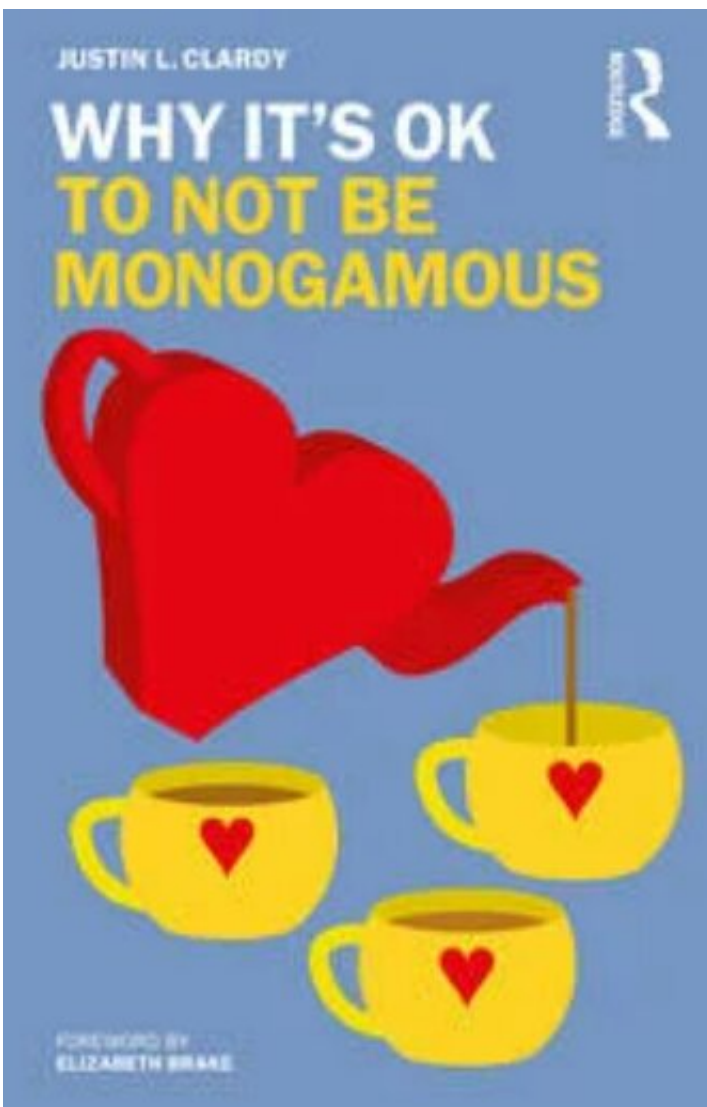


Polyamorous relationships can have as many benefits as monogamous ones, shows research

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Credit: Routledge

Polyamorists face stigma and discrimination in their day-to-day lives, yet research shows that having a romantic relationship with more than one person at a time may offer emotional and physical benefits to all parties.

Monogamy is frequently portrayed as the ideal form of [romantic love](#) in many modern societies. From the stories we read as [children](#), to the films and books we consume as adults—we are told that to achieve happiness we need to find our one true soulmate to share the rest of our lives with.

At the same time, states and governments offer financial, legal, and social incentives to married couples. Meanwhile men and women who deviate from these monogamous norms are treated as pariahs and publicly shamed.

However, despite this, polyamorous relationships are on the rise. It is estimated that between 4% and 5% of the U.S. population is currently involved in consensually non-[monogamous relationships](#).

Furthermore, in 2010 a study found that roughly one out of every 500 adults in the United States identified as polyamorous.

Time for reform?

Increasing numbers of legal and political scholars are arguing for reforms to current family laws so that they recognize the wide variety of intimate personal relationships in which humans can thrive.

"Polyamorists face the risk of being fired, denied housing or citizenship, or having their children taken away from them because of their polyamorous identities and lifestyles," says Justin Clardy, a professor of

philosophy at Santa Clara University.

"However, in many cases poly relationships are more durable than monogamous ones, because their flexibility allows them to meet shifting needs over time in a way that monogamous relationships don't."

Professor Clardy has dedicated his [academic career](#) to studying the ethicality of non-monogamous [relationship](#) styles and the unjust political consequences faced by non-monogamists.

In his first book, [*Why It's OK to Not Be Monogamous*](#), Clardy summarizes the main arguments that are commonly put forward to support [monogamy](#). He then debunks each one with thorough research.

A moral debate

For example, there is a theory that humans evolved to be monogamous because human babies require greater care, as they are born at a younger gestational age than other mammals.

Professor Clardy explains, "Monogamy is therefore seen as the 'natural' order of things. However, many homosexual and heterosexual monogamous couples either do not want, or cannot have children, yet this doesn't exclude them from being able to marry, and enjoy the rights and privileges that come with marriage.

"Others may see monogamy as a moral command given by God, however, does this mean that atheists and agnostics are disqualified from romantic love, even if they find themselves in happy, healthy, and satisfying monogamous romantic relationships?"

Refocusing attention

One of the most common arguments against polyamory is that it incites painful feelings of jealousy, however monogamous couples experience this emotion too. In fact, Clardy argues that in many cases vulnerability, possessiveness, and a sense of entitlement to another person's love are more at the heart of jealousy than we care to admit.

Clardy argues that polyamory, on the other hand, can benefit relationships by refocusing our attention on how one's partner fares in their other intimate relationships.

"When governed by mutual consent and understanding, polyamorous relationships can allow people to share more fully in the happiness of others," says Clardy.

"This can be achieved by confronting and managing one's vulnerability, by softening our propensity to be jealous, and by learning to pay attention to the flourishing of others."

Different forms of family

Some of the harshest critics of polyamorists argue that non-monogamy is harmful to the family unit, leading to divorce and the breakdown of families. However according to Clardy, polyamorous families both exist and thrive, and such an arrangement can actually benefit children.

"It may not take an entire village to raise a child, but it stands to reason that all things being equal, having more than one 'father' or 'mother' as a caregiver may be even more conducive to meeting children's needs, as children may be loved and nurtured in unconventional families," says Clardy.

"Indeed, it may turn out that on average, the existence of more than two caregivers is the superior parenting arrangement."

'Othering' the unknown

In the final chapter of his book, Clardy argues that it is morally wrong to impose monogamy on society, and calls for the state to support polyamorous relationships as well as monogamous ones.

"Polyamorous relationships need support and protection that the state is uniquely able to provide and is best placed to carry out," argues Clardy.

"Just because a way of relating might deviate from well-established social norms like monogamy, this does not mean that they don't have considerable value—morally, socially, or politically."

More information: Justin L. Clardy, Why It's OK to Not Be Monogamous (2023). [DOI: 10.4324/9781003375036](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003375036)

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