

American Psychological Association convenes task force on consensual non-monogamy

The Alliance for Therapeutic Choice

Recent reports from APA affiliate divisions indicate that in 2018 the organization through its Division 44 (Society for the Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity) convened a task force on consensual non-monogamy (CNM). The following description of this task force is provided at <https://www.apadivisions.org/division-44/leadership/task-forces/> :

The Task Force on Consensual Non-Monogamy promotes awareness and inclusivity about consensual non-monogamy and diverse expressions of intimate relationships. These include but are not limited to: people who practice polyamory, open relationships, swinging, relationship anarchy and other types of ethical, non-monogamous relationships.

Finding love and/or sexual intimacy is a central part of most people's life experience. However, the ability to engage in desired intimacy without social and medical stigmatization is not a liberty for all. This task force seeks to address the needs of people who practice consensual non-monogamy, including their intersecting marginalized identities.

The goal of the task force is to generate research, create resources and advocate for the inclusion of consensual non-monogamous relationships in the following four areas:

Basic and applied research

Education and training

Psychological practice

Public interest

Additional information and resources can be found on the Consensual Non-Monogamy Task Force's website.

Consensual Non-Monogamy Task Force contacts:

Amy Moors

Heath Schechinger

In discussing CNM, the initial task force reviews report research suggests roughly 21% of adults had engaged in this practice at some point in their lives, and lesbian, gay, and especially bisexual identified adults have higher levels of CNM participation than heterosexual adults. The task force acknowledged stigma is attached to CNM and that anti-CNM discrimination is frequent and creates minority stress for CNM practitioners leading to increased psychological distress. The task force expressed concern that health care providers may frequently engage in microaggressive acts toward clients who engage in CNM and calls for therapists to avoid "monosexism" and become more CNM-affirming in their practices. An effort is underway to encourage various therapist locator websites to include CNM as a search term for greater ease in locating a CNM-

affirming clinician. In addition, the task force is currently circulating a petition to support relationship diversity, including the question, “I support consensual non-monogamy as a legally protected class (i.e., to avoid discrimination in employment, housing, etc.)”

Reports indicate a great deal of energy around the work of this task force: “The Div. 44 leadership made it clear they were supportive of the CNM task force, with many outwardly expressing excitement, acknowledging the historical significance of the task force and endorsing their desire for the CNM task force to become a Standing Committee in Div. 44.”

Psychologist and Alliance member Laura Haynes, Ph.D., however, had a very different very response to this APA action, observing, “I think most Americans will be very concerned to learn this radical sex activism has hijacked the American Psychological Association and all our mainstream mental health professional organizations. They are no longer trusted sources of accurate scientific information about sexuality or gender. Unfortunately, they are radical political organizations at this point.” Haynes noted that the APA is expressing similar sympathies regarding other practices that used to be considered paraphilias--bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sad-masochism and masochism (Kleinplatz & Diamond, 2014, p. 251). She believes the growing effort to mainstream such practices could be driving the recently documented decrease in support among young adults for LGBTQ activism. “What is becoming clearer to everyone,” Haynes asserted, “is that for decades the APA has been letting radical sex activists control their positions on sexuality and on therapy that is open to change in sexuality for those who want to move in a direction toward more traditional sexuality. They’re just becoming more bold and ‘out’ about it.”

References

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