

Relationship quality, infidelity, and mental health among ethically non-monogamous  
individuals: A Finnish population-based study

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Viime vuosina Länsimaisissa massamedioissa on alettu kiinnittää enemmän huomiota erilaisiin suhdemuotoihin monosuhteiden rinnalla. Myös tieteellinen tutkimus on alkanut kiinnostumaan suhdemuotojen monimuotoisuudesta. Tästä huolimatta tutkimus monisuhteissa elävien yksilöiden tyytyväisyydestä ja hyvinvoinnista suhteessa tai suhteissa on vähäistä niin Suomessa kuin kansainvälisestikin. Tämän Pro Gradu - tutkielman tavoitteena on tutkia suhdetyytyväisyyden eri aspekteja, uskottomuutta, masentuneisuutta ja ahdistuneisuutta suhdevähemmistöjen keskuudessa Suomessa. Toinen tavoite oli tutkia seksuaalista suuntautumista ja sukupuolen moninaisuutta suhdevähemmistöjen keskuudessa. Tässä tutkimuksessa eri aspekteja verrattiin monisuhteisten ja monisuhteisten yksilöiden välillä tavoitteena lisätä tietoa suomalaisista monisuhteissa olevista yksilöistä. Tutkimus on ensimmäinen väestötason kyselytutkimus, jossa verrataan monisuhteessa eläviä ja monosuhteissa eläviä yksilöitä suomessa.

Tutkimuksessa verrattiin 136 monisuhteista ja 3755 monosuhteista yksilöä. Käytetyt mittarit olivat yleisesti hyväksytyt BSI-18 ja PRQC.

Sekä seksuaalisessa suuntautumisessa että sukupuoli identiteeteissä oli enemmän variaatiota monisuhteisten ryhmässä verrattuna monosuhteisiin. Odotetusti tyytyväisyys suhteessa tai suhteissa ei eronnut ryhmien välillä. Sen sijaan yllättävää oli se, että pettäminen oli yleisempää monisuhteisten ryhmässä verrattuna monosuhteisiin. Korkeampi tyytyväisyys suhteessa selittyi osittain pettämisen vähyydellä mutta suurin osa variaatiosta selittyi muilla faktoreilla, joita ei tunnistettu tässä tutkimuksessa. Odotetusti myös ahdistuneisuus ja masennustasot olivat korkeammat monisuhteisillä yksilöillä verrattuna monosuhteisiin yksilöihin.

Tutkimuksen vahvuudet olivat väestötason data ja laajasti käytettyjen sekä validoitujen mittarien käyttö. Rajoittavia tekijöitä taas olivat monisuhteisten yksilöiden pieni otos, jonka takia kaikki erilaisissa monisuhteissa olevat osallistujat muodostivat yhden ryhmän. Lisäksi kysymys, jolla tutkittiin suhteen tyyppiä, oli muotoiltu epäselvästi.

Yhteenvedona voidaan todeta, että tulokset tukevat sitä ajatusta, että erilaisille ihmisille sopivat erilaiset suhdemuodot, eikä tyytyväisyys suhteissa riipu sen tyyppistä. Lisäksi on hyvin mahdollista, että korkeampien ahdistuneisuus ja masennus pisteiden takana on vähemmistöstressi. Joka tapauksessa monisuhteisten yksilöiden hyvinvoinnin eteen tarvitaan lisää toimia.

**Avainsanat:** eettinen monisuhteisuus, monosuhteisuus, suhteen laatu, uskottomuus, mononormatiivisuus, vähemmistöstressi, ahdistuneisuus, masennus

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In recent years other relationship types besides monogamy have gained more visibility in Western mass media and slowly in scientific research as well. However, studies about non-monogamous individuals' relationship quality and wellbeing are scarce both in Finland and internationally. The aim of this thesis was to study different aspects of relationship quality, infidelity, depression, and anxiety of relationship minorities using a Finnish population-based sample. Another aim was to explore sexual orientation and gender identities amongst relationship minorities. In this thesis these different aspects were compared between non-monogamous and monogamous individuals in order to create a better understanding of non-monogamous individuals in Finland. Our study is the first population-based study comparing non-monogamous and monogamous relationships in Finland.

We used population-based Finnish survey data from 136 individuals in non-monogamous relationships and from 3755 individuals in monogamous relationships for comparison. Used measures were widely used BSI-18 and PRQC.

We found that there was more variation in sexual orientations and gender identities among non-monogamous individuals compared to monogamous individuals. As expected, there was no significant difference between non-monogamous and monogamous individuals in relationship quality. Surprisingly, infidelity was more common in non-monogamous relationships compared to monogamous relationships. Higher relationship quality was partly explained by lack of infidelity but most of the variation was caused by other factors not identified in this study. Anxiety and depression levels were also higher in non-monogamous individuals compared to monogamous individuals.

Strengths of this thesis were the use of population-based data and use of widely used and validated measures. Limitations on the other hand were the small sample of non-monogamous individuals causing us to put all the participants in the same big group, and the phrasing on the questionnaire surveying the relationship type.

To conclude, our results support the idea that there is not one universal relationship form that is suitable for everyone, but different individuals are satisfied in different types of relationships. One potential explanation for the higher anxiety and depression rates in the non-monogamous group could be minority stress. More work is required to promote the wellbeing of individuals in non-monogamous relationships.

**Keywords:** ethical non-monogamy, monogamy, relationship quality, infidelity, mononormativity, minority stress, anxiety, depression

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# 1. Introduction

In recent years, ethical non-monogamy has slowly started to become more visible in Western societies. Ethical non-monogamy can be defined as alternative options to monogamous relationships where only two people are in a romantic relationship with each other (Taivaloja, 2018). Especially mass media has paid more attention to other types of relationship besides monogamy (Klein, 2021; Lyon, 2010; Tiessalo, 2018). Scientific research has followed, though being criticised of lagging behind for a long time (Brewster, 2017; Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2013). Research on ethical non-monogamy in the U.S. and Europe has been growing fast and has focused on, for example, the characteristics of non-monogamous individuals and the prevalence of non-monogamy (Matilainen, 2012; Rubel & Burleigh, 2020) defining the terms and language used (e.g., Barker, 2005; Klesse, 2006; Richie & Barker, 2006; Weitzman, 2006), facing non-monogamous individuals in therapy and healthcare services (e.g. Baumgartner, 2009; Berry & Barker, 2014; Hiljanen & Hirvonen, 2016; Weitzman, 2006), as well as stigma around ethical non-monogamy, and its negative effects on mental health (Conley, Moors, Matsick & Ziegler, 2013; Klesse, 2005; Matsick, Conley, Ziegler, Moors & Rubin, 2014; Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, Rubin, & Conley, 2013). In summary, previous research indicates that there is more variation in sexual orientations and gender identities among non-monogamous individuals compared to monogamous individuals. However, little is still known about the more specific characteristics of non-monogamous individuals or their wellbeing. Especially in a Finnish context research has almost been non-existent when it comes to relationship minorities (Taivaloja, 2018).

## 1.1 Types of Non-monogamous Relationships

The most common type of intimate relationship in Western countries is closed monogamy, usually described as a closed relationship between two people (Conley, 2015). If either of the participants engages in romantic or sexual behaviours with someone outside of the relationship, it is usually considered infidelity and harmful for the common trust. However, this type of relationship is only one possibility among a wide spectrum of partnerships.

Ethical non-monogamy is an umbrella term for varying ways of being with more than one partner at the same time, in an intimate, sexually, and/or emotionally nonexclusive way. Sometimes ‘ethical’ or ‘consensual’ is added to the label to highlight distancing non-monogamy from the deceit in cheating, also in scientific research (Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2013; Grunt-Mejer & Campbell, 2015). In this thesis I will use the term ethical non-monogamy or non-monogamy for the sake of simplicity after consulting the Finnish Polyamory society. However, the term can be considered somewhat problematic. It refers to monogamy as something normal and relationship minorities as something abnormal, which suggest these forms of relationships are unequal. However, there is no better term in English so far.

According to Berry and Barker (2014) non-monogamous individuals create a heterogeneous group including a wide variety of different relationship arrangements which may vary in type of relationship, transparency, disclosure, and mutually agreed specific terms between participants. Categories are always more or less forced classifications of reality and there are always individuals defining themselves and their relationships differently—that is, relationships include unique characteristics depending on the people being part of them. However, what unites these non-monogamous relationship structures is the desire of the individuals to be in a sexual/romantic way with more than one person (Sheff & Tesene, 2015) and open communication about the non-monogamy (Levine, Herbenick, Martinez, Fu, & Dodge, 2018). The most common types of non-monogamy described in scientific literature are polyamory, open relationships, and swinging (Grunt-Mejer & Campbell, 2015). Polyamory usually refers to a relationship where multiple romantic and/or sexual relationships can be engaged.

Labriola’s (1999) widely used theory of non-monogamy sees relationships either as closed or open (e.g., Barker, 2005; Klesse, 2006; Ritchie & Barker, 2006; Weitzman, 2006). In a closed relationship, all partners are equal to each other and relationships outside of the closed relationship are not allowed (often described as polyfidelity; Levine, Herbenick, Martinez, Fu, & Dodge, 2018). In an open relationship, individuals can make decisions about new partners without the other partner’s approval. This definition is also supported by the Finnish Polyamorous Society. They emphasize that polyamorous individuals can vary in their sexual orientation as well as romantic orientation regardless of the term “amory” indicating polyamory being romantic (Uuttu, Hokkanen, Koutonen, & Oja, 2016). It is, in other words, possible to be polyamorous

and asexual or aromantic. Communities behind ethical non-monogamy often highlight the meaningful emotional relationships between individuals, focusing on love and honesty (Barker, 2005; Fierman & Puolsen, 2011; Klesse, 2006). Nevertheless, purely sexual relationships are also possible. In this case, having a romantic relationship outside of the dyad can be considered infidelity.

Within dyadic intimate relationships, there are also different forms of sexual and/or romantic non-exclusivity. The term open relationship is most commonly used to describe a dyadic relationship where the partners can have sex partners outside of the dyad (Grunt-Mejer & Campbell, 2015). Labriola (1999) used the term primary couple instead of a dyad and referred to all other relationships the primary couple forms with other people as secondary — the primary couple puts their relationship first before any other possible partners. A similar primary/secondary structure can often be found in swinging, where the primary couple engages in extradyadic sex, often performed in social situations such as swinging parties, where both partners are present (Grunt-Mejer & Campbell, 2015). Compared to swinging, extradyadic sex in open relationships is not as organised and can be performed more freely.

Labriola (1999) also described another category within non-monogamy, which includes people who are not looking for a committed relationship and might have some other all-consuming commitment in their lives, such as work, but who enjoy certain aspects of intimate relationships.

## 1.2 Prevalence and Characteristics of Ethical Non-Monogamy

According to Barker & Langdrige (2010) the most studied types of non-monogamous relationships are polyamory, open relationships, and swinging. Haupt, Gesselman, Moors, Fisher, and Garcia (2017) found that more than 20% of single adults in the U.S. reported having had some sort of consensual non-monogamous relationship at some point in their life. Men compared to women, and gay, lesbians, and bisexuals compared to heterosexuals, were more likely to have had a consensual non-monogamous relationship in the past. Rubel and Burleigh (2020) estimated a point prevalence of polyamory varying from 0.6% to 5% and lifetime estimates from 2% to 23% in the U.S depending on how strict the definition of polyamory was. Nonetheless, robust stigma and minority stress around non-monogamy might affect the willingness to respond honestly or to even participate in studies, making it hard to gain trustworthy prevalence estimates. Levine, Herbenick, Martinez, Fu, & Dodge (2018) analysed data from the

National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior, a population-based cross-sectional survey of adult men and women from the U.S. ( $N = 2270$ ). They found that 4% of the participants reported being in an open relationship, where the couple had agreed that either one of them or both can engage in sexual activities with other people. Men compared to women, and gay/lesbian, and bisexual individuals compared to heterosexual individuals, were more likely to report being in an open relationship.

Moreover, some research indicates that individuals in non-monogamous relationships are a remarkably heterogeneous group (e.g., Berry & Barker, 2014). There is a significant variety when it comes to sexual orientation, gender identity, relationship type, and life situation more generally. However, some similarities have been found as well. Non-monogamous individuals tend to be highly educated, white, and middle- or upper middle-class individuals (e.g., Sheff & Hammers, 2011). Research also indicates that there is a wider variety of sexual orientations and gender identities among individuals in non-monogamous relationships compared to individuals in monogamous relationships (Berry & Barker, 2014).

### 1.3 Wellbeing in Non-Monogamous Relationships.

Different types of consensual non-monogamy might have the potential to offer a more satisfying lifestyle for people who do not find monogamy suitable for them (Conley, 2013; Gummerus, 2018; Mitchell, Bartholomew, & Cob, 2014; Rubel & Bogaert, 2015). One reason that makes non-monogamous relationships an interesting research topic is that most Western societies hold strong social norms about monogamy.

Unfortunately, there seems to be a robust stigma around non-monogamy compared to monogamy (Balzarini, Shumlich, Kohut, & Campbell, 2018; Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2013; Klesse, 2005; Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, Rubin, & Conley, 2013).

Pieper and Bauer (2005) created the term mononormativity to describe the prevalent atmosphere where monogamy is expected and seen as normal and natural unlike non-monogamy. Conley, Moors, Matsick, and Ziegler (2013) asked their random sample of 189 U.S. undergraduate students why monogamy is preferable. The most common answers focused on the commitment between the partners and health, especially worrying about sexually transmitted infections. Moreover, non-monogamous parents are often seen as dysfunctional and partners as unreliable (Haritaworn, Lin, & Klesse, 2006). Especially women seem to suffer because of the stigma, and there seem to be more negative attitudes towards non-monogamous women compared to men (Klesse,



2005). Matsick, Conley, Ziegler, Moors, and Rubin (2014) compared views on polyamory, open relationships and swinging in the U.S. Their sample ( $N = 126$ ) was collected from classified advertisement and social media websites. They found that out of these three categories, polyamory was seen in the most positive light, and swinging was perceived in the most negative light. They argued that non-monogamy is considered more acceptable when love is the prioritized aspect and less acceptable when the main aspect is sex. However, continuing research on non-monogamous relationships can provide more reliable knowledge and help creating a more nuanced picture of these relationships.

Despite the stigma around non-monogamy and halo effect surrounding monogamy, some studies indicate that the relationship quality in consensual non-monogamous relationships could be at least as good as in monogamous relationships. There are few studies comparing relationship quality between consensual monogamous participants and consensual non-monogamous participants. Mitchel, Bartholomew, and Cobb (2014) studied need fulfilment, relationship satisfaction and commitment of polyamorous participants with two partners ( $N = 1093$ ). They found that in both relationships the participants had, the need fulfilment and satisfaction were reported to be high. There was no association between need fulfilment with one partner and commitment with the other and need fulfilment with one partner negatively predicted only 1% of the variance in relationship satisfaction with the other partner.

Morrison, Beaulieu, Brockman, and Beaglaioich (2013) compared relationship wellbeing and sociosexuality (i.e., personal differences in the willingness to engage sexual relations without commitment; Penke & Asendorpf, 2008) between polyamorous and monogamous individuals ( $N = 284$ ) from Canada. Participants were recruited from polyamorous online groups and Facebook. Their results showed greater levels of intimacy in polyamorous individuals compared to monogamous individuals, both in men and women. In this study, intimacy was defined as a reciprocal disclosure of personal information which leads to empathetic understanding of one another, strong, positive, warm affect towards others and communication of affection either verbally or by acts (originally defined by Baumster and Bratslavsky, 1999). Mogilski, Memering, Welling, and Shackelford (2017) compared mate retention and different relationship evaluations such as satisfaction in the U.S. among monogamous and consensually non-monogamous individuals ( $N = 199$ ) recruited from social media websites. They found

that monogamous individuals performed more mate retention behaviours compared to non-monogamous individuals and that non-monogamous individuals performed more mate retention behaviours with their primary partner compared to their secondary partner. They found no significant differences in overall relationship satisfaction. However, monogamous individuals reported less satisfaction with communication and less satisfaction with openness compared to non-monogamous individuals and non-monogamous individuals reported higher satisfaction with their primary partner compared to their secondary partner.

When comparing polyamorous, swinging, monogamous and open relationships, Conley, Matsick, Moors, and Ziegler (2017) found that commitment and appreciating the partner was not lower for polyamorous relationships—but in fact slightly higher. Participants were recruited in the U.S. from social media websites and selected to the final sample ( $N = 189$ ). The only relationship type that reported more jealousy and had lower satisfaction compared to monogamy was open relationship. The above-mentioned results challenge the myths of non-monogamous individuals being unreliable, dysfunctional, and unable to commit to their relationships

One interesting aspect in the context of relationship quality among ethical non-monogamy is infidelity. Moreover, in couples therapy infidelity is one of the main factors to reach professional help and one of the hardest issues to overcome (Blow & Hartnett, 2005), making infidelity a relevant topic of research. Regardless, this can possibly work differently for non-monogamous and monogamous individuals due to an expectation of non-monogamous individuals to communicate more about the external relationships. Infidelity can be defined as breaking the rules and boundaries agreed on by the individuals in the relationship. These rules depend on the consenting individuals setting them, not on what is acceptable in a major culture. Cheating can occur in all types of relationships and is not tied to the number of participants in the relationship. In any case, breaking common rules can cause remarkable trauma in a relationship and for individuals in a relationship (e.g., Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2007). It is also important to emphasize that infidelity in monogamous relationships does not necessarily mean that a more suitable relationship form would be non-monogamy.

Infidelity is common in monogamous relationships. According to the FINSEX study (Kontula et al., 2015), 39% of men and 30% of women had cheated on their current or

previous partner, indicating that it is difficult to stay monogamous over time. The most commonly reported reasons for cheating were an opportunity to cheat, problems in the relationship, falling in love, partner's low desire to have sex, and no particular motive. Moreover, many participants reported that the motive to cheat came from a need that was not fulfilled in the primary relationship. One aspect was that if monogamous participants accepted sexual relationships with someone outside of the dyad, it was more common to have these relationships. This study did not consider other relationships forms than monogamy.

It could be argued that in consensual non-monogamous relationships, there is not as much need for infidelity compared closed monogamous relationships, due to the freedom to fulfil unmet emotional or sexual needs with other people. There are a few studies about infidelity in non-monogamous relationships. For example, Wosick-Corre (2010) found that there are also violations of rules in non-monogamous relationships. However, they did not find 'cheating' to be a relevant construct to describe the behaviour. For instance, some of their non-monogamous study participants considered the term cheating to be closely connected to a sexual relationship outside a dyadic relationship. Instead, breaking the common rules was something non-monogamous individuals seemed to prefer while talking about infidelity.

## 1.4 Relationship Minorities in Finland

In Finland, the media has recently started to pay more attention to varying types of relationships, but scientific research is scarce (Taivaloja, 2018). There are a handful of studies on non-monogamous relationships, conducted from a social psychology perspective. These studies have mostly focused on describing non-monogamous relationships (Gummerus, 2016; Matilainen, 2012; Tikkanen, 2016) and how people identifying as non-monogamous are faced in different healthcare systems (Taivaloja, 2018) or as parents in early childhood education (Hiljanen & Hirvonen, 2016). Participants in these studies have been recruited directly from polyamorous communities.

It is challenging to estimate how many individuals in Finland identify as non-monogamous due to the lack of studies. Prevalence estimates have not been reported since the studies have focused on the on the communities rather than the general population. However, according to Matilainen (2012), Finnish polyamorous individuals ( $N = 76$ ) are usually feminists, non-religious and urban adults with a wide variety of

sexual orientations. Furthermore, 4 % did not identify as neither man nor woman. Tikkanen's (2016) polyamorous participants ( $N = 8$ ) were either hetero-, bi-, or pansexual but identified as men or women. In Gummerus (2018) study participants were polyamorous, hetero-, bi-, or pansexual and men, women, or non-binary. Taivaloja (2018) found variety in all sexuality, gender, and relationship types ( $N = 13$ ). It seems justified to assume that non-monogamous communities in Finland include a greater percentage of non-cis and non-hetero people compared to the general population. Moreover, in accordance with international research (e.g., Berry & Barker, 2014) Finnish research seems to indicate that there is a significant variety of sexual orientations, gender identities, relationship types, and life situations more generally. However, due to a lack of research, more information is needed to make reliable conclusions of the prevalence and demographics of Finnish non-monogamous individuals.

### 1.5 Aims of the Present Study

The aim of this thesis was to study relationship and wellbeing aspects of non-monogamous individuals and compare these to monogamous individuals, using Finnish population-based data. The first aim was to study frequencies of sexual orientation and gender identities of non-monogamous individuals and compare these to monogamous individuals. The second aim was to study relationship quality and infidelity among non-monogamous individuals. The third aim was to study symptoms of anxiety and depression among non-monogamous individuals. Based on previous research, we hypothesized that

1. There would be more variation in sexual identities and gender among non-monogamous participants compared to monogamous participants.
2. Non-monogamous and monogamous participants would show similar levels of relationship quality.
3. Non-monogamous participants would report less infidelity compared to monogamous participants. We further wanted to test whether infidelity among non-monogamous was associated with lower relationship quality with a primary partner
4. Non-monogamous participants would report higher anxiety and depression compared to monogamous participants, because of the stigmatization and minority stress

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Participants

The study sample was part of a larger population-based data collection called Genetics of Sex and Aggression, conducted at the Department of Psychology at Åbo Akademi University. Invitation letters were sent to twins and siblings of twins identified from the Central Population Registry in Finland. Individuals were invited only if their mother tongue listed in the Central Population Registry was Finnish, if they resided in Finland at the time of gathering their contact addresses, and if they were over 18 years old. A subset of individuals ( $N = 7,716$ ) had participated in similar data collections conducted by the same research group before (for an elaboration on this cohort, see Johansson et al., 2013), and had indicated willingness to participate in future studies when participating in previous data collections (in 2006 or 2012/2013). We also obtained addresses for a cohort of Finnish twins and siblings of twins who had not previously participated in studies performed by our research group. These twins were born between March 13, 1988 and October 4, 2000 (their siblings were any biological siblings aged at least 18 on October 4, 2000). In total, addresses of 33,390 individuals were obtained. Of these, 179 had addresses abroad, leaving us with 33,211 addresses. Participants were invited to respond to an online survey. The first invitation letters were sent to potential participants in November 2018. Those who did not respond were sent a maximum of two reminder letters spaced 2-3 weeks apart. We were informed that 31 individuals were unable to participate (e.g., due to the potential participant being affected by a severe disability). Data collection concluded in the first week of January 2019.

In total, 9,564 individuals (6,965 twins and 2,592 siblings, 7 unknown) responded, resulting in a total response rate of 29%, with 9,319 (97%) of respondents consenting to their data being used for scientific purposes.

Individuals who did not answer to the item whether they were in a relationship or not were removed ( $n = 632$ , 6.8%). After that, single participants ( $n = 2286$ , 24.5%) were removed. Similarly, participants who did not respond to the question “How would you describe your relationship” ( $n = 3549$ , 38.1%) and participants who answered, “None of the above” to the question ( $n = 214$ , 2.3%) were removed. Next, to control for dependency as the sample consisted of twins and siblings, only one member per family was randomly included in the analyses ( $n = 1664$ , 30.1% were removed). In cases where

one family member was non-monogamous and the other or others monogamous, the non-monogamous individual was included to maintain as high power as possible for the non-monogamous group. Ten individuals that only had non-monogamous siblings were removed. The final sample size was 3,892.

The respondents were divided into a non-monogamous group or a monogamous group based on the question “How would you describe the relationship?” with the response options 1 = “You and your partner are in a sexual and romantic relationship only with each other” (monogamy), 2 = “You and your partner can occasionally have sex with other people, together with your partner or on your own” 3 = “You and your partner can have other sexual relationships” (open relationship), 4 = “You and your partner can have other romantic relationships” (polyamory). Participants who answered that they were in a sexual and romantic relationship only with each other formed the group of monogamous participants. The non-monogamous group was created by combining participants answering either 2, 3, or 4.

## 2.2 Ethical Review

The Ethics Review Board of Åbo Akademi University in Turku, Finland, assessed then approved the research plan which described the methods of data collection (Tybur, Wesseldjik, & Järn, 2020). No invasive practices were involved during data collection. Participants were openly informed that their participation was voluntary, and their participation could be ended at any time without reason. Each participant gave their informed, written consent in agreement with the Declaration of Helsinki prior to responding to the survey.

## 2.3 Measures

Finnish was the provided language for all items (Tybur, Wesseldjik, & Järn, 2020). The scales in their original English were translated to Finnish and then back to English by two different translators who were native Finnish speakers fluent in English. The translator who translated items back to English did not have access to the original English items. After this a native English speaker compared the original and the back-translated versions and flagged discrepant items. These items were reviewed and revised when appropriate. Lastly, two native Finnish speakers went through the items to check grammar and comprehensibility.

Relationship quality among participants was measured by the Perceived Relationship Quality Components inventory (PRQC; Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000), where items are divided into six subdomains: relationship satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and love. PRQC is a widely used questionnaire to study relationship quality (e.g., Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000; Shirdel, Hosseinian, Kimiaei, & Safarian, 2019; Smith, Heaven, & Chiarrochi, 2008) In this study we used a shortened version of the PRQC which has previously demonstrated good internal consistency (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000). The short version includes six items, one for each subdomain, with response options ranging from 1 = “not at all” to 7= “very much”. Participants in non-monogamous relationships answered the PRQC based on their primary or longest relationships. Relationship quality questions were coded into one item measuring quality by creating a sum score by adding the items together. The possible range of this sum score was 6–42.

Infidelity was measured by the question “Have either of you cheated during your relationship?” with four response options: 1 = “No/ I don’t know”, 2 = “Yes, I have cheated”, 3 = “Yes, my partner has cheated” and 4 = “Yes, we both have cheated”. An infidelity variable was created by including all participants who had cheated themselves (i.e., response options 2 and 4). We decided to leave out the cases where only the participants’ partner had cheated, as we did not have information about the partner’s assessment of the relationship quality.

Depression and anxiety symptoms were measured with the Brief Symptom Inventory-18 scale (BSI-18; Derogatis, 2001). BSI-18 is a widely used and validated questionnaire (e.g., Boulet & Boss, 1991; Derogatis, 2001; Li et al., 2011). Since we wanted to analyse anxiety and depression separately, questions 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12 were coded into a sum score for anxiety and 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11 to a sum score for depression by adding the items together.

## 2.4 Statistical Analyses

All analyses were conducted in SPSS 27 (IBM Corp., 2020). Differences between the relationship type groups with regards to sexual orientation and gender was analysed using  $\chi^2$  tests. Infidelity rates, relationship quality, and anxiety and depression levels between non-monogamous and monogamous groups were compared using independent t-tests. The relationship between infidelity and relationship quality in both groups was

analysed with one-way ANOVA. We created a binomial logistic regression model to test whether the amount of cheating could be explained by looking at relationship quality with a primary partner.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Differences in Sexual Orientation and Gender

For our first hypothesis we wanted to investigate if there would be any differences between the relationship groups with regards to sexual orientation and gender. Frequencies of different sexual orientations and genders based on relationship type can be seen in Table 1. According to the  $\chi^2$  test, there was a statistically significant difference between the relationship type groups with regards to sexual orientation  $\chi^2(12, 4048) = 326.01, p = <.001$ . Participants in non-monogamous relationships seemed to have more variation in their sexual orientation. Similarly, the  $\chi^2$ -test between relationship type and gender was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(12, 4048) = 226.15, p = <.001$ . That is, there also seemed to be more variation in gender among participants in non-monogamous relationships compared to those in monogamous relationships.

**Table 1.**

*Frequencies of Different Sexual Orientations and Genders Based on Relationship Type*

Characteristics	Monogamy	Occasional sex alone or together	Open relationship	Polyamory	None of the above <sup>a</sup>	Total
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Sexual orientation						
Hetero	3455 (92.0)	54 (58.7)	15 (48.4)	6 (42.9)	130 (83.3)	3660 (90.4)
Homo	68 (1.8)	7 (7.6)	5 (16.1)	1 (7.1)	9 (5.8)	90 (2.2)
Bi	206 (5.5)	28 (30.4)	9 (29.0)	3 (21.4)	14 (9.0)	260 (6.4)
Other	26 (0.7)	3 (3.3)	2 (6.5)	4 (28.6)	3 (1.9)	38 (0.9)
Gender						
Cis	3739 (99.6)	88 (95.7)	29 (93.5)	11 (78.6)	151 (96.8)	4018 (99.3)
Trans	3 (0.1)	2 (2.2)	0 (0.0)	1 (7.1)	1 (0.6)	7 (0.2)
Other <sup>b</sup>	13 (0.3)	2 (2.2)	2 (6.5)	2 (14.3)	4 (2.6)	23 (0.6)

<sup>a</sup> We included this group to have estimates on the prevalence in the Finnish population, but this group was not included in the rest of the analyses.

<sup>b</sup> Participants' relationship type did not fit any options given in the questionnaire.



### 3.2 Relationship Quality

Our second hypothesis was that the non-monogamous and monogamous groups would show similar levels of relationship quality. According to Levene's test, the variances of the PRQC for non-monogamous and monogamous participants were equal ( $F = 2.5, p = .11$ ). According to the independent samples t-test, there was no significant difference in relationship quality measured with the PRQC between non-monogamous ( $M = 34.89, SD = 6.02$ ) and monogamous ( $M = 35.72, SD = 5.61$ ) participants;  $t(5533) = -1.7, p = .09, CI\ 95\% [-1.78, .13]$ . This is in line with our hypothesis of non-monogamous and monogamous reporting similar levels of relationship quality.

### 3.3 Infidelity and Relationship Quality

For our third hypothesis, we hypothesised that non-monogamous participants would report less infidelity than monogamous participants due to the possibility of fulfilling sexual and/or emotional needs with multiple people. Frequencies of infidelity among different relationship types are represented in Table 2. Levene's test for equality did not assume variances to be equal variances ( $F = 86.56, p = <.001$ ) so we used the test statistic where equal variances were not assumed. There seemed to be differences in frequencies of infidelity between non-monogamous ( $M = 1.68, SD = 1.06$ ) and monogamous ( $M = 1.28, SD = .692$ ) participants;  $t(139.2) = 4.33, p = <.001, CI\ 95\% [.28, .52]$ . Contrary to our expectations, infidelity was more commonly reported among non-monogamous individuals.

**Table 2.**

*Frequencies of Infidelity among Different Types of Relationships*

	Monogamy	Occasional sex alone or together	Open	Polyamory	Total
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Infidelity					
No cheating/Don't know	3102 (82.7)	58 (63.0)	23 (74.2)	7 (53.8)	3109 (82.0)
I have cheated	373 (9.9)	13 (14.1)	6 (19.4)	2 (15.4)	394 (10.1)
Partner cheated	157 (4.2)	8 (8.7)	0 (0.0)	2 (15.4)	167 (4.3)
Both cheated	121 (3.2)	13 (14.1)	2 (6.5)	2 (15.4)	194 (3.5)

We also wanted to test whether the amount of cheating could be explained by looking at relationship satisfaction with a primary partner. Relationship satisfaction statistically significantly predicted infidelity,  $\chi^2(32) = 235.775, p < .001$ . However, according to the Hosmer-Lemeshow test, the model did not fit the data well,  $\chi^2(8) = .000, p = 1.000$ . Also, Nagelkerke  $R^2$  was not too high, 0.107. The result supports our hypothesis of relationship satisfaction predicting infidelity, but most of the variance was explained by other factors.

Part of our third hypothesis was that individuals in both non-monogamous and monogamous relationships with infidelity would report lower relationship quality compared to participants in non-monogamous and monogamous relationships without infidelity. According to the ANOVA, there was no difference in relationship quality between any of the groups,  $F(3) = 1.308, p = 0.271$ . Descriptives of relationship qualities of different relationship groups are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.**

*Multiple Comparisons of Relationship Quality in Different Relationship Types When Infidelity is Taken into Account*

(i)anova <sup>b</sup>	(j)anova <sup>b</sup>	M	Std. Error	p <sup>a</sup>	95 % Confidence Interval	
					Lower bound	Upper Bound
1	2	-.45	1.32	1	-3.93	3.04
	3	2.49	2.34	1	-3.72	8.69
	4	-5.39	3.31	.62	-14.13	3.36
2	1	.45	1.32	1	-3.04	3.93
	3	2.93	2.67	.98	-4.12	9.99
	4	-4.94	3.54	.98	-14.31	4.43
3	1	-2.49	2.34	1	-8.69	3.72
	2	-2.93	2.67	1	-9.9	4.12
	4	-7.88	4.04	.31	-18.56	2.81
4	1	5.38	3.31	.62	-3.36	14.13
	2	4.94	3.54	.98	-4.43	14.31
	3	7.86	4.04	.309	-2.81	18.56

<sup>a</sup> Adjustments for multiple comparison: Bonferroni

<sup>b</sup> Groups have been coded as followed: 1 = Monogamy, 2 = Occasional sex alone or together, 3 = Open relationship, 4 = Polyamory

### 3.4 Anxiety and Depression

Our fourth hypothesis was that individuals in the relationship minority group would report higher anxiety and depression levels compared to the monogamous group.

Levene's test did not assume variances of non-monogamous and monogamous groups to be equal for either anxiety ( $F = 7.5, p = 0.006$ ) or depression ( $F = 5.17, p = .023$ ), so we used the test statistics for non-equal variances. According to the independent samples t-test, there was a statistically significant difference in levels of anxiety between non-monogamous ( $M = 11.11, SD = 4.94, n = 292$ ) and monogamous ( $M = 10.11, SD = 4.94, n = 3719$ ) participants;  $t(328.67) = 2.11, p = .036, CI 95 \% [.042, 1.218]$ .

We found similar results for depression. According to the independent samples t-test, non-monogamous ( $M = 12.1, SD = 5.12, n = 291$ ) and monogamous ( $M = 11.25, SD = 4.69, n = 3719$ ) participants differed statistically significantly in the levels of depression symptoms;  $t(329.22) = 2.74, p = .007, CI [.238, 1.459]$ . To sum, non-monogamous participants reported higher levels of anxiety and depression compared to monogamous participants.

## 4. Discussion

The aim of this thesis was to study different aspects of relationship quality, infidelity, depression, and anxiety of relationship minorities using a Finnish population-based sample. We also wanted to explore sexual orientation and gender identities amongst relationship minorities. These different aspects were compared between non-monogamous and monogamous individuals to create a better understanding of non-monogamous individuals in Finland.

### 4.1 Main Results and Interpretation

Our first hypothesis suggesting that there would be more variation in sexual orientation and gender among non-monogamous individuals compared to monogamous individuals got support from the results. It indeed seems like there is more variation in both sexual orientation and gender among non-monogamous individuals. Previous studies in Finland and abroad (e.g., Matilainen, 2016; Taivaloja, 2018) have had similar results. It has previously been suggested that individuals in different minority groups are more open to explore non-monogamous relationships with their partners (Sizemore & Olmstead, 2018).

Our second hypothesis got support from the results, as there were no significant differences between non-monogamous and monogamous individuals in relationship quality. Levels of quality, including the aspects of commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and love, were similar between the groups. These results are important to continue the work of reducing the stigma by normalising non-monogamy. Reducing the stigma would likely help to increase the quality of life of non-monogamous individuals, since previous studies have suggested that the stigmatization is a major reason for unhappiness in non-monogamous relationships (Moors, Schechinger, Balzarini,, & Flicker, 2021).

Surprisingly, our third hypothesis was not supported by the results. Based on our results, it seems like infidelity is more commonly reported among non-monogamous individuals compared to monogamous individuals. However, since we analyzed all non-monogamous individuals in a combined group to maintain statistical power, there might be some factors we could not consider. For example, those who sometimes have sex with people outside the relationship had a higher representation in the combined group. It is possible that the result might be better representative for them than for those that were, for instance, polyamorous, since the polyamorous group was small ( $n = 7$ ). Despite the result that non-monogamous individuals reported more infidelity compared to monogamous individuals, they seem to be just as satisfied as monogamous individuals. As discussed above, this study cannot give information about how cheating has occurred or when. It is possible that cheating has happened before finding the working type of relationship or when the boundaries and rules have still been under discussion. Being able to work through cheating or misunderstandings of the common rules could at least be a reason behind at least partly be a reason behind the relationship quality.

One factor affecting the relationship quality could be jealousy. Both non-monogamous individuals and monogamous individuals experience jealousy, but there seem to be some differences (Klesse, 2018). In non-monogamous relationships, jealousy can be defined as a wider concept including for example feelings of insecurity, possessiveness, or needs not being met (Rubinsky, 2018) which is similar to monogamous relationships. Clinical literature indicates that the reason behind jealousy in polyamorous relationships is often due to a new person entering the relationship, or due to one's partner having a strong and serious feelings for someone new. Monogamous individuals, on the other

hand, usually feel jealousy over the partner's desire for intimate or sexual interaction with someone outside of the dyad. Polyamorous individuals do not see jealousy as a taboo but something to work through by open communication (Deri, 2015). It is possible that differences in experienced jealousy and ways to work through it in open relationships help the partners to feel satisfied in the relationship, or relationships, even if there has been infidelity in the past.

It could also be that some of the non-monogamous individuals were previously in a monogamous relationship with their current partner and due to cheating, they decided to open their relationship to better fit their needs and desires. That is, in some instances, cheating might have occurred before finding the working relationship type for these individuals. Another possible explanation is that at least some non-monogamous relationships have some degree of openness, but that being fully transparent is difficult. It could be that there is an imbalance between the partners in an open relationship in the amount of partners found outside of the relationship, and the individual with more partners does not want to talk about every new sexual or intimate action with a new partner. For instance, if the partners in an open relationship have agreed on telling each other about a sexual encounter before it has happened, and this is not followed, it could be considered as infidelity. Interestingly, non-monogamous individuals still identified instances of infidelity and more so than monogamous individuals. This indicates that there is a clear difference between having sex with others and cheating. As discussed in the introduction, the meaning of cheating might generally differ between non-monogamous and monogamous individuals, and it would be important to know more about this so that clinicians and the general population can navigate these issues with better understanding of the dynamics of non-monogamous relationships.

With our third hypothesis, we wanted to test whether the amount of cheating could be explained by looking at relationship quality with a primary partner and the result seemed to support this hypothesis. However, most of the variance was explained by other factors not considered in this study. To create a better understanding of the reasons behind infidelity other than relationship quality, more research is needed.

However, as part of our third hypothesis, that individuals in both non-monogamous and monogamous groups with infidelity would report lower relationship quality compared to participants in both groups without infidelity, did not get support. One possible

explanation for this could be that our sample only included those who stayed together after infidelity. There are some indications that couples who stay together after infidelity do not differ from couples with no infidelity. Instead, in both couples with and without infidelity, the quality seems to increase over time (Marín, Christensen, & Atkins, 2014). We did not have information about when the infidelity had occurred and how it was dealt with, but the fact that the partners have stayed together indicates a willingness to improve the relationship. This might reflect on our results of no differences on relationship quality between participants with infidelity and without infidelity.

Our fourth hypothesis also got support from the results. Non-monogamous participants seemed to suffer from higher levels of anxiety and depression compared to monogamous participants. One reason for this could be minority stress and mononormativity (Piper & Bauer, 2005). Monogamous individuals might see non-monogamous individuals as unreliable partners and parents (Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2013; Haritaworn, Lin & Klesse, 2006; Klesse, 2005). It is likely that facing these prejudices causes stress and increases the symptoms of anxiety and depression. Furthermore, it would have been interesting to compare the levels of anxiety and depression between the different groups of non-monogamy, but due to our small sample size that was not possible. Like Matsick, Conley, Ziegler, Moors and Rubin (2014) noticed, polyamory has usually been seen in a more positive light compared to swinging and open relationships which might influence the levels of anxiety and depression.

Besides minority stress and mononormativity, non-monogamous individuals often report that they are not understood and that they are judged by health care professionals (e.g., Arseneau, Landry, & Darling, 2019; Weitzman, 2006). Knowing the dynamics of non-monogamous relationships helps healthcare professionals facing non-monogamous individuals respectfully provide the best possible care, so more research is needed to provide the information.

## 4.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of the Study

Our study is, to our knowledge, the first population-based study on non-monogamous relationships in Finland. One of the strengths of the present study was the possibility to compare non-monogamous individuals' sexual orientations, gender identities, relationship quality, and infidelity to monogamous individuals. Hence, this study can

add to our understanding of non-monogamous individuals from a population-based point of view.

Another strength was the use of validated measures for anxiety, depression, and relationship quality. Both the BSI-18 and the PRCQ are widely used and validated measures.

This study also has its limitations. Due to the small amount of non-monogamous people, we had to combine everyone in non-monogamous relationships into one group to be able to run any statistical tests. Putting a wide range of different relationship types into one group leaves out a lot of important information about differences between different types of non-monogamous relationships. For example, being polyamorous seems to be more accepted than swinging and open relationships according to Matsick, Conley, Ziegler, Moors, and Rubin (2014). Also, some of the non-monogamous subgroups were better represented than others, like individuals in open relationships. Our results give a general view on non-monogamous individuals' relationship quality and infidelity rates but leaves out important and more detailed information about different relationship types. Non-monogamy is more of an umbrella term, so using only one group may fail to show individual differences in different types of relationships. Another issue with our data was that we could not determine when the infidelity had occurred, what the participants counted as cheating, and how the participants in the relationship worked through this break of trust.

Another limitation seemed to be the question that was used to measure relationship type. A fairly large amount of the participants ( $n = 251$ ) felt that none of the provided labels for relationship type described their relationships. Clearly, the labels provided were insufficient for capturing several relationship dynamics. One possible reason for this could be that some individuals did not identify themselves as either non-monogamous or monogamous, since they were in a relationship with a non-monogamous person who might have multiple partners but did not themselves have a need to have more than one partner. It could also be that the definitions were too specific and that some wording made the participants not choose a label that was otherwise quite similar to their experience.

## 5. Conclusion

This thesis has focused on different aspects of relationship quality, infidelity, depression, and anxiety of relationship minorities in Finland. Relationship quality rates between the non-monogamous and monogamous individuals did not differ. These results support the idea that different individuals can be satisfied in different kinds of relationships. There is not a universal relationship form that is better than the other. However, one thing that did differ between non-monogamous and monogamous individuals was that the non-monogamous individuals reported higher rates of anxiety and depression, likely caused by mononormativity and minority stress. More work is required to promote the wellbeing of individuals in non-monogamous relationships. This study creates a better understanding of relationship minorities in Finland on a population level, but more detailed understanding will be needed i.e., infidelity and minority stress.



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