

♥ Loving *with* or *against* the tide? ♥

An exploratory study of (ex)polyamorous individuals' framing of polyamory in the context of neoliberal capitalism

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Abstract

Polyamory is nothing new. However, in recent times this form of relationship has been getting increasing attention from scholars and society at large. In this context, an interesting debate has emerged regarding polyamory and neoliberal capitalism. On the one hand, some argue that polyamory is a counter-hegemonic and anti-capitalist practice as it encourages a kind of love that is free from neoliberal capitalist values and constraints such as individualism, competition, and consumerism. On the other hand, critics state that polyamory reinforces neoliberal capitalist values both in theory and in practice. Research on this debate is scarce and limited to theoretical accounts, ignoring the perspectives of those who practice polyamory under capitalism. This paper explores how people who have experience with polyamory frame this form of relationship in the context of neoliberal capitalism in order to delve into their views about this debate. To do so, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings of this study show that individuals have a nuanced perspective on this debate. Polyamory is not framed as a counter-hegemonic and anti-capitalist practice per se by participants as it is still subject to the influences of neoliberal capitalism. Nonetheless, participants identify that opening up discussions about love, polyamory, capitalism, and so on provides a space for research and society in general to reflect and question the ways in which we love and relate to one another to build improved connections in society, even beyond the realm of romantic relationships.

Keywords: capitalism, love, neoliberalism, polyamory, relationships.

“Hot take: when people say “society would crumble if polyamory were normalised”, what they actually mean is “capitalism would crumble” (Poly Philia, 2022).

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“Capitalism is like polyamory; sure it might work okay for some people, but generally the ones who reap the most rewards from it are those who don’t care about other people’s feelings.”
(Johnstone, 2021).

Introduction

Let us think about love and capitalism. What is the first thing that comes to mind? Chances are that the first thing you envision is Valentine’s Day and how capitalism has arguably turned love into a commodity, encouraging consumerism in the name of love. However, the relationship love–capitalism is deeper than this. Love, like other emotions (Parkinson, 1996), can be understood as being socially constructed as it is shaped, at least to some extent, by external factors such as one’s environment and experiences, which are defined by culture (Bell & Sternberg, 1995). In modern society, love is partially dependent on and shaped by neoliberal capitalism. It is not common to link love to the economy, however, capitalism not only entails an economic system but a culture as well (Illouz, 1997). In fact, capitalism is best understood as a “form of life” (Cole & Ferrarese, 2018, p.105). As such, the characteristics associated with capitalism and its accompanying culture – high levels of rationalization, competition, individualism, profit maximization, private property ownership, and consumerism – can permeate private aspects of our lives, including intimate relationships and how we love and are loved by others (Cole & Ferrarese, 2018). Neoliberal capitalism and its accompanying culture are said to repress nurturance, compassion, and intimacy in society. Consequently, love becomes flexible, ephemeral, and unstable (O’Hara, 2014). In other words, critics argue that love is ‘liquid’ (Bauman, 2003) as opposed to ‘holistic’ – a form of love where passion, intimacy, commitment, freedom, and social spread are balanced and harmoniously transform people’s lives (O’Hara, 2014).

Since this holistic love seems to hardly appear under capitalism (O’Hara, 2014), some people – as agentic beings – have been critical of capitalist love and have worked towards counter-hegemonic, anti-capitalist ways of loving. An example of this *could be* polyamory, “a form of association in which people openly maintain multiple romantic, sexual, and/or effective relationships” (Sheff & Hammers, 2011, p. 201). Polyamory is considered by some as a counter-hegemonic/anti-capitalist practice because it involves, for example, voluntary association, free love, cooperation, community, and abundance of love rather than scarcity. Furthermore, it is

argued that it challenges conceptions of partners and people in general as property, competition, dishonesty, as well as compulsory monogamy (Ferrer, 2018; Schippers, 2016; Song, 2012). However, others argue that in theory and practice, polyamory might actually reproduce and deepen capitalist culture as it is still subject to it (Klesse, 2014). Polyamory could thus still reproduce existing inequalities based on gender, race, and class, and deepen individualism through the multiplication of superficial and unstable relations (De Graeve, 2018; Klesse, 2014; Weeks, 2021).

So, is polyamory a counter-hegemonic and anti-capitalist way of loving or not really? And, why? In short, the answer depends on who you ask. The debate around these questions is ongoing and different people have different takes on it, depending on their positionality (Rose, 1997). Polyamory, even if it is nothing new per se, is an increasingly popular topic and practice. It has gotten growing attention in academia and the mainstream as well (Klesse, 2014). Just as an example, a quick google search of the word 'polyamory' at this moment in time gives over 25.000.000 results ranging from news articles, opinion pieces, books, and health-related articles, to psychology-related content. And on google scholar, over 8.000 results are found. Unfortunately, literature on polyamory that engages with power structures is scarce (Haritaworn et al., 2006) and lacks a critical approach (Klesse, 2014). Additionally, most research lacks consideration of individuals' perceptions and experiences beyond what could be understood as 'arm-chair theorizing'. However, love is "perhaps the most important quality of human endeavor" (O'Hara, 2014, p. 188) as well as a socially constructed phenomenon (Bell & Sternberg, 1995), making (ex)polyamorous individuals' perceptions not only valuable but imperative to address the relationship between polyamory and (neoliberal) capitalism. Exploring how polyamory is framed in relation to capitalism should be done through the eyes of those who have practiced this form of relationship. As such, we would also be making space for people's experiences and views on this topic and inviting them to reflect on love and polyamory in relation to structures of power such as neoliberal capitalism. Actively exploring and engaging in these conversations can help us as a society to work towards collectively building new relations, ones that are more solid, based on solidarity and community (Bauman, 2003), which is beneficial for society at large.

In order to contribute to closing these gaps and to, hopefully, encourage the debate even further and motivate critical assessment of the ways in which we relate to one another in a capitalist context, research should focus on individuals' discourses and accounts about polyamory in relation to neoliberal capitalism. As such, this study aims to do so by exploring and answering the following research question: *How do people who have experience with polyamory frame this practice in a neoliberal capitalist context?*

Theoretical framework

Love is a social emotion

For a long time, the predominant conception concerning emotions both in the scholarly community and society at large assumed that they are solely inner and individual reactions (Parkinson, 1996). As such, until around the 1960s, the social sciences regarded emotions as similar to other subjective psychological and physiological experiences. Consequently, emotions were excluded from the study of the public, relegating them to the private sphere where they were not discussed in terms of, for instance, power structures, social conflict, and cultural traditions (Illouz, 1997). Decades later, however, researchers insisted on the socially constructed aspects of emotions. While cognitive and physiological processes are key features of emotional phenomena, these also depend on social considerations (Parkinson, 1996), as they are influenced and shaped by culture (Illouz, 1997; Swidler, 2001). Culture plays a relevant role in the construction, interpretation, and functioning of emotions as it acts as a frame within which emotional experiences are organized, labeled, classified, and interpreted. These cultural frames give names and define emotions, set intensity limits, detail the norms and values related to them, and provide symbols and cultural settings to communicate emotions socially (Illouz, 1997). In short, “emotion is social through and through” (Parkinson, 1996, p. 680).

However, even though nowadays most research agrees with the idea of emotions being – at least to some extent – socially constructed, love is commonly excluded from this. A typical discourse is that love stands above everything. Similar to some conceptions of art and religion, for example, love is seen as “the site par excellence of the denial of the social world” (Illouz, 1997, p.3). Nonetheless, there are several aspects of love that illustrate why and how it can be understood as socially constructed, as argued by Bell and Sternberg (1995). First, what is love? This is a seemingly easy question, however, there is no single definition of love to answer it because ideas about what love is, vary greatly. Second, perceptions of who/what is suitable to be loved are shaped by conventions that are culturally defined. Third, there are four pieces of information relevant to understanding conceptions of love in any time period and culture: information about (a) the who/what is loved, (b) related thoughts, (c) related feelings, and (d) the behavior between lover and beloved that is expected and accepted. Historical accounts highlight substantial differences regarding these four aspects, leading to various and diverse conceptions of love (Bell & Sternberg, 1995). As such, “love is not only a powerful natural factor, a biological force, but also a social factor. Essentially, love is a profoundly social emotion” (Kollontai, 2012, p. 163).

Love, the neoliberal capitalist way

Capitalism as an economic system is characterized by free markets, private property, competition, and limited state/government intervention. It involves the commodification and exchange of goods and services with the goal of wealth accumulation (Illouz, 1997).

Consumerism is also a core feature of capitalism (Harmanci, 2017). However, capitalism is not only an economic system. It also entails a cultural mindset (Illouz, 1997) where money and market values dominate (Macfarlane, 1986). Capitalist culture is characterized, among other things, by high levels of rationalization, competition, and individualism to maximize profit for oneself. Furthermore, there is a particular emphasis on the importance of private property ownership (Illouz, 1997; Robbins & Dowty, 2018) and consumerism (Harmanci, 2017). As such, capitalism is more than an economic system, rather, it can be conceived as a “form of life” (Cole & Ferrarese, 2018, p.105) “that shapes our relationships with others, our sense of ourselves and our capacities, practices, and actions in the material world” (Cole & Ferrarese, 2018, p.105). Considering this, “this egoistical economic mentality spread into various noneconomic domains of life, specially into the ties that bind the individual to the surrounding community” (Shorter, 1975, p.295 in Macfarlane, 1986), *including love* (Bauman, 2003).

What does love look like under capitalism? Critics argue that in market capitalism personal relations are turned into market relations and so they are seen as business transactions (Bauman, 2003; Illouz, 1997). Love is a product to be consumed (Bauman, 2003) (i.e., commodification) because neoliberal capitalism stimulates consumerism (Harmanci, 2017) and competition between people, even in the realm of intimate relations. As such, it tends to turn human relations into alienated experiences based on work, money, and equal exchanges, leading to little time for people to form and maintain deep connections with one another (O’Hara, 2014). Consequently, relationships are argued to be superficial and ephemeral. Additionally, relationships are disposable because consumerism encourages people to prioritize novelty and variety in their consumption. Like any other product, relationships/love can be easily exchanged (Bauman, 2003). All of this means that love is characterized by a perpetual lack of nurturance in a neoliberal capitalist context (O’Hara, 2014). Furthermore, the individualism that characterizes neoliberal capitalism leads to equally individualistic forms of love where love is also privatized. Thus, love is seen as intimacy between just two people, spreading only to a limited number of others such as close family and friends (if at all). ‘True love’, is to be shared with one other person only (i.e., compulsory monogamy) that is ‘ours’ (i.e., private property) (Fromm, 1957). This in turn justifies jealousy and control over others. Consequently, love is constrained by an individualistic society based on work and capital, instead of being free (Sartre, 1956). In

capitalism we, therefore, expect and demand “that our lover commits to us, becomes engaged to us, marries us, lives with us; shares our habits and tendencies; plans children with us; invests in household capital with us” (O’Hara, 2014, p.182). In sum:

Love under neoliberal economies tends to undergo several phases of evolution; the social dimension usually fails to emerge; Intimacy is inhibited by work, study, unemployment, and other pressures; while competition and individual concerns limit the generation of Freedom, Social Spread, Intimacy and Commitment. Current institutional arrangements tend to limit compassion, friendship and Intimate connections that would enhance the life experience of people, thus stunting the growth of love (O’Hara, 2014, p. 187).

The next question would then be, how is this type of love legitimized and reproduced? Social systems in general are not able to endure without an accompanying set of shared values and norms (Wuthnow, 1997). Capitalism specifically is embedded in this “pervasive mentality” (Polanyi, 1944 as cited in Wuthnow, 1997, p. 424) described above. And the most productive way to legitimize a social system/ideology is to successfully frame it as something natural and inevitable, which is what the capitalist mentality has done (Wuthnow, 1977). The specific mechanism through which the hegemonic ideology (i.e., neoliberal capitalism) is legitimized are institutions. Schools and the media are modern examples of institutions that socialize individuals into the hegemonic ideology of neoliberal capitalism, thereby legitimizing and reproducing it both as a market system and cultural mindset (cf. Althusser, 1971; Gramsci, 1971/2012). Since capitalism as a whole permeates all aspects of our lives (Cole & Ferrarese, 2018), the type of love and relationships that are related to capitalism can also be legitimized and reproduced through institutional socialization.

Polyamory under neoliberal capitalism: loving with or against the tide?

Even though some people might feel content in their (romantic) relationships, and some might even actively challenge capitalism in their private lives, the overview above paints a particularly negative picture of love under capitalism. ‘Holistic love’ – a form of love where passion, intimacy, commitment, freedom, and social spread are balanced and harmoniously transform people’s lives – seems to be difficult to emerge and sustain in this context (O’Hara, 2014). Nonetheless, despite the relevance and prevalence of capitalist culture in modern society, individuals still have agency. People are – at least to some extent – able to choose aspects of

culture to rely on and people have different life experiences that would affect how they approach (romantic) love (Swidler, 2001). As such, this 'liquid love', as Bauman (2003) called it, could be overthrown by building new forms of relationships, more solid ones, based on values such as solidarity and community (Bauman, 2003). In this context, some people have questioned this capitalist love and have decided to practice and explore different ways of loving and relating to one another. This is where polyamory might come into play for some individuals. Polyamory can be defined as "a form of association in which people openly maintain multiple romantic, sexual, and/or effective relationships" (Sheff & Hammers, 2011, p. 201). Additionally, definitions of the concept often emphasize the honest aspect of polyamorous relationships as all participants are expected to be aware and consent to the situation, thus aiming toward ethical and responsible non-monogamy (Song, 2012).

On the one hand, polyamory has been argued for as a counter-hegemonic practice that is anti-capitalist or at least challenges the kind of love that emerges in a capitalist context. Polyamory is framed as a way of loving and relating to one another that encourages nurturance as high degrees of constant openness, communication, mutual aid, and trust are needed in order to engage in polyamory ethically and responsibly (Ferrer, 2018; Schippers, 2016; Song, 2012). As such, polyamory is said to challenge the superficiality and the nurturance gap caused by capitalism, allowing for the formation of intimate connections despite external (capitalist) pressures. At the same time, this challenges individualism and the relevance of profit-making for the self, as others are involved as well. Furthermore, as 'true love' is not seen as something exclusive between only two people, the number of potential partners available increases with polyamory. As such, love is not a scarce commodity anymore, but something that can be shared by many. Consequently, competition between people declines (Schippers, 2016). This also entails a challenge to the conceptualization of partners as a possession/property to be owned since polyamory allows for love to be shared with as many people as it is agreed to (Ferrer, 2018; Song, 2012). Here, instead of jealousy, polyamory encourages individuals to feel happy seeing their loved ones share their own love with others, too (also known as *compersion*) (Schippers, 2016, p.16). Considering all of this, supporters of this perspective argue that polyamory encourages free love: free from sexual, emotional, and structural capitalist and patriarchal constraints, related to the money and market values discussed before (Ferrer, 2018; Song, 2012).

However, on the other hand, skeptics have emphasized how in practice but also in theory polyamory can and does reproduce and deepen capitalist culture. Overall, authors of this perspective argue that discourses and debates around polyamory (unconsciously perhaps) hide

aspects of polyamory that could potentially reinforce, rather than challenge, neoliberal expectations (de Graeve, 2018) as there is no engagement with power structures (Haritaworn et al., 2006; Klesse, 2014). After all, polyamorous relationships in modern society still exist in a capitalist context that does not disappear by 'just' engaging in different forms of relationships. Polyamory can still be subject to capitalist love because structures of power are engrained (Klesse, 2014). For example, the polyamorous community has been found to be mostly formed by privileged white individuals with time and (monetary) resources to engage in polyamory (Sheff & Hammers, 2011). There is also a strong individualist focus in polyamory discourse that emphasizes individual agency (Noël, 2006; Weeks, 2021), which is a core aspect of neoliberal capitalism. Furthermore, despite claims of gender egalitarianism, "poly relationships often require more time management and communication than monogamous ones, and emotional work is 'women's work', when women are partnered with men, polyamory increases their labor" (Schippers, 2016, p. 23). Additionally, some argue that, in practice, irresponsibility, greed, manipulation, and lack of intimate connections are characteristic of (some) polyamorous relationships (Ferrer, 2018). All in all, critics state that "polyamorous relationships replicate the disposable throwaway values of our capitalist society, treating other people as objects to satisfy our cravings, interchangeably as we please, useful to us only as long as they work for our own purposes" (Young, 2004, p. 39).

Overall, even though studying love and relationships with reference to the economy remains unpopular (Illouz, 1997), a fair amount of research has established the relationship between love and capitalism, as illustrated by the literature reviewed here. Furthermore, polyamory seems to be an increasingly salient issue in academia and society at large (Klesse, 2014). Still, the debate of whether polyamory entails a counter-hegemonic and anti-capitalist practice or a reinforcing practice, is not effectively addressed, since most research about polyamory fails to approach the topic in direct relation to capitalism and other power structures (Klesse, 2014). Moreover, it seems that most research does not necessarily go beyond theorizing, thus not considering (ex)polyamorous individuals' accounts. However, whether polyamory is framed either as an anti-capitalist or capitalist practice will most likely depend on one's positionality since people's experiences, views, and situations in society shape their identities (Rose, 1997) and consequently how they view polyamory, capitalism, love, as well as their position within this debate. As such, explicitly studying people's perspectives and experiences is of utmost importance to know and understand their discourses and their takes on the debate, which is the goal of the present study.

Method

Justification of method

To answer the research question *How do people who have experience with polyamory frame this practice in a neoliberal capitalist context?* a qualitative approach was used. Qualitative research is preoccupied with understanding the social world through the eyes of participants. As such, it focuses on people's interpretations and their subjective experiences, leaving space for different understandings of what knowledge and 'the truth' entail (Brennen, 2017; Bryman, 2016). Considering that the goal of this thesis is to understand people's perceptions of love and polyamory in a neoliberal capitalist context, a qualitative approach is suitable.

Specifically, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted. This data collection method effectively allows for in-depth conversations between the researched and researcher to gain insights into their perceptions, feelings, emotions, values, and experiences regarding the topic studied (Brennen, 2017; Bryman, 2016). Furthermore, the flexibility aspect of semi-structured interviews allows for fluent interaction and space for follow-up questions for more elaboration of the topics and issues addressed (Brennen, 2017; Marvasti, 2004).

Sample and data collection

To recruit participants, purposive criterion sampling was employed. As such, participants were selected based on a set of inclusion criteria (Robinson, 2014) established considering participants' knowledge, experiences, and other characteristics that are relevant to the research question at hand (Babbie, 2014). As such, participants fulfilled the following basic requirements:

- Direct experience with polyamory (present or past)
- Over 18 years
- Speak English and/or Spanish (in order to have meaningful conversations with the researcher)

Regarding the recruitment process, the researcher prepared social media posts indicating basic information about this study that were shared on different platforms she has access to such as Facebook (own profile and relevant groups), Instagram, and Twitter. Posts were shared using personal profiles to reach people inside the researcher's network and beyond. Ten people agreed to participate with whom dates were set, and consent forms were distributed in order to conduct interviews that lasted around 60 minutes and took place online. To conduct the interviews, an interview guide was developed following Brennan's (2017) suggestions. As such, generally speaking, the interview guide started with reminding participants of the purpose of this

research to establish a proper frame of reference, icebreakers, general questions about them and their relation to polyamory, and then went more in-depth to address participants' views on monogamy and polyamory as well as connecting these with the wider context of neoliberal capitalism.

One could argue that introducing the topic of neoliberal capitalism might make the discussion seem artificial if participants are not able to get here and reflect on it by themselves. Taking this into account, the researcher took her time to reflect on it and concluded that one can assume that participants have already thought about this before and/or are ready to do so in the context of the interview since they voluntarily and actively showed interest in participating in this research after being informed of the topic of this research at least two times during the recruitment process and at the beginning of each interview. Furthermore, all ten participants of this study come from non-western backgrounds (i.e., outside of the US and western Europe) which have been strongly influenced by neoliberalism. In fact, most interviewees come from Chile, which is commonly described as the “cradle of neoliberalism” (Galarce, 2021). In the context of the Cold War, the US designed a plan to establish the neoliberal school of thought in Latin America in order to expand its hegemony in the region. Chile was chosen as a starting point for this plan and the neoliberal model was imposed during Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile (1973-1990) (Galarce, 2021). Furthermore, during the 2019 uprising in the country, protesters demanded the end of this model in the country: “Neoliberalism was born in Chile. Now it will die there” (Pérez, 2022). Thus, considering the background of (most) participants, one could assume that participants are more aware of the influences of neoliberal capitalism in their (love) lives and have been ‘forced’ to reflect on these matters more than other people. As such, the interview process was indeed natural, fluent, and relevant (see Appendix A for the full interview guide). Interviews were recorded in order to be transcribed verbatim for the purpose of analysis.

Ethical considerations

“The in-depth nature of the interviews lies in the intention of the interviewer to uncover details of the interviewee's experience that would be undisclosed in, say, a questionnaire” (Allmark et al., 2009, p. 48). From this type of research different ethical issues/concerns can often emerge. For example, privacy can become a significant issue when interviewers touch upon unexpected areas. Emotional harm can also be a risk when especially sensitive topics are discussed (Allmark et al., 2009). Taking these and other potential ethical issues/concerns into consideration, an informed consent form was created in which these different ethical aspects are addressed. The aim was to provide participants with all the relevant information for them to

make an informed decision regarding their participation. This document provided prospective participants with a description of the present study, relevant contact points including the EUR data protection officer, the legal basis for processing data, information about who will have access to their data and for how long, potential risks, and, most importantly, their right as participants. Furthermore, since the nature of this study required the researcher to collect special categories of data, the consent form included this aspect for prospective participants to consider and give explicit consent. Overall, in accordance with ethical guidelines of the GDPR for master's students at EUR, all the information provided is concise, transparent, presented clearly using plain language, intelligibly, and easily accessible, including a Spanish translation for Spanish-speaking participants (see Appendix B for Checklist Ethics and Privacy Aspects of Research, including consent form).

Data analysis

The goal of this study was to answer the research question through the identification and analysis of ideas in interviewees' responses concerning their appreciation of polyamory in the context of neoliberal capitalism. To do so, inductive thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) was conducted. The main advantage of this data collection method lies in that "thematic analysis is not wed to any pre-existing theoretical framework, and so it can be used within different theoretical frameworks (although not all) and can be used to do different things within them" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 9). As such, through this method of analysis, the researcher can find relevant themes in the data and later connect them to the literature reviewed about love, polyamory, and capitalism. Moreover, considering the inductive nature of this method as well as the room for flexibility it allows, one can approach the data with no preconceived assumptions/expectations giving all the information the same relevance, as unforeseen components can still be significant to answering the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Despite being one of the most often used methods of analysis, thematic analysis "is not an approach that has an identifiable heritage or that has been outlined in terms of a distinctive cluster of techniques" (Bryman, 2016, p. 584). As such, to ensure validity and reliability of the analysis process, this study adhered to the procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which consists of six explicit phases/steps. The first step consisted of familiarizing oneself with the data obtained from the interview process. This began with the transcription of interview recordings and actively (re-)reading the data looking for initial ideas/details relevant to the research question. Then, using the computer program ATLAS.ti, relevant aspects of the data

were identified and coded. Here, Ryan and Bernard (2003) recommend looking for: repetitions, indigenous typologies or categories, metaphors and analogies, transitions, similarities and differences, linguistic connectors, missing data, and theory-related material (Bryman, 2016). Third, using the initial codes mentioned before, the researcher identified possible themes. Fourth, the obtained themes and sub-themes were checked on and iteratively examined to see that they correspond with the data. Fifth, the researcher gave adequate names to each theme. Finally, the last step of the analysis process consisted of reporting these themes and discussing them in relation to the literature reviewed previously (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which can be found below.

Results

Love is a social emotion: the expectations

Across all interviews, love was identified as a social emotion (Bell & Sternberg, 1995; Kollontai, 2012) even though it is still common for research and society at large to exclude this particular emotion from our understanding of the social world (Illouz, 1997). Participants recognized the socially constructed aspects of love, indicating that “we’ve been educated in a lot of patterns to love” (Emilia). Here, interviewees also agreed that neoliberal capitalism plays an important role in the construction of love because the environment that the neoliberal capitalist society creates “spreads everywhere, to the whole of human experience”, as mentioned by Fito Torres, including love (Bauman, 2003). This is mainly through *expectations* that participants feel like they are forced to meet, which are informed by *family* members asking certain questions as well as the *media*, for example. This finding supports the idea that capitalism not only entails an economic system but a “form of life” (Cole & Ferrarese, 2018, p. 105) as it spreads into all aspects of the human experience (Shorter, 1975, p.295 in Macfarlane, 1986).

Love under capitalism: a negative view

Then, what does love look like under capitalism through the eyes of participants? To answer this, it is helpful to look at four aspects of love that are relevant to understanding love in this particular time period and culture: (a) who/what is loved; (b) related thoughts; (c) related feelings; and the accepted and expected behavior associated with love (Bell & Sternberg, 1995).

In terms of who/what is loved, participants identify that “we’ve been educated in monogamy and heterosexuality”, as Emilia put it. As such, participants feel that society expects people to only be able to ‘truly love’ one person (Fromm, 1957) who is also of the ‘opposite

gender' (also based on a binary conception of gender). In this regard, Fito Torres highlighted that this expectation of *mono- and heteronormativity* is useful for the maintenance of the capitalist system and its culture because

Monogamy presents us with a life plan for two people, and you have to do it that way to survive because a single person with a normal salary can get by but a single person with a minimum salary or less than the minimum, then it's like "let's start saving or getting together with another person in order to live". It's the same for old age. I gave you the example of old age because they say, "get married, have children so that they take care of you". It's replicating the system all the time. And right now, because even if you are not married, there are thousands of laws so that your partner has the same rights as if you were married. They realized that people no longer believed so much in the institution of marriage, so they moved on to a partner institution.

In relation to this, participants also emphasized the expectation of *foreverness* in capitalist love because "there's still this expectation to find the love of your life and feel very fortunate about it, and stay with this one person forever", said Guillermo. And, for this to work, this true love is expected to be "infallible, able to do anything, and it doesn't question anything" (Isidora).

In terms of the related thoughts and feelings (Bell & Sternberg, 1996) expected of love under capitalism, participants highlighted how one's partner is perceived as one's "*other half*" (Fito Torres). Consequently, one's partner is expected to be one's *top priority* in life to the point that, according to Isidora, "if your partner is not your priority it's strange. It's believed that your partner takes precedence and that they are the one around who our life is organized". People are expected to *include their partners in every aspect of their lives*, even in small things. For example, an expected behavior identified by participants is that "if you are with someone, you are expected to take them to every gathering, you have to go to all those things", mentioned Agustina. All of this has consequences for love under capitalism. According to participants, love is strongly characterized by *possessiveness* since partners are conceived as *ours*. Inevitably, this encourages a *sense of property* and leads to *jealousy* and *control over others* (Fromm, 1957). For example, Guillermo mentioned how it is common for his friends to ask for permission to do activities without their partners:

I have friends who have to ask for permission to go out to play something or to go out for a drink. They're like "I have to check if my partner lets me". And maybe it's an agreement

they have, or they want to make sure they didn't have prior plans together. But to me, it feels more like "let me ask for permission to see if I can go out". It's this *exclusivity* and *sense of property*.

According to Mateo, this tends to lead to unhealthy emotional dependence because "it's like you're my property and I need to be with you because otherwise I'm going to die. If you leave, I'm going to kill myself". Additionally, since love is a scarce commodity in this context, the need to find a person with whom to stay forever to meet society's expectations encourages *competition* for love within society. In Ina's words, "there's a competition aspect to it definitely. I think like competing to be someone's favorite person and competing to be the most important thing in someone's life". This is also an individualistic attitude because "you're trying to be someone's everything when you as a person are probably not capable of that. It would be easier to share that burden with a community and a source of people that can bring joy in different ways", added Ina.

The expectations of love described above additionally mean to participants that love under capitalism *disregards love and relationships with people aside from one's romantic partner*. Since the 2-person romantic relationship is expected to become the top priority in people's lives, other relationships become second-order relationships. This is evident in Isidora's words as "the basis of this is that deep connections only happen with one's partner. So, we forget about friends, family and even about people who might not fit into any of those categories", in her opinion. This means that in society, "it's weird to love your friends so much or to put your family in a higher place", for example (Isidora). Consequently, Ina argued that "that love kind of just gets completely disregarded". A reason for this is that "we're taught that it [the non-romantic relationship] doesn't have an end goal [e.g., marriage and so forth]. It's just something that's around us, and that's why it takes value away from it". This makes it harder for people under capitalism to sustain other relationships. As such, participants identify that there is a *lack of community ties* leading to high levels of *individualism* in society, in accordance with O'Hara, (2014).

Interestingly, even in these 2-person relationships where 'true love' is supposed to be found, participants highlighted certain issues that are present even within the couple. For instance, *lack of communication*, which at first seems paradoxical since 'true love' and deep connections are actually expected (only) in this context. "I think that it's still expected that you don't talk about everything with your partner, that you don't express your real feelings", especially when these feelings go against societal expectations, said Guillermo. And when one

is honest and communicates everything, one tends to face negative reactions. This happened to Agustina:

At one point I wanted to talk [with her then-partner] that I liked someone else, but I wanted to share it as if I were talking to a friend. I wasn't asking to open up our relationship. No way. What I needed was companionship because something was happening to me, and something was hurting me. But I didn't find companionship. I found guilt, found abuse, I found someone defensive.

Additionally, participants mentioned the *exchange aspect of relationships*. As Mateo noted, “they say ‘I’m here for you, forever’ but it’s more like for their own benefit”. As such, participants observe that people constantly expect things in return within their relationships. The “you have to give me something because I’m going to give you something” is very prevalent when looking at love in modern capitalism, according to Josefa. Participants also identified another seemingly paradoxical aspect of love under capitalism, namely that there is an encouragement to *accumulate people and experiences* as well as the *disposable aspect of these interactions* (Bauman, 2003). Dating apps illustrate this, according to Manolo Aranda:

In a society that’s permeated by capitalism, of course we’re going to reproduce the capitalist logic, like with the accumulation of sexual and erotic experiences, where these experiences also show the disposable aspect. It’s like with dating apps. I’m swiping from left to right and a lot of the time, these interactions don’t have any consideration or care behind them. It’s like “I don’t like you, so bye” without considering other people’s feelings that you might be hurting.

However, as paradoxical as this might sound – because ‘true love’ is expected to emerge only within the couple but even this does not seem to happen in the capitalist context, according to participants –, Emilia argued that all of this happens because “we’ve not been educated to care for others”. An important reason for this is neoliberal capitalism, which was also identified by participants. As discussed earlier, neoliberal capitalism is characterized, among other things, by high levels of individualism, competition, and relationships of exchange (O’Hara, 2014). It is also characterized by consumerism (Harmanci, 2017) and the goal of profit-making and accumulation of wealth for oneself without considering others in the process (Illouz, 1997; Robbins & Dowty, 2018). Thus, it comes as no surprise that love in society is described

by participants in a similar way to O'Hara (2014) did, highlighting a limited "generation of Freedom, Social Spread, Intimacy and Commitment" as well as limited "compassion, friendships and intimate connections" (p. 187). As such, even 'true love' within the couple is undermined by the capitalist culture in which everyone has been socialized, according to participants' accounts.

Framing polyamory under capitalism: it is not all black and white

Participants characterized love under capitalism as negative. In this context, participants reflected upon their understanding of polyamory in a capitalist context and addressed the ongoing debate whether polyamory constitutes an anti-capitalist practice or not. Across all interviews, based on interviewees' positive and negative experiences with polyamorous relationships, polyamory is framed as a *disruptive practice*, at least initially. It is understood by participants as a potentially anti-capitalist way of loving and relating to one another considering the basic principles and ideas behind polyamory. As such, participants agreed that, to some extent, polyamory challenges capitalist love (Ferrer, 2018; Schippers, 2016; Song, 2012). One common argument for this is *polyamory's conception of love, which is not limited to two individuals*, making it *less exclusive* as it is spread beyond the traditional monogamous (and heterosexual) couple:

We're creating a society where the most basic institution is the family which is very hermetic and self-contained, with this idea of the breadwinner father and the woman in charge of caregiving. What's disruptive about polyamory is that caregiving goes beyond this core. *We all take care of each other*, and we're all capable of creating bonds through respect (Emilia).

Consequently, in polyamory *love is also no longer a scarce resource* in society as it can be shared by as many people as it is agreed to (Schippers, 2016). This entails a higher level of *freedom to decide* since people do not look for partners or maintain relationships because they are expected to do so, but because they *choose to do so*. In this regard, Mateo said that the attitude with which relationships are approached is that "I don't need to be with anyone, I can be by myself. I prefer to be with you, yes, but I don't need to, it's not an obligation to have you by my side". This polyamorous conception of love is also seen as disruptive by participants because "*you don't have to refuse what you naturally feel*" (Guillermo) in the case that a person develops romantic feelings for more than one individual, to maintain romantic relationships. Guillermo gave an example of this:

I had always been in monogamous relationships before. And although I loved my partners very much, I could feel attraction towards other people, and I would feel like repression of those feelings and at the same time also I felt bad about feeling those things, about feeling that I liked someone else besides my partner. So, it [polyamory] is to me like "ah well look, I'm not the only one, and it [monogamy] is not the only way to interact with someone".

Understanding love in this way encourages people to "interact with others *without the idea of ownership* in the back of our heads", said Guillermo, but rather "in the context that *we're all free individuals*", he continued. Consequently, *jealousy has no place* in polyamory. On the contrary, *compersion* takes place (Schippers, 2016) because "if my partner is with someone that makes them happy, I'm also happy" (Sofía). Participants further indicated that the amount of competition typical of capitalist love (O'Hara, 2014) also decreases (Schippers, 2016) because nobody needs to compete to become someone's "favorite person", as Ina put it.

All of this, however, only works if "a person – this is going to sound very purist –practices real polyamory", as noted by Fito Torres. What does this mean? Participants agreed several best practices, that follow logically from the principles and ideas behind polyamory, that make it possible for it to challenge capitalist love. As such, polyamory requires *constant open communication* and *trust*. Of course, participants agree that this should be a standard in every type of relationship, however, "it is emphasized in this world", to maintain multiple relationships, according to Guillermo. Other imperatives are *care* and *affective responsibility*. This is particularly disruptive considering that, as Emilia mentioned before, we have not been educated to care for others because it goes against capitalist principles such as individualism and competition (Illouz, 1997; Robbins & Dowty, 2018). Thus, affection and care make polyamory a disruptive practice because "with care we build *community*, and this community destroys the individualism of capitalism" (Manolo Aranda) since "that which is *collective* will always be dangerous to the system" (Isidora).

However, participants reflected beyond this initial framing of polyamory under capitalism, and most agreed that this disruptive and anti-capitalist understanding of polyamory tends to work best in theory than in practice. There are barriers that undermine the potential of polyamory as an anti-capitalist practice because *polyamory still exists in a capitalist context* and can therefore still be *subject to capitalist love* (Klesse, 2014), which most participants identified and reflected upon. For example, Isidora shared the following:

Capitalism swallows everything that resists it. We see feminist t-shirts in retail, so we're like close to having polyamory t-shirts. So, I think that, without a doubt, it [polyamory] also harbors [capitalist] dynamics because we are people who have grown up in this norm. So, these dynamics are not in the air, they are in us, and for that same reason, they are replicated.

In simpler words, Agustina said that “being polyamorous doesn’t exempt you from capitalist bullshit”. In this context, based on their own experiences and/or what they have seen around them, interviewees gave examples of capitalist love being reproduced in polyamorous relationships. For example, in Emilia’s experience, many polyamorous relationships manifest a lack of commitment because “the attention is scattered when you’re living experiences and bonds with more people”. As such, this freedom and spread of love might backfire into more superficial and less nurturing connections, which is characteristic of capitalist love (Ferrer, 2018; O’Hara, 2014). Also, unfortunately, certain power relations can still be reproduced in polyamorous relationships, according to Emilia’s heterosexual polyamorous experience, “in heterosexuality [both polyamorous and monogamous], power relations happen a lot. I mean, it is still very frowned upon for a woman to have sexual relations with many people”. Thus, structures of power are engrained despite the form of the relationship (Klesse, 2014). Furthermore, the encouragement to accumulate and own others/experiences has also been observed, leading to *jealousy* and other feelings/behaviors associated typically with capitalist love as well (Ferrer, 2018). Sofía once crossed paths with someone who illustrates this:

I met a guy who was in an open relationship. But he was still jealous about me being on Tinder and able to see other people. He *wanted everything for himself*. He just wanted *more people*, but other people couldn't have more relationships. And then there is this thing of collecting people, experiences. Like "I'm with this one, with this one, with this one I got involved, with this one, with this one, with this one, with this one". And it is called polyamory to deceive people, to continue with this practice that does have to do with capitalism, with *accumulation*.

Individualism is another capitalist characteristic that can be reproduced in polyamorous relationships. According to Sofía, there’s a very fine line between a kind of polyamory that fights

individualism – and is, therefore, anti-capitalist – and one that reproduces this. Which kind of polyamory people practice affects how disruptive to capitalism poly relationships can be:

A friend was telling me that he was having a hard time maintaining this polyamorous relationship because they lived in different cities due to jealousy. It's natural for jealousy to occur as long as one can let go of it. So, he told me "But it's okay, because polyamory is like an act of self-love, like being happy yourself". And I thought, yes, it is that, but it is not *only* that. To think that it is only an act of self-love just for *you* to be happy, then you start to fall into this more individualistic practice (Sofía).

Additionally, polyamory is not exempt from capitalist pressures of work, money, and time as these aspects of neoliberal capitalist culture still impact poly relationships inhibiting nurturance and intimacy. In Fito Torre's experience:

Time, but in the sense of being able to coordinate many bonds simultaneously without them feeling unprotected, neglected, or abandoned, this is very, very complex. And besides that, *money*, because one can have a date in any square eating sopaipillas, which is like the cheapest thing in the world, but from time to time one tends to *show love and affection with gifts or much more planned dates*. And that hits your pocket, because I pay one, you pay the next, but when you have to invite three simultaneously, it costs a little more.

Furthermore, the expectation to consume in order to demonstrate affection is also present which is problematic because "people see it as something very necessary, to see that the other person is putting effort into you" (Fito Torres), highlighting the continued relevance of consumerism (Harmanci, 2017). Additionally, this highlights a more general barrier to polyamory which is *privilege*, as particular resources are needed to engage in polyamory, especially in a neoliberal capitalist context (Sheff & Hammers, 2011). This can also be deduced from interviewees' backgrounds and how most first approached polyamory. All interviewees recalled that they first started reflecting on love, relationships, and learned about polyamory through their *social circles* as well as their *own questioning*, which was deepened through *access to information and other resources, particularly online*. Access to *therapy* was also a relevant resource for two participants, which gave them a *safe environment* to reflect, learn and discuss. This is not to say that all participants or all polyamorous individuals come from particularly privileged

backgrounds, however, participants recognize the privilege that is needed to be able to read, learn, reflect, and practice a different way of relating to one another such as polyamory in a neoliberal capitalist context (Sheff & Hammers, 2011). As Josefa expressed:

I think polyamory as such is more difficult to practice in a capitalist society because many people say it and it's true: how are you going to find the time? And here comes the fact that polyamory is a privilege because people who work, or who work and study, or who work and have children, don't have time to have more than one relationship. Maybe they want to, but they don't have time to even consider having another one. So, in that aspect, yes. This means that once again there is discrimination in access to polyamory between people with a higher socioeconomic and sociocultural level and a lower socioeconomic level.

Discussion & conclusion: toward anti-capitalist love beyond forms of relationship

Let us think again about love and capitalism? What is the first thing that comes to mind now? Chances are that it is not (just) Valentine's Day because the findings of this study show that the love-capitalism relationship goes beyond this. After all, capitalism permeates all aspects of our lives (Cole & Ferrarese, 2018), and love is no exception. In fact, neoliberal capitalism plays a relevant role in the social construction of love. In their everyday lives, people are confronted with expectations about love and relationships that they are expected to meet. Additionally, it is evident that characteristics of neoliberal capitalism such as individualism, competition, and consumerism, are often reproduced in romantic relationships. Findings illustrate how "current institutional arrangements tend to limit compassion, friendship and intimate connections [...]" (O'Hara, 2014, p. 187). However, despite the overwhelming presence of neoliberal capitalism and its associated pressures and expectations regarding love, participants' discourses indicate that people still have a degree of agency and thus are able to reflect and look for possible ways to challenge capitalist love. Here is where polyamory has been argued for as a *potentially* counter-hegemonic/anti-capitalist practice by some while others are critical of this perspective.

The data gathered showed that, on the surface, participants of this study understand polyamory as a form of relationship that *can be* disruptive to capitalist love because polyamory presents foundational aspects that can be considered anti-capitalist such as constant open communication, trust, and sharing, among others. These aspects are framed by interviewees as a challenge to capitalist values. However, upon further reflection, while it can be a disruptive practice, it is *not inherently* so. In other words, the form of the relation (i.e., the number of

possible partners) appears to *not* be the determining factor for understanding polyamory as an anti-capitalist or capitalist practice. While these anti-capitalist aspects appear to be emphasized in polyamory as they are necessary to the ethical and responsible practice of polyamory, they could and should also be present in any form of relationship, according to participants. Furthermore, polyamory is still understood as being subject to neoliberal capitalism and is thus not exempt from its influence (Klesse, 2014). As such, it is still seen as able to reproduce certain aspects of capitalist love. As such, it is more other foundational aspects of polyamory rather than the number of partners per se that could be considered anti-capitalist.

Considering all of this then, going back to the quotes presented at the beginning, who is right? Is it Poly Philia (2022) arguing that “capitalism would crumble” if polyamory is normalized in society? Or is it Johnstone (2021) arguing that polyamory and capitalism are two sides of the same coin? The findings of this study show that the debate regarding the polyamory-capitalism relationship is not as straightforward as the limited literature and online discussions make it out to be. At first, polyamory is framed as a practice that is disruptive to neoliberal capitalism as it challenges values related to individualism, competition, consumerism, and private property, for example. Since open communication, trust, sharing, lack of emphasis on property ownership, and so on are understood as basic necessary aspects to practice polyamory ethically and responsibly, this form of relationship is understood initially as disruptive in the context of neoliberal capitalism. Nonetheless, upon further reflection, the number of potential partners is framed as a *matter of personal preference* rather than a necessary aspect to challenge capitalist love. It is other aspects that are part of polyamory that are framed as necessary for an anti-capitalist kind of love. Even though these seem to be emphasized more in the context of polyamory, they can and should be part of any relationship, regardless of the number of potential partners, but also in the case of other types of relationships like friends, family, work relationships and so on. In the context of neoliberal capitalism, polyamory, albeit not sufficient to challenge capitalist love, still encourages reflection, questioning, and conversations – like the interviews conducted here – about love, relationships, the role of capitalism, expectations, as well as our own preferences which, according to participants, can contribute to building new ways of loving and relating to one another, even though some might decide to not engage in polyamory after all.

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, further research is needed to go more in-depth about the relationship between love and capitalism and the different efforts to challenge capitalist love. Future research is encouraged to still take into account and work with various individuals to address this topic together but a more collective and/or collaborative methods

could be employed such as focus groups to encourage more collective reflection about these topics instead of the – arguably – more limited one-on-one interaction that this study had. Furthermore, the sample of polyamorous individuals who participated in this study is quite homogeneous in terms of background in relation to neoliberal capitalism. Thus, it would be interesting for future research to explore the perspectives of people from other regions where neoliberal capitalism is less questioned or reflected upon. Would the conclusions drawn be any different? This would also help us understand to what extent individuals frame relationships in a capitalist way and/or if they actively think about it. To what extent do others practice polyamory as a conscious revolt against capitalism and capitalist love? These questions are interesting to delve into.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this study are relevant for a variety of reasons. First, although emotions are understood as socially constructed, love tends to remain excluded from this. In comparison, little research about love engages with structures such as capitalism (Illouz, 1997). However, this paper shows how love in general cannot be excluded from the study of the social as different social structures, such as neoliberal capitalism influence and shape our understanding of this emotion. This is also not only theoretically speaking as participants themselves actively identified and reflected upon this matter. Furthermore, most existing content about polyamory specifically lacks a critical approach and engagement with power structures (Haritaworn et al., 2006; Klesse, 2014) as well, which is relevant to addressing the question at hand. Additionally, the debate addressed with participants is unexplored at the time of writing this and more specifically does not take into account people's views and experiences because it consists mostly of theoretical accounts. As such, the findings of this study begin to close these gaps by actively engaging in the study of love in general and polyamory in particular in relation to capitalism and its culture. Moreover, a space was provided for people's experiences and views on the topic and debate addressed here, inviting them to reflect on love and polyamory in relation to structures of power such as neoliberal capitalism. In doing so, one can see that people can recognize and reflect upon these relationships (differently) based on their positionality and that, as such, the situation is not as black and white as part of the literature reviewed seems at times.

Even though theoretical accounts as well as online discourses, like those present in the quotes at the beginning of this paper, argue for either side of the debate at hand, this study's findings show a more nuanced and complicated relationship between polyamory and capitalism. Individuals are constantly negotiating ways of loving and relating to one another that could potentially challenge social structures but do so under the influence of these social structures.

As such, discussions about these topics need to be more nuanced and complex, as illustrated by this paper's findings. Consequently, the main takeaway is that actively exploring and engaging in these conversations can help toward imagining and building together new ways of loving and relating to others. Hopefully ones based on solidarity and community, as argued by authors such as Bauman (2003).

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Appendix A: interview guide

Topic I: introduction

- Reminder about purpose of study, contents of consent form, encourage expression of honest opinions and experiences, thank for participation, set tone of interview – build rapport.
- How do you identify? Who are you?
 - Gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, relationship status, relationship preference (i.e., form, number of partners), occupation, political orientation.

Topic II: Polyamory & monogamy (general)

- What are your views on polyamory?
 - Own experiences, meaning, best practices, challenges, advantages, type of people in the community, how did you become interested, current relationships?
- What are your views on monogamy?
 - Own experiences, meaning, best practices, challenges, advantages.

Topic III: polyamory/monogamy & neoliberal capitalism (connection)

- Think about modern society. How do you think that broader society affects/shapes intimate relationships?
 - What about romantic love specifically?
 - What it is of society that shapes these interactions/the way we love? (link to neoliberal capitalism)
 - Ask for personal experiences
- How do you think neoliberal capitalism shapes love/intimacy?
 - Ask for personal experiences
- Do you think that polyamory challenges power structures/capitalism?
 - Why/why not?
 - How so?
 - What are the challenges / advantages?
 - Can polyamory reinforce capitalist love/relationships?
- What about monogamy?
- Does the form of the relationship matter? → What else is needed to challenge capitalist love?
- In your own utopia, how would love/relationships look like?
 - What would be the socio-economic & political frame?

Appendix B: Checklist Ethics and Privacy Aspects of Research

INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17) If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Jennifer A. Holland, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: Loving with or against the tide? An exploratory study of (ex)polyamorous individuals' framing of polyamory in the context of neoliberal capitalism.

Name, email of student: Amanda Lara Wall, 487671al@eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Samira van Bohemen, vanbohemem@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: 1 February 2022 – 19 June 2022

Is the research study conducted within DPAS **YES-NO**

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?(e.g., internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants? **YES-NO**

If 'NO': skip to part V.

If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research? **YES-NO**

Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act ([WMO](#)) must first be submitted to [an accredited medical research ethics committee](#) or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects ([CCMO](#)).

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants? YES-**NO**
If 'YES': skip to part IV.
3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else). YES-**NO**
If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? YES-**NO**
2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? YES-**NO**
3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? YES-**NO**
4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants? YES-**NO**
Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).
5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? YES-**NO**
6. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g., racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious

- or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)? YES-NO
7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? YES-NO
8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? YES-NO
9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? YES-NO
10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? YES-NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

Since this study focuses on participants experiences with polyamory and their opinions regarding (polyamorous) love/relationships in relation to neoliberal capitalism, information will have to be collected about special categories of data, particularly regarding participants' sex life or sexual orientation and political opinions. This aspect cannot be avoided because the research question would not be answered otherwise. Additionally, since this research will address power structures, participants will be also asked about demographic characteristics such as their racial or ethnic origin if applicable. These categories are theoretically relevant and should therefore not be avoided in order to answer the research question better. If these special categories of data are not addressed, the research question would not be answered.

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

To keep participants safe, they will be informed about the purpose of this research before they accept to participate (recruitment process) and before starting the interviews. They

will be informed about the topic and issues addressed as well as the type of personal data that will be collected. Participants will be asked to read (and sign if they feel comfortable with it) a consent form containing all relevant information and/or they will be asked for their consent verbally. Everything will be explicit and information about the special categories of data mentioned above will also be mentioned in order to get unambiguous consent. Participants will be reminded of their rights before and after the interviews. Furthermore, participants will be kept anonymous with the use of pseudonyms (unless they prefer to use their real names) and avoiding any kind of descriptive information that could be linked/traced back to them. Any data (recordings, transcripts) will be kept in a personal computer only accessed by the researcher using safe platforms approved by EUR such as EUR OneDrive. Finally, the researcher will maintain transparent communication with the subjects throughout the course of the study in case anything else comes up.

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

There should be none beyond what would be normally encountered by participants. Regardless, the researcher understands that the topic being studied is sensitive in nature as it addresses intimate aspects of participants' lives and can be related to negative experiences. As such, the researcher will mention this to participants and remind them that they are free to not answer any questions, and a safe and respectful environment will be ensured.

Informed consent form is attached at the end of this document.

Continue to part IV.

PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

The data will be collected via interviews. Participants will be recruited via social media posts on different platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp) shared/posted by the researcher. The data collection process is not bound to any geographical place.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

10 participants.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

The study population consists of all people who have (had) experience with polyamory at some point in their lives. There is not official information sufficient to know this specifically. However, it has been estimated that 4-5% of people in the US engage in consensually non-monogamous relationships (see [Rubin et al., 2014](#)). As such, the population size would be bigger than 13180000 (~ 4% US population according to US Census Bureau 2020).

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

Data will consist of recordings and transcripts of interviews. These will be stored in the researcher's personal computer using EUR OneDrive.

Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

Only the researcher will have access and be responsible for the management, storage and backup of data arising from this research.

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

At least once a week or every time the data is updated (e.g., transcripts made, etc.).

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

Any directly identifiable personal details will be separated from the rest of the data.

Participants will be assigned pseudonyms and no descriptive characteristics will be used that can be traced back to them.

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

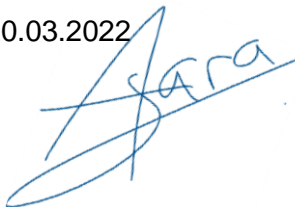
Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Amanda Lara Wall

Name (EUR) supervisor: Samira van Bohemen

Date: 10.03.2022

Date: 15.03.2022



Consent request for participating in research
Solicitud de consentimiento para participar en estudio

For questions about this study, contact the researcher:

Para preguntas sobre este estudio, contacte a la investigadora:

- Name/nombre: Amanda Lara Wall
- Address/dirección: Bovenstraat 75, 3077 BC, Rotterdam. The Netherlands. E-mail: 497671al@eur.nl
- Phone number/teléfono: +31610513093
- Institution/institución: Erasmus University Rotterdam. Erasmus School of Social and behavioral Sciences, Department of Public Administration and Sociology.

Description of the study

Descripción de la investigación

English: You are invited to participate in a research about polyamory in modern society. The purpose of this study is to understand how people who have had direct experience with polyamory perceive it, and what they think about this practice in relation to neoliberal capitalism. This study is part of the requirements to opt for the master's degree in Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms, the questions of the interview will be related to your thoughts and experiences regarding polyamory and polyamorous relationships. Furthermore, you will be asked about your thoughts and experiences with romantic relationships in general in the context of modern society (i.e., neoliberal capitalism). As such, you consent to me asking about and processing your data related to your political opinions, sex life and sexual orientation, as well as racial or ethnic origin. We will have a relaxed conversation about these topics in a safe and respectful environment.

Unless you prefer no recordings to be made and state so in this form, I will use a tape/video recorder for the interview.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point. Your consent is necessary to proceed. Only if you consent will the data obtained be processed.

Only the researcher, her supervisor and Erasmus University will have access to your data. Data will be only processed and used in the context of this research. Your data will be safely stored and kept for the duration of this study.

Castellano: Está invitado/a a participar en una investigación sobre el poliamor en la sociedad moderna. El propósito de este estudio es comprender cómo las personas que han tenido una experiencia directa con el poliamor lo perciben y qué piensan sobre esta práctica en relación con el capitalismo neoliberal. Este estudio es parte de los requisitos para optar por la maestría en Sociología en la Universidad Erasmus de Róterdam.

Su consentimiento para participar en este estudio significa que acepta ser entrevistado. En términos generales, las preguntas de la entrevista estarán relacionadas con sus pensamientos y experiencias respecto al poliamor y las relaciones poliamorosas. Además, se le preguntará sobre sus pensamientos y experiencias con las relaciones románticas en general en el contexto de la sociedad moderna (es decir, el capitalismo neoliberal). Como tal, consiente que le pregunte sobre y procese sus datos relacionados con sus opiniones políticas, vida y orientación sexuales, así como su origen racial o étnico. Tendremos una conversación relajada sobre estos temas en un ambiente seguro y respetuoso.

A menos que prefiera que no se realicen grabaciones y así lo indique en este formulario, usaré una grabadora de cinta/video para la entrevista.

Usted siempre es libre de no responder alguna pregunta en particular y/o dejar de participar en cualquier momento.

Su consentimiento es necesario para proceder. Sólo si usted da su consentimiento se tratarán los datos obtenidos.

Solo la investigadora, su supervisora y la Universidad Erasmus de Róterdam tendrán acceso a sus datos. Los datos solo se procesarán y utilizarán en el contexto de esta investigación. Sus datos se almacenarán y conservarán de forma segura durante la duración de este estudio.

Risks and benefits

Riesgos y beneficios

English: As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Regardless, I understand that the topic of this a sensitive topic with which you might have negative associated experiences Thus, you are free to not answer certain questions and we will keep the interview a safe and respectful space for you. You are also free to decide whether I

should use your name or other identifying information such as gender, profession, age, etc. or not in the study. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by using a pseudonym and only providing general identification by means of mentioning age and gender, etc. and nothing else that could identify you.

I will use the material from the interviews and my observations exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

Castellano: En base a mi conocimiento, no existen riesgos asociados a la participación en esta investigación. Sin embargo, entiendo que el tema de esta tesis es sensible y puede estar potencialmente asociado a experiencias personales negativas y discriminación por parte de terceros. Por lo tanto, es libre de no responder cualquier pregunta y me encargaré de que esta entrevista sea un espacio seguro y respetuoso. Además, usted es libre de decidir si me permite usar su nombre real u otra información que permita su identificación como género, profesión, edad, etc. o no en el estudio. Si lo prefiere, me aseguraré de que no pueda ser identificado/a, utilizando seudónimos y solo brindando identificación general como mención de edad y género, etc. siempre y cuando esto no sea suficiente para identificarle.

Utilizaré el material de las entrevistas y mis observaciones exclusivamente para trabajos académicos, como investigaciones futuras, reuniones académicas y publicaciones.

Time involvement

Tiempo relacionado a su participación

English: Your participation in this study will take approximately 60 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

Castellano: Su participación en este estudio tendrá una duración aproximada de 60 minutos. Puede interrumpir su participación en cualquier momento.

Payments

Pagos

English: There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

Castellano: No hay compensación monetaria asociada a su participación.

Participant's rights

Derechos de la/el participante

English: If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

You have the right to refuse to answer any particular questions.

If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

You have the right to access your data anytime.

You have the right to rectify, erase and/or restrict any processing of your personal data. In case of complaints, you have the right to file one with a supervisory authority.

Castellano: Si ha decidido aceptar participar en este proyecto, comprenda que su participación es voluntaria y tiene derecho a retirar su consentimiento o interrumpir la participación en cualquier momento sin penalización.

Tiene derecho a negarse a responder preguntas particulares.

Si lo prefiere, su identidad se dará a conocer en todos los datos escritos que resulten del estudio. De lo contrario, su privacidad individual se mantendrá en todos los datos publicados y escritos que resulten del estudio.

Tiene derecho a acceder su información personal en cualquier momento.

Tiene derecho a rectificar, borrar y/o restringir cualquier procesamiento de su información personal.

En caso de quejas, tiene derecho a presentar una a autoridad supervisora.

Contacts and questions

Contactos y preguntas

English: If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact — anonymously, if you wish — the supervisor of this thesis Dr. Samira van Bohemen at:

Castellano: Si tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante del estudio, o no está satisfecho/a en algún momento con algún aspecto de este estudio, puede contactar – de forma anónima, si lo desea – a la supervisora de esta tesis, Dra. Samira van Bohemen a:

- E-mail: vanbohemmen@essb.eur.nl
- Visiting address/dirección: Burg. Oudlaan 50 3062 PA Rotterdam
- Postal address/dirección postal: Postbus 1738 3000 DR Rotterdam

Or contact Dr. Jennifer Holland at:

También puede contactar a la Dra. Jennifer Holland:

- E-mail: j.a.holland@essb.eur.nl
- Visiting address/dirección: Burg. Oudlaan 50 3062 PA Rotterdam
- Postal address/dirección postal: Postbus 1738 3000 DR Rotterdam

You can also contact the Erasmus University Rotterdam data protection officer at privacy@eur.nl in case of any questions/concerns regarding your data.

También puede contactar a la oficina de protección de datos de Erasmus University Rotterdam al e- mail privacy@eur.nl en caso de tener preguntas acerca de su información personal.

You can also contact the researcher herself, Amanda Lara Wall at:

Puede contactar a la investigadora, Amanda Lara Wall, directamente:

- E-mail: 497671al@eur.nl
- Phone number/teléfono: +31610513093
- Address/dirección: Bovenstraat 75, 3077 BC, Rotterdam. The Netherlands.

Signing the consent form

Firmar el formulario de consentimiento

English: If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, **you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.**

Castellano: Si firma este formulario de consentimiento, su firma será la única documentación de su identidad. Por lo tanto, **NO NECESITA firmar este formulario. Para minimizar los riesgos y proteger su identidad, es posible que prefiera dar su consentimiento verbalmente. Su consentimiento oral es suficiente.**

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:
Consiento a ser grabado/a durante este estudio:

Name/nombre

Signature/firma

Date /fecha

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study: Prefiero que mi identidad sí sea revelada en toda lo escrito resultante de este estudio:

Name/nombre

Signature/firma

Date /fecha

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep, and the researcher will keep another.

Esta copia del formulario de consentimiento es para el/la participante y otra debe ser entregada a la investigadora.