

How non-monogamous relationships find success

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Credit: Anna Langova/public domain

Individuals in polyamorous relationships report more commitment and investment with their primary partners and report more time spent on sex with their secondary partners, a new study authored by Western researchers has found.

While previous research suggests that consensually non-monogamous

relationships do not significantly differ from monogamous relationships on a number of [relationship](#)-quality indicators, this is one of the first studies to examine potential differences in the relationship dynamics between an individual's [multiple partners](#), said lead author Rhonda Balzarini, a PhD candidate in the Psychology.

The authors asked 1,308 people in online questionnaires (drawn from polyamorous affinity groups on social media) about the dynamics of their polyamorous relationships.

"The study suggests people who are 'primary' partners – those who share a household and finances, for example – experience greater commitment and investment in the relationship. However, the secondary partnership experiences greater proportion of time spent on sex, and this remains a factor even when we account for relationship length and living arrangements," she said.

Researchers also found participants reported greater acceptance for their primary partners from both friends and family, and the secondary relationship was more likely to be maintained in secrecy from people outside the relationship. Participants' perception of the quality of their communication with their partner was greater with primary than with secondary partners, the study found.

"The study verified, in empirical terms for the first time, some of what we had expected about the dynamics of these relationships. In other ways, though, the results surprised us. We actually found people who were more satisfied with their secondary partner were also likely to be more committed, not less, to their primary [partner](#)," she said. "This may suggest that benefits of one relationship carry over to the other, and counters the idea that people turn to polyamory because they're not satisfied with their primary relationship."

Balzarini said that, while the proportion of time spent having sex was the only reward found for secondary relationships in this study, there may be many other meaningful rewards that secondary relationships provide, including more opportunities for self-expression or meeting specific needs or desires the primary relationship doesn't fulfill such as shared leisure activities.

More information: Rhonda N. Balzarini et al. Perceptions of primary and secondary relationships in polyamory, *PLOS ONE* (2017). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0177841](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0177841)

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