

Jealousy and Compersion in Polyamorous and Monogamous Relationships



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Introduction

- Researchers have recently started to examine polyamorous or consensually non-monogamous relationships (CNM) as an alternative to monogamy (Conley et al., 2013)
- CNM or polyamory has been defined as any sexual and/or romantic relationship involving three or more individuals (Balzarini et al., 2017). Recent studies estimate that approximately 4 to 5 percent of Americans are currently involved in polyamorous relationships (Conley et al., 2012)
- Romantic jealousy which occurs in response to an actual or perceived threat toward the existence or quality of a person's primary relationship is usually seen as a destructive force (Guerrero et al., 2005).
- Those in polyamorous relationships report experiencing jealousy; however, the negative effects may be offset by feelings of compersion (Aumer et al., 2014).
- Compersion is defined as a feeling of happiness in the successful compatibility of one's partner with another person (Deri, 2015).
- The current study investigated the relationship between jealousy and compersion in polyamorous and monogamous relationships. It was predicted that those in polyamorous relationships would experience higher levels of compersion in response to imagining their partner expressing interest in someone new and that this increased compersion would help buffer the negative effects of jealousy.

Method

- 223 participants (129 monogamous and 94 polyamorous) completed an online survey on jealousy and attachment in romantic relationships.
 - **Monogamous** - 107 Females; 21 Males; 1 Other; 104 Heterosexual; 3 Homosexual; 18 Bisexual; 4 Other
 - **Polyamorous** - 54 Females; 29 Males; 11 Other; 33 Heterosexual; 3 Homosexual; 42 Bisexual; 17 Other
- Participants completed measures of relationship satisfaction (Investment Model - Satisfaction and Investment subscales; Rusbult et al., 1998) and attachment (Adult Attachment Scale; Collins & Read, 1990)
- Participants were then asked to imagine that their partner expressed romantic interest in someone else and report how they would respond.
- Jealousy and Compersion were both measured with items from the PANAS (Watson et al., 1998)
 - **Jealousy** - Anxious, Insecure, Threatened, Uncertain ($\alpha = .88$)
 - **Compersion** - Joviality Subscale ($\alpha = .98$)

Feelings of compersion may serve to protect those in polyamorous relationships from the negative effects of jealousy.



For more information

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Results

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations for Relationship Quality, Attachment, Jealousy, and Compersion in Polyamorous vs Monogamous Relationships

	Polyamorous	Monogamous	
Relationship Quality	Satisfaction	5.68 (1.13)	5.71 (1.30)
	Investment	4.98 (1.27)	5.09 (1.28)
Attachment	Dependence	4.20 (1.34)	3.87 (1.30)
	Anxiety*	2.97 (1.17)	3.34 (1.15)
	Closeness**	5.09 (1.14)	4.58 (1.07)
Jealousy**	3.23 (1.67)	5.33 (1.31)	
Compersion**	4.18 (1.63)	1.68 (1.29)	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

- As shown in Table 1, there were no significant differences for Relationship Quality (Satisfaction & Investment)
- For attachment, there were no significant differences on Dependence; however, those in Polyamorous relationships reported lower levels of Anxiety and higher levels of Closeness.
- As predicted, those in Polyamorous relationships also reported lower levels of Jealousy and higher levels of Compersion
- Further analysis revealed that the relationship between Relationship Type and Jealousy was mediated by feelings of Compersion.

Discussion

- The suggestion made by Aumer et al. (2014), that those in polyamorous relationship may experience compersion in response to their partners' involvement with other people, was confirmed with this research.
- As expected, polyamory was associated with lower levels of jealousy. However, this relationship was mediated by feelings of compersion. Thus, compersion may serve to protect those in polyamorous relationships from the negative effects of jealousy.

Limitations/Future Research

- Investigating a non-standard relationship pattern such as polyamory presented some unique challenges that can be addressed in future studies.
- For example, our sample of participants who identified as polyamorous was older and tended to be more diverse in terms of sexuality and gender identity than the monogamous sample.
 - In future research we plan examine the influence of gender identity and sexual orientation, as well as other personality characteristics that may be a factor.
- Most of the measures of jealousy were designed for traditional relationships and thus were not as relevant for the polyamorous sample. Standard validated measures of both jealousy and compersion that can be used with this sample are needed.