05)	4.68 (1.39)	2.40 (1.40)	5.01 (1.06)
Relationship quality scale	5.05 (0.77)	2.46 (1.14)	4.80 (0.82)	2.96 (1.25)	5.02 (0.92)	2.86 (1.09)
Acceptability scale	4.98 (0.97)	2.16 (0.86)	4.07 (1.35)	2.36 (1.01)	4.22 (1.34)	2.51 (0.91)
Arbitrary benefits scale	4.41 (0.84)	3.45 (0.79)	4.18 (0.72)	3.43 (0.84)	4.42 (0.81)	3.64 (0.73)
Sexual satisfaction scale	4.13 (1.05)	2.88 (1.29)	4.07 (0.95)	3.16 (1.39)	4.45 (0.88)	3.17 (1.04)
Loneliness scale	2.01 (1.06)	3.22 (1.64)	2.30 (1.15)	3.14 (1.44)	2.27 (1.44)	3.25 (1.31)
Likely to use condoms (item)	2.56 (1.58)	4.22 (1.71)	2.59 (1.70)	3.64 (1.75)	3.28 (1.86)	3.95 (1.83)

Note. *N* = 466. Means (standard deviations) for targets in monogamous and consensual nonmonogamous relationships.

lesbian and gay couples were viewed as higher in relationship quality than the heterosexual relationship (although, the ratings for all CNM relationships were low; see Table 3). When looking at the monogamous condition, the gay and lesbian couples were perceived as sexually riskier and less socially acceptable than the heterosexual couple.²

Notably, we found some truth to what Hegarty proposed—it seems as though the targets' sexual identity affected participants' judgments about CNM relationships. That is, compared to heterosexual CNM relationships, both lesbian and gay CNM relationships were viewed higher in relationship quality (although all mean levels were low). Potentially, LG individuals may have slightly more leeway than heterosexuals to reconstruct their romantic relationships and to redefine normative relationship scripts. Both LG and heterosexual CNM relationships, however, were perceived extremely negatively by heterosexual participants.

Assumptions about Gender and CNM

In addition to excellent suggestions about the role of sexual orientation on people's perceptions of CNM, Hegarty (2012) also questioned how people's beliefs about gender affect perceptions of CNM. In our target article, we found that CNM relationships were viewed as less natural compared to monogamous relationships. However, Hegarty raised the point that according to an evolutionary psychology framework, the opposite would be supported. He provided an interesting insight: do women and men in a heterosexual arrangement share the stigma of CNM equally—or is CNM sometimes seen as natural for men, but not for women?

In our target article, we had participants rate the targets (Sara and Dan) as a relationship and as a couple; however, we did not ask participants to rate the male target separately from the female target and vice versa. According to evolutionary psychological perspectives, men and women have innately different mating strategies that promote optimal reproduction: Men desire multiple sexual partners to ensure many offspring, and women desire fewer partners due to limited ova (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Trivers, 1972). Successful short- and long-term mating strategies for men include multiple partners; however, these strategies are rarely advantageous for women (e.g., under poor ecological conditions; Schmitt, Shackelford, & Buss, 2001). To examine people's beliefs about gender and relationships, we randomly assigned participants ($N = 717$) to read about heterosexual partners (Sara and Dan) in a monogamous or CNM relationship and to evaluate either the male or female described in the vignette (see Study 3 for similar procedures and materials; Conley, Moors et al., 2012). Participants rated the extent to which

² Another simple main effect emerged, such that the same-sex male monogamous couple was viewed as more likely to use condoms than opposite-sex and same-sex female monogamous couples.

Table 4. Beliefs about Gender: MANOVA for the Effects of Relationship Type and Gender on the Dependent Variables

Scale	Wilks' Lambda	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Relationship type (Overall)	0.323	211.65	7, 707	<.001	0.68
Sexual riskiness scale		826.78	1, 713	<.001	0.54
Relationship quality scale		699.37	1, 713	<.001	0.50
Acceptability scale		602.77	1, 713	<.001	0.46
Sexual satisfaction scale		118.88	1, 713	<.001	0.14
Arbitrary benefits scale		113.16	1, 713	<.001	0.14
Loneliness scale		82.05	1, 713	<.001	0.10
Likely to use condoms (item)		42.46	1, 713	<.001	0.06
Target gender (overall)	0.96	4.43	7, 707	<.001	0.04
Sexual riskiness scale		0.83	1, 713	0.36	0.001
Relationship quality scale		0.01	1, 713	0.94	0.001
Acceptability scale		0.43	1, 713	0.51	0.001
Sexual satisfaction scale		16.67	1, 713	<.001	0.02
Arbitrary benefits scale		0.05	1, 713	0.83	0.001
Loneliness scale		0.71	1, 713	0.40	0.001
Likely to use condoms (item)		0.56	1, 713	0.46	0.001
Relationship type \times target gender	0.97	3.36	7, 707	<.01	0.03
Sexual riskiness scale		0.25	1, 713	0.62	0.001
Relationship quality scale		0.48	1, 713	0.49	0.001
Acceptability scale		0.20	1, 713	0.66	0.001
Sexual satisfaction scale		7.78	1, 713	0.01	0.01
Arbitrary benefits scale		1.25	1, 713	0.26	0.002
Loneliness scale		1.30	1, 713	0.25	0.002
Likely to use condoms (item)		4.36	1, 713	0.21	0.002

they believed that various relationship-specific and arbitrary dimensions were characteristic of the male or female target (same measures used in Study 3; Conley, Moors et al., 2012).

We found that, regardless of the target's gender, individuals engaged in CNM were viewed more negatively than individuals engaged in monogamy on all seven dimensions; see Table 4 for main effects and Table 5 for means. One main effect of target gender emerged; specifically, regardless of relationship type, males were perceived as higher in sexual satisfaction than females. Interestingly, the male in the CNM relationship was perceived as higher in sexual satisfaction than the male in the monogamous relationship and the female in either relationship type. We suspect this finding has to do with the cultural perception that men who have sex with more than one woman garner increased sexual satisfaction, rather than evolutionary motives.

In sum, with little exception, individuals engaging in CNM relationships were viewed more negatively than individuals in monogamous relationships regardless of gender, indicating that the halo effect extends to both men and women based on their relationship type. Hegarty posed an empirical question and our response

Table 5. Beliefs about Gender: Means and Standard Deviations for Effects of Relationship Type and Target Gender on the Dependent Variables

	Target Gender			
	Female		Male	
	Monogamous	CNM	Monogamous	CNM
Sexual riskiness scale	1.85 (1.17)	4.48 (1.19)	1.97 (1.15)	4.52 (1.27)
Relationship quality scale	4.88 (0.83)	3.01 (1.09)	4.93 (0.75)	2.96 (1.20)
Acceptability scale	4.65 (0.88)	2.78 (1.10)	4.66 (0.80)	2.87 (1.17)
Arbitrary benefits scale	4.33 (0.83)	3.71 (0.97)	4.39 (0.80)	3.62 (0.87)
Sexual satisfaction scale	4.00 (1.09)	2.82 (1.28)	4.11 (0.96)	3.41 (1.23)
Loneliness scale	2.25 (1.22)	3.07 (1.43)	2.22 (1.18)	3.27 (1.64)
Likely to use condoms (item)	3.46 (1.74)	4.11 (1.58)	3.21 (1.64)	4.18 (1.63)

Note. $N = 717$. Means (standard deviations) for targets in monogamous and consensual nonmonogamous relationships.

includes data that show that men and women are judged nearly equally negatively for (consensually) violating norms of monogamy.

The Drawbacks of Monogamy

Despite the abundance of academic interest in romantic relationships, we could not find extant research on the benefits that monogamy (or alternatives) affords people. Thus, as a starting point for our target article, we decided to ask people: “*What are the benefits of monogamy?*” In a separate study, we similarly asked about the benefits of CNM; however, it proved to be more difficult than anticipated. That is, those who have never engaged in CNM relationships had a difficult time imagining benefits of a polyamorous, swinging, or open relationships. As a result, such attempts to consider the benefits of a relationship structure that deviates from monogamy generally elicited disgust and moral anguish.

Salvatore (2013) appears unconvinced that we adequately captured stigma, insofar as our scales generally were created based on the reported benefits of monogamy found in Study 1 of our target article. It is a possibility that benefits unique to CNM would have emerged that were not captured by asking about the benefits of monogamy (as in Study 1) or about the benefits of relationships in general (as in Study 4). However, we doubt the halo surrounding monogamy would completely fade if benefits unique to CNM were added, especially given that monogamous relationships were rated higher on *irrelevant* dimensions (e.g., flossing teeth daily, reliable at daily dog walking) than CNM relationships.

Salvatore (2013) suggested that we would have leveled the playing field by asking people about the disadvantages of monogamy. In a separate study, we asked 217 people: “*What are the drawbacks of monogamy?*” Participants were given six open-ended spaces and asked to list at least three drawbacks. Two

undergraduate coders (nonauthors) independently read through all of the responses three times and generated a list of major themes that emerged (and examples of each theme). Nine major themes of the drawbacks of monogamy emerged: *doubts about commitment, health-related issues, lack of trust, meaninglessness, no romance, lack of sex, unnatural, family issues, and no disadvantages*; see Table 6. Not surprisingly, eight of the nine themes that emerged are the *opposite* of the benefits of the monogamy (as found in Study 1 of our target article; Table 6 provides a side-by-side comparison of the benefits and drawbacks of monogamy). Only one unique theme emerged—no disadvantages (11 people out of 217 listed this). However, “no disadvantages” does not translate into a measurable relationship quality or trait. Even though the results of this study would not change the original dependent variables, the scales we created in our target article were bipolar. Thus, we infer that the drawbacks of monogamy were adequately captured in our original research.

Future Directions and Implications for Social Change

This section will address suggestions offered by Day and Depaulo in regards to future directions for research as well as implications for policy and social reform.

Committed Relationship Ideology and Stigma toward CNM

In our target article, we found that individuals who engage in CNM relationships rated monogamous relationships more favorably on a variety of important relational traits and qualities, rather than lauding the qualities of their own relationship styles. Consistent with a system justification framework (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004), individuals who engage in CNM may find reasons to support the very social structures that oppress them in an effort to defend the status quo. Day (2013) added a very interesting layer to this finding, suggesting that the motivation to defend committed relationship ideology (i.e., the desire to get married, engage in a monogamous sexual partnership, and have children) may provide a more nuanced understanding of the unique stigma attributed to CNM relationships. Indeed, another group of individuals not engaged in monogamy—singles (who also deviate from the committed relationship ideology)—encounter stigma such as negative personality and relational stereotypes (see DePaulo & Morris, 2005; for a review). By assessing CNM in conjunction with other relationship statuses that are inconsistent with committed relationship ideology (as suggested by Day), we can gain a better understanding of the broader implications of our target article. Thus, we can use this framework as a potential guide for evaluating underlying mechanisms of stigma surrounding various types of nonnormative relationships.

Table 6. Major Themes: Drawbacks of Monogamy Compared to the Benefits

Disadvantages of monogamy		Benefits of monogamy (from Conley, Moors, Matsick et al., 2012)	
Major themes	Minor themes and example responses	Major themes	Minor themes and example responses
Doubts about commitment	Doubting the relationship, feeling trapped, wondering about other possibilities, temptations <i>Examples:</i> “Find out too late you chose the wrong person” “That trapped feeling” “Hard to resist temptations”	Commitment	Emotional security, dependability, ease, exclusivity, long-term <i>Examples:</i> “You can commit yourself fully to someone” “Makes you feel special and certain”
Health-related issues	Controlling behaviors, depression, decreased social networks, abuse, poor mental health <i>Examples:</i> “Abuse may occur, and the victim might be trapped in a bad situation” “Less time with friends” “Have to check in [with partner]” “Feeling controlled by partner”	Health	No disease, no physical violence, mental health, health, happiness <i>Examples:</i> “Safety from STDs” “Physical safety”
Lack of trust	Worries about cheating (self and partner), feeling jealous, divorce, dishonesty <i>Examples:</i> “Fear that my partner is not being monogamous” “Trust issues almost always come up” “Causes problems like cheating”	Trust	Faithfulness, jealousy, honesty, confidence in relationship <i>Examples:</i> “There are no jealousy issues” “There is honesty and trust in that relationship”
Meaninglessness	Boring, routine, lonely, loss of self, poor communication <i>Examples:</i> “Lack of stimulation” “It gets boring . . . fall into routines” “Loss of self”	Meaningfulness	Deepness, respect, not lonely, good communication <i>Examples:</i> “Availability of partner when you need them” “Ultimately feel better about yourself”
No romance	Lose interest, fall out of love, grow apart <i>Examples:</i> “No thrill of a new relationship” “People fall out of love” “Loss of lust”	Passion	True love, passion, romance <i>Examples:</i> “More emotionally involved” “Encourages true love”

Continued

Table 6. Continued

Disadvantages of monogamy		Benefits of monogamy (from Conley, Moors, Matsick et al., 2012)	
Major themes	Minor themes and example responses	Major themes	Minor themes and example responses
Lack of sex	Lack of sex, boring sex, no variety of partners, no sexual freedom, sexual frustration <i>Examples:</i> “Never enough sex” “Sex gets boring” “Sex becomes more of a chore and less of an adventure”	Sex Benefits	Comfort, consistent, no worries, exciting sex <i>Examples:</i> “Reliable access to sex” “Sexually adventurous”
Unnatural	Against human nature, evolution <i>Examples:</i> “Goes against Darwinian principles” “For men, it leads to less biological success, because of fewer progeny” “It works against most basic ‘animal’ instincts”	Morality	Social acceptance, moral, god/religious <i>Examples:</i> “Fulfilling God’s design for the world” “Maintaining a higher moral standard and adhering to values”
Family issues	Financial insecurity, money issues, divorce, wedding expenses, difficult in-laws <i>Examples:</i> “Divorce” “Two people could have a tough time paying the bills, might take more than two incomes” “Financially restrictive” “Unequal division of household chores”	Family Benefits	Family environment, financial support, equality <i>Examples:</i> “Having a family, home, and commitment for life” “Secure finances”
No disadvantages	<i>Examples:</i> “I am a big fan of monogamy” “I do not think there are any drawbacks”		

Incorporating the insightful suggestions offered by Day, future research should examine the unique predictors of stigma associated with CNM relationships. One way to achieve this is by assessing perceptions of other nonnormative relationships, including but not limited to married couples that choose not to have children, single mothers, and monogamous individuals who engage in nonnormative sexual practices (e.g., BDSM). Through an examination of similarities and

differences in perceptions across diverse types of relationships, we can further develop a framework that accounts for stigma specifically associated with engagement in CNM. Further, we must consider the underlying mechanisms that *motivate* individuals to defend committed relationship ideology in order to evaluate the processes that maintain monogamy as a meaningful and normative life goal. This will help to elucidate why individuals perceive nonnormative relationships as negative.

Broadly, developing a framework that accounts for stigma associated with a multiplicity of nonnormative relationships has important policy implications. An inherent aspect of relationship ideology is that those who meet normative standards (i.e., desire to marry and have children) are perceived to be higher in status and more important than those who violate these values (DePaulo & Morris, 2005). Indeed, this preference is consistently replicated in law and policy, affording privileges to heterosexual, married individuals over different relationship types (DePaulo, 2006). Despite the social and financial benefits associated with the gold standard relationship, census data indicate that barely half of adults (51%) ages 18 and over are married, marking a 22% decline in marriage since 1960 (Pew Research Center Staff, 2010). These statistics suggest that there has been a transformative social and cultural trend over the past 50 years that has led to a sharp decline in marriage and an accompanying rise of alternative relationship styles and family structures. Regardless of these societal changes, however, CNM and other nonnormative relationships still elicit stigma and are met with a lack of social and financial benefits.

DePaulo posed similar questions regarding the prioritization of traditional monogamous relationships, but further extended this line of thought urging us to interrogate the ways in which policy excludes *many* additional types of close personal relationships. In doing so, she highlighted the importance that is placed on romantic and conjugal relationships (be they monogamous or otherwise) in relation to any other close personal relationships, such as those between siblings or close friends. Subsequently, investigating the reasons behind the high value we exclusively place on romantic relationships would offer an interesting avenue for future work.

At the Operational Level: Future Methodological Considerations

No research study is without its limitations, and we do not argue that our target article is flawless. As mentioned in our original article, our studies were just the first step in understanding prejudice towards CNM. Next, we will address methodological concerns raised by Salvatore (2013) and Blaney and Sinclair (2012). In line with other commentators (see Day, 2013), these scholars' introduced concerns with how we operationalized monogamy and CNM that may help clarify the mechanisms that drive this stigma.

In our research and thinking about monogamy and CNM, we have purposely focused on highlighting relationship *agreements* surrounding monogamy (or lack thereof). There are several different types of CNM arrangements, including but not limited to polyamory, swinging, and open relationships (see Conley, Ziegler, Moors, Matsick, & Valentine, 2012, for a more comprehensive overview). However, despite the difference in details among these various types, these relationships are rooted in the notion that *all* partners in the relationship are aware of and share a consensus on the nonmonogamous (be it emotional and/or sexual) aspect of their relationship arrangement.

We acknowledge Blaney and Sinclair's (2012) points about isolating a specific type of CNM relationship (i.e., polyamory) as targets of prejudice research, because individuals in these relationships may be more invested in legal recognition of multiple partners compared to other individuals engaged in CNM (e.g., swingers). However, we caution future researchers to avoid focusing on just one type of CNM relationship; this kind of analysis could highlight a moral hierarchy among a large group of individuals who engage in various types of CNM with more commonalities than seen at the surface level (Matsick, Ziegler, Moors, & Conley, under review). For example, researchers have acknowledged that there is an emerging group of individuals who identify as both swingers and polyamorous (known as "swolly") and other individuals prefer using broader terms to define their relationships, such as "open" or "monogamish" (Hosking, 2012; Sheff & Hammers, 2011). We are congenial to the idea of thinking of relationships on a monogamy continuum, in which some relationships fall strongly on the monogamous end of the spectrum (e.g., even the thought of one's partner being attracted to another person is intolerable) whereas others fall on the consensual nonmonogamous end (e.g., believing that sex and love with more than one partner is acceptable). We will further discuss prioritizing CNM-based identity versus shared inequalities for organizing policy change later in this paper.

Additionally, Blaney and Sinclair (2012) raised some concern about our operationalization of monogamy and CNM as well as our use of person perception methodology. We acknowledge that person perception paradigms are oftentimes limited; sound definitions (in this case, defining different relationship types) are important for producing thorough research. For example, there are countless ways that a researcher could reframe a vignette by adding and removing different descriptive information (e.g., specifying whether or not the people in a relationship are *truly* monogamous or if they are "nonconsensually nonmonogamous"). The vignettes that we mentioned in response to Miller's commentary address some of Blaney and Sinclair's concerns, such that in the present research, we made it explicitly clear that the people engaged in the CNM and monogamous relationships were happy with their relationship agreements from the start of their relationships. Unfortunately, we currently do not have data to directly address Blaney and Sinclair's concerns; thus, future research could strengthen

the quality of our original research by ensuring that participants are thinking of a truly monogamous comparison group (and not an ostensibly monogamous couple).

Based on our reading of this commentary, future research could conceptualize monogamy as a continuum to determine at which point individuals who do not strictly adhere to monogamy become devalued. However, encouraged by the size of the effects found in our target article, we believe that regardless of how researchers choose to pursue this research design (i.e., altering the vignettes or definitions used to describe monogamous and CNM relationships), the results most likely will not nullify our original results.

Further, Salvatore (2013) appeared to be under the impression that we are unfamiliar with prejudice research. In our previous work, we have used a wide array of methodologies to assess prejudice (e.g., Conley, Rabinowitz, & Hardin, 2010; Conley, Ziegler, & Moors, 2012; Diamond et al., 2012), but in our target article, we were primarily interested in assessing only explicit prejudice. Although follow-up studies are needed to address the nuanced questions raised by some of the commentators, we do not believe that researchers need to replicate every theoretical process once a new target group emerges in the literature. We acknowledge the complexity of the research on stereotyping and prejudice (as described by Salvatore); however, documented psychological processes would most likely not change when examining individuals engaged in CNM. Indeed, given the sizes of our effects, we think a very interesting question would be whether researchers could identify any circumstances in which the stigma toward CNM does *not* exist.

Of course, researchers could spend time examining at what age children exhibit an explicit CNM bias (or implicit for that matter), latency biases between people's reactions to positive and negative words paired with monogamy and CNM, the effects of cognitive load on CNM prejudice, observational measures of prejudice and discrimination (e.g., how far people will physically move away from someone in a CNM relationship), or associated changes in blood flow in the brain with exposure to CNM-related stimuli. However, we believe that there are other valuable and fruitful areas of CNM research to pursue (compared to assessing prejudice that has already been documented) that would have greater implications for policy and understanding the underlying mechanisms of this type of prejudice.

We suggest that when a bias is as clear and strong as the current one, we can assume that it will operate much as other biases do. Rather, time should be spent documenting clear cases of discrimination and how those who deviate from the ideals of monogamy are disenfranchised socially and economically. Additionally, we and other researchers believe more attention needs to be paid to thwarting prejudice and changing people's attitudes for the better (Schmader & Stone, 2008). Both of these avenues would be beneficial to policy, law, and social justice.

Progressive Change: Coalition Building

DePaulo (2012) noted that laws should include any close relationship, not just sexual ones. Focusing on cause (e.g., discriminatory laws for those who are not married), rather than an identity (e.g., polyamory) would garner coalition building and be advantageous to policy change (c.f. Cohen, 1997). For instance, if individuals not in relationships, in same-sex relationships, in CNM relationships, and anyone else with a close friend (almost every person in the United States!) banded together because of their shared oppression, then policy could be quickly changed. DePaulo raised an important question about coalition building; in particular, will there be a time in which people who are disadvantaged by current policy and law that privileges monogamy band together for their collective greater good?

DePaulo hypothesized that this type of coalition building is dependent on the status of an identity as stable or permeable, leading us to question, is the engagement in CNM relationships an identity that is stable or not? This may help us to better understand the likelihood of individuals engaged in CNM to become politically involved in the interest of questioning the prioritization and privileging (both formally and informally) of conventional monogamous romantic relationships. An effective strategy for both research and policy might be to develop movements and research programs around shared questions (or shared inequalities) rather than shared identities. Thus, in the research domain, it is generally more practical to engage with questions of how to reduce prejudice than with how to reduce prejudice associated with a specific social group. Likewise, within the political domain, it is more reasonable to organize around issues than around identities. For example, it would be highly beneficial to develop a movement to prevent anyone from being fired for reasons unrelated to their ability to perform their job, rather than developing protections for individual groups separately.

Organizing around broad social issues rather than identities can be extended to additional policy domains, including marriage and its legal affordances. Blaney and Sinclair (2012) argue that polyamorous relationships, rather than other CNM configurations (e.g., swinging, open relationships), would benefit from changes in policy due to their desire to marry more than one partner. According to this logic, polyamorous marriage, then, should take precedence in future discussions of legal recognition. In line with suggestions by DePaulo, we caution against privileging certain relationship types over others. Populations practicing CNM share a variety of traits as well as considerable overlap in membership (Bauer, 2010). Additionally, individuals who engage in CNM may use alternative identity labels that diverge from “polyamory”; however, their relationships practices may be similar. Limiting future discussion to only polyamory would exclude a diverse subset of individuals in CNM relationships who may also desire marriage and its legal affordances.

Thus, as DePaulo (2012) shrewdly observed, a better strategy for both research and policy would be to integrate the perspectives of those who are outside the normative framework of heterosexual marriage and family. Approaching the topic from this perspective will allow researchers and policy advocates to garner a more holistic sense of the dynamics of American culture and to foster ally relationships across a wide variety of groups. We look forward to addressing these issues in the near future.

Taken together, the points raised by all of the commentators as well as our own positions have established a common ground on which to build in future research. Specifically, after we read all of the commentary and critically examined our work, two empirically unanswered questions emerged—why are nonnormative relationships *so* threatening and, in turn, what is it about monogamy that is *so* idealized? We imagine that the commentators of our target article would agree that these two questions are fruitful avenues worthy of scholarly pursuit in an effort to understand the underlying mechanisms of relationship-based stigma.

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