

Polyamory as an Ethical Alternative to Infidelity

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Abstract

Most of the population would agree that true love is the key to a happy life. Long-term dyadic monogamy, defined as the prototypically between a man and woman, and sanctioned through marriage, is the dominant index for how most Americans experience and authenticate their relationships. In the United States, Heteronormativity, or the belief that two-parent households are the default, preferred, or normal mode of sexual orientation. Further, into adulthood, this concept becomes a key goal or achievement to have lived a satisfied and accomplished life, and the infidelity of a loved one to be of utmost betrayal. Although this review will not be for or against the concept of marriage, it will acknowledge the marriage and divorce rates and the factors behind those changes. This review's purpose is to introduce ideas related to monogamy, sexual jealousy, and their relation to sexual and relationship satisfaction. If it is so hard for humans to be monogamous, why do most of us around the world make it one of the most central goals of our lives? Furthermore, the impact infidelity has on these types of relationships. According to Fincham and May (2017), the scope of infidelity extends beyond the realm of marriage, with persons in casual and dating relationships reporting higher rates of infidelity than married persons.

Research Question

This review's purpose is to introduce ideas related to monogamy, sexual jealousy, and their links to sexual and relationship satisfaction. If it is so hard for humans to be monogamous, why do most of us around the world make it one of the most central goals of our lives? Furthermore, the impact infidelity has on these types of social relationships.

Introduction

To further answer this question, these articles will examine the impact of experiences of infidelity, or otherwise known as extradyadic involvement, adultery, affairs, stepping out, cheating, or some other term associated with an undisclosed romantic involvement with a secondary partner. For many of us, this concept of marriage and the idea that men and women complete each other and must hold a value of commitment to each other proves to only be a guiding factor to enforce gender roles and social order. The rise of polyamory and other forms of multi-partner relationships is increasing, changing how we see and form ideas of relationships beyond the concept of monogamy and marriage being a binding contract between two people and treat breaking it as such a betrayal.

Review of Literature

The Driving Forces Behind Marriage and Divorce Rates.

In the 2007 article by Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers' article; *Marriage and Divorce: Changes and their Driving Forces*, researchers document important factors about marriage and divorce while comparing trends through the past 150 years and outcomes across a varying sample of participants in multiple countries. Authors have noted that although divorce rates have risen over the past 150 years, they have been decreasing for the past quarter-century. The study concludes that marriage rates have also been falling, in relation, the importance of marriage at different points in the life cycle has changed, reflecting rising age at first marriage, rising divorce followed by high remarriage rates and a combination of increased longevity with a declining age gap between spouses. (Stevenson, 2007, p. 28)

Marriage maintains a significant role in American life; as we evolve as a society, so will human sexuality and partner relationships, thus creating relationships we want to have. Evidence of this is represented by the rise of alternative means of birth control and women's control over their fertility, changes in wages, the role of gender equality and equal pay, and the influence of the internet.

Roles of Monogamy

Terra Schmookler and Krisanne Bursik in the *Value of Monogamy in Emerging Adulthood: A Gendered Perspective* reviews the valuing of monogamy and its association with current relationship satisfaction. A sample of young adults currently in heterosexual relationships was used to study their differences in gender and gender roles in their monogamous relationships. Also, examining the value of monogamy and its connection to current relationship

satisfaction. Attitudes on monogamy were measured by four detentions: valuing emotional monogamy, valuing sexual monogamy, beliefs of monogamy as relationship-enhancing, and feelings of fidelity and sacrifice. Gender differences were adamantly noted; women valued both emotional and sexual commitment over men. Both genders viewed monogamy as a relationship enhancement, but men were more likely to associate monogamy with sacrifice. Each of these monogamy detentions significantly went together with relationship satisfaction. The authors also discuss monogamy and relationship satisfaction beyond infidelity. The components of infidelity involve dishonesty and lack of faithfulness that are separate from the inherent values one places on being in a relationship with only one other partner.

Relationship Satisfaction Vs. Sexual Satisfaction

Sexual desire and romantic love are often experienced together, yet they are fundamentally distinct experiences with differing neurobiological substrates. In a study by Diamond (2004); *Emerging Perspectives on Distinctions Between Romantic Love and Sexual Desire*, using the evolutionary origin of each type of satisfaction led researchers to understand the underlying process of sexual desire and how satisfaction is applied to understand the context of sexual mating and how romantic love comes from pair-bonding originally evolved from the context of infant-caregiver attachment. As a result, humans can experience these feelings of sexual desire and romantic love, but an individual's sexual predisposition may not coincide with their capacity to fall in love with partners of either gender. The article also reviews how love and desire can be influenced by the role of oxytocin and contributes to the common trend that women experience greater interconnections between love and desire than men do. Using this research to further study the systematic investigation of the coordinated biological, behavioral, cognitive, and emotional processes that shape experiences of love and desire in humans may also lead us to

develop more theories on how human sexuality and the number of partner preference may be supported by the idea that love and compassion are separate from sexual desires.

Another study, *Relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction: A Longitudinal Study of Individuals in Long-term Relationships* (Byers, 2005), also reviews in depth the distinct roles regarding relationship and sexual satisfaction. Over time these examinations will provide evidence of explanations for the connection between the two topics. A group of 87 participants who were in long-term relationships complicated measures of sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction twice during the study, 18 months (about one and a half years) apart. Based on further analysis, there was limited evidence to support the original theory; “Changes in relationship satisfaction led to changes in sexual satisfaction or the hypothesis that changes in sexual satisfaction leads to changes in relationship satisfaction” (Byers, 2005, p.113). However, it was found that sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction were found to change simultaneously. The researcher later discusses the need to develop invasive modules depict the associations between sexual and relationship satisfaction. Having this knowledge of the different aspects of relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction can further understand what these distinct roles have on how we create lasting relationships and how we gain sexual satisfaction in these relationships. Concepts like these lead us to develop new types of relationships that satisfy each romantic relationship needs and sexual satisfaction.

New/Alternative Types of Relationships

Article *Love and Sex: Polyamorous Relationships* are perceived more favorably than swinging and open relationships (Matsick, et al., p.334, 2013) defines consensual non-monogamy (CNM) as romantic relationships where all partners agree to interact in sexual,

romantic, or emotional connections with others. (Matsick et al., p.1, 2013) This study examines the likelihood of stigma attached to romantic social relationships such as polygamy, swingers, and open relationships. Those participating in the research were asked to read each definition of these three types of CNM relationships and asked to throw their responses towards individuals who practice those relationships. Findings report that swingers were drastically perceived negatively as less responsible (Matsick, et al., 2013, p.1) Also, open relationships were perceived negatively in that they are less common or normal. Reports from these findings would suggest that people are less comfortable with the concept of sexual relationships than types of relationships that involve multiple romantic or emotional partners.

A similar article by Bergstrand, and Williams, *Today's alternative marriage styles: The case of swingers*, discussed the results of an online survey of 1092 swingers. The General Social Survey (GSS) was used to compare social, political, and sexual attitudes towards swingers within the general population in the U.S. (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000). Groups were also compared by measures of marital and general life satisfaction. At three to seven years into a marriage, it begins to take higher levels of stimulation between partners to produce the same level of sexual excitement previously witnessed in the first years of the relationship (Bergstrand, & Williams, 2000).

This study theorizes that couples that are open to new and dissimilar sexual experiences will begin to explore a different approach to shared sexual fulfillment to continue to grow together and raising relationship satisfaction. It is also at this stressful point in marriages when infidelity increases, affecting the rise in divorce rates. It is concluded that the swingers surveyed were the same population reported in early years holding a middle-class, middle-aged, white, religious segment of the population, but when it comes to attitudes about sex and marriage, they

are found to be less racist, less sexist, and less heterosexist than the general population. (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000) Based on this article, swinging appears to make most of the swingers' relationship satisfaction greater, and swingers rate the happiness of their marriages and overall life satisfaction as higher than the non-swinging population.

A study, *Polyamory and Monogamy as Strategic Identities* (Robinson, 2013), reviews how recently polyamory has been framed as a sexual orientation with the idea that some people are independently predisposed to forming multiple partner relationships. A qualitative study based in Toronto, Canada, viewed 40 bisexual women (Robinson, 2013, p.1).

The research found argues that polyamory and monogamy are terms best used as examples of sexual expression rather than as a sexual orientation. Using this approach, one could accommodate identity changes between monogamy and polyamory that enable people to obtain their desired type of relationships. Research would argue polyamory is increasing today, and this study supplies examples of how bisexual women, but further studies could investigate these implications on bisexual men or heterosexuals.

Conclusion

Based on these articles, reviewing the dynamics behind marriage and divorce rates along with the research done on relationship satisfaction, infidelity, and sexual satisfaction between partners in a marriage can raise more questions to challenge society's construct of marriage. Using this information, we can initiate the creation of relationships that increase overall life satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction.

Results

Information gathered to support the literature review supports the research question.

A study done by the Journal of Sex Research further examines the sociosexuality and the association between these desires and commitment in relationships to further understand the role and impact of infidelity. “Participants were romantically involved heterosexuals (N = 252; 51 women, 201 men; Mage = 41.13, SD = 9.82) registered on a dating Web site directed at romantically involved individuals.” results of this study presented the idea that sociosexuality, paired with commitment, is linked to sexual infidelity.

“Individuals who had (versus had not) previously engaged in infidelity reported more unrestricted sociosexuality, while reporting less commitment. For individuals reporting prior sexual infidelity, unrestricted sociosexual desire and lesser commitment were associated with more permissive perceptions of infidelity. For individuals reporting no prior sexual infidelity, greater commitment was always associated with more strict perceptions of infidelity. No gender differences emerged in the analysis. Also, no differences were found according to individual motivations (i.e., looking to know other people versus seeking casual sex) or relational motivations (i.e., individual registration versus registration as a couple) underlying individuals’ registration on the Web site. These results are an important addition to the literature on infidelity by analyzing a specific sample motivated to engage in infidelity.” (Rodrigues, Lopes, & Pereira, 2017)

	Sexual Infidelity				Correlations						
	No		Yes		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>							
1. SOI-R behavior	2.30	1.14	3.45	1.33	—	.31***	.17*	.13	.02	-.03	-.03
2. SOI-R attitudes	5.08	1.58	5.69	1.30	.27**	—	.39***	.08	-.07	.011	-.08
3. SOI-R desire	4.29	1.57	5.01	1.45	.17	.43***	—	-.19*	-.17*	-.22**	-.18*
4. Commitment	4.90	1.25	4.28	1.50	.18	-.15	-.34**	—	.18*	.04	.17*
5. PDIS ambiguous	2.11	1.27	1.81	0.84	-.01	.01	-.07	.28*	—	.44***	.42***
6. PDIS explicit	6.11	1.27	5.67	1.69	-.11	-.05	-.10	.36**	.31**	—	.54***
7. PDIS deceptive	5.01	1.75	5.04	1.77	.12	-.08	-.09	.42***	.29*	.35**	—

Note. Controlling for “looking for” variable. Correlations for individuals without accounts of sexual infidelity ($n = 80$) appear below the diagonal. Correlations for individuals with accounts of sexual infidelity ($n = 172$) appear above the diagonal.
 $*p \leq .05$; $**p \leq .01$; $***p \leq .001$.

Article Title:

Sociosexuality, Commitment, Sexual Infidelity, and Perceptions of Infidelity: Data from the Second Love Web Site.

Source:

Journal of Sex Research, Feb2017, Vol. 54 Issue 2, p241-253, 13p, 4 Charts

Chart; found on p247

	Step 1				Step 2			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Wald	OR [95% CI]	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Wald	OR [95% CI]
Gender	-0.22	.369	0.35	0.80 [0.39; 1.66]	-0.41	.463	0.76	0.67 [0.27; 1.65]
Looking for	0.71**	.307	5.27	2.02 [1.11; 3.69]	0.30	.372	0.66	1.35 [0.65; 2.80]
SOI-R behavior					0.81***	.157	26.67	2.25 [1.65; 3.06]
SOI-R attitudes					-0.03	.140	0.04	0.97 [0.74; 1.28]
SOI-R desire					0.25*	.124	3.97	1.28 [1.00; 1.63]
Commitment					-0.43***	.122	12.44	0.65 [0.51; 0.83]

Note. Gender, 0 = female, 1 = male; looking for, 0 = knowing people, 1 = casual sex. SE: standard error. OR: odds ratio; CI: confidence interval. Degrees of freedom for Wald test = 1. Variables were standardized prior to analysis.

$*p \leq .05$; $**p \leq .01$; $***p \leq .001$.

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	Women (n = 51)		Men (n = 201)		χ^2	Cramer's <i>V</i>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
Education					1.52	0.09
≤ 12 years	25	49	77	38.3		
> 12 years	26	51	124	49.2		
Residence					0.19	0.04
Urban	23	45.1	100	49.8		
Suburbs	28	54.9	101	50.2		
Religion					0.58	0.06
None	15	29.4	73	36.3		
Catholic	36	70.6	128	63.7		
Relationship type					0.67	0.05
Single	10	19.6	48	23.9		
De facto union	12	23.5	39	19.4		
Married	29	56.9	114	56.7		
Cohabiting					0.11	0.03
No	8	15.7	38	18.9		
Yes	43	84.3	163	81.1		
Children					0.98	0.06
0	17	33.3	58	28.9		
1	12	23.5	61	30.3		
≥ 2	22	43.1	82	40.8		
Sexual infidelity					0.01	0.02
No	17	33.3	63	31.3		
Yes	34	66.7	138	68.7		
Registration					0.03	0.03
Individual	45	88.2	173	86.1		
Couple	6	11.8	28	13.9		
Looking for					20.87***	0.29
Know other people	30	58.8	51	25.4		
Casual sexual encounters	21	41.2	150	74.6		
	<i>M (SD)</i>		<i>M (SD)</i>		<i>t</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Age (years)	39.57 (9.31)		41.53 (9.92)		-1.28	0.16
Relationship length (months)	150.74 (105.16)		149.51 (110.34)		0.07	0.01

****p* ≤ .001.

Article Title:

Sociosexuality, Commitment, Sexual Infidelity, and Perceptions of Infidelity: Data from the Second Love Web Site.

Source:

Chart; found on p245

	Women (<i>n</i> = 51)		Men (<i>n</i> = 201)		χ^2	Cramer's <i>V</i>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
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Chart; found on p245

Methods

To further support the question “If it is so hard for humans to remain monogamous, why do most human beings around the world make it one of the most crucial goals of our lives?” Further information was gathered through a literature survey to support how human sexuality is evolving from the preconceptions constructed by society. Results would support the hypothesis, providing examples that show the growth of new sexual preferences and orientations and how these concepts differ from each other, thus separating commitment from the ideals of love. In conclusion, infidelity continues to be a marker for causing stress in relationships, but as multiple partner relationships become more perceived thought society, new types of intimate relationships can appear. Issues that appeared during this study would include a limited period, with more time researching the subject, stronger arguments may be made. Some issues encountered were finding peer reviewed articles on this subject that were opposing standard beliefs surrounding monogamy and marriage. As an observer, I was able to notice the lack of studies done that are opposing monogamy. Because monogamy is such a conceptualized firm idea today, recent studies for emerging types of new relationships and ideals continue to be published. Using the Purchase College Library and Google Scholar databases and search engines yielded various results to key words. Keywords included: monogamy, polygamy, marriage and divorce rates, sexual jealousy, relationship satisfaction and multiple partner relationships. Each key word brought up a variety of articles, searches for sexual jealousy and polyamory fielded the best results to support my hypothesis, while marriage and divorce rates seemed to consist of books and articles on how to have a happy marriage. The importance of this study is to question the

marriage structure that has been defined and expected of us by society. The ideas of monogamy have been enforced through western culture, but as human beings we struggle to stay in these definite constructs. Conducting a literature survey gathers information supporting a specific ideology behind human relationships.

Discussion

Infidelity is the most complex issue met by couples as well as therapists and psychologists. Biological influences might be the cause behind many gender differences in relationship tactics and responses to conflict in relationships such as infidelity. Are humans meant to be monogamous? Couples that live this alternative lifestyle benefit in that polyamorous people often find satisfaction in having close relationships on both sexual and emotional levels with more than one partner. This is since couples that decide to open their relationship to include others are often highly secure in the strength of their partnership bond. Furthermore, couples are more likely to welcome experiences and situations that influence individual growth that come from close connections with new and interesting people.

This research reflects the common idea that men and women “complete” each other in their differences, as well as marriage and the life quest for a perfect soulmate that are a result of cultural histories. Most living in the US today would identify marriage as a natural goal for humans and equate monogamy to marriage. However, true long-term monogamy is rare in nature and can be argued as a nontypical mating pattern for human beings. Monogamy as the expected cultural norm contradicts our evolutionary heritage and basic biology.

Although objective literature and speculation on the topic of infidelity and CMN are abundant, research literature is scarce. While researching this topic barriers that arose include the

lack of a consensus on the definition the term infidelity. Examples of the types of challenges faced in the research would include lack of retrospective research, increase confidentiality for participants, measures, and variables; and sampling issues, such as lack of diversity and randomization.

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