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# Three or More

Reflections on Polyamory and  
Consensual Non-monogamy



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## Reflections on Polyamory and Consensual Non-monogamy

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May this booklet help start the Christian conversation on this topic and equip us to engage in the conversation well.

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# What are Polyamory and Consensual Non-monogamy?

# 1

Zack and Jess met through mutual friends. After nine months dating, they rented a flat together. A few years into their relationship, Zoe became close friends with the couple and it was not long before the relationship became sexual. All three felt this was more than just sex and acknowledged a growing emotional connection. Two years after Zack and Jess moved in together, Zoe joined them in the flat and they now live as a throuple, sharing their lives, their home and their bed. Their relationship is closed: they have agreed not to pursue any other romantic or sexual relationships. Zach, Jess and Zoe are in a polyamorous relationship.

Francesca is at the centre of a vee with a boyfriend, Jimmy, and a girlfriend, Laura. Jimmy and Laura get on well but are not in a relationship with each other. Jimmy has other girlfriends. Laura prefers to have one partner at a time. Francesca, Jimmy and Laura are in a polyamorous relationship.

Dave and Angela have been married for 30 years. They feel their marriage has become a bit stale. One day, Angela read an article about open marriages which claimed opening a relationship can breathe new life into a struggling marriage. Dave and Angela decided to try making their marriage open. Now, Angela has a boyfriend, Tom, and Dave has had several on and off girlfriends. Dave and Angela are in a consensually non-monogamous relationship.

These stories might sound like something out of a dramatic TV soap or the gossip column of a magazine, but polyamorous and consensually non-monogamous relationships are becoming increasingly common and increasingly accepted in the world around us. What can seem surprising now could soon seem unremarkable.

## What are Polyamory and Consensual Non-monogamy?

Polyamory is the practice of engaging in polyamorous relationships. There are three elements which must usually be present for a relationship to be considered polyamorous:

- Three or more people are involved.
- The relationship is emotionally, romantically and, often although not always, sexually intimate.

- Everyone involved is aware of and has given their consent to the form of the relationship. This distinguishes polyamory from infidelity or cheating.

Many assume that polyamory is just about sex, but those who identify as polyamorous stress that the heart of polyamory is about love and emotional connection. Some relationships identified as polyamorous are non-sexual.

Polyamory is an example of the broader category of consensual non-monogamy (CNM), although the term polyamory is sometimes used for this broader category too. CNM encompasses any sexual relationship where all parties agree that the relationship is not exclusive. This can include sexual relationships where there is little emphasis on emotional connection.

## A Glossary of Terms

### Hierarchical Relationships

An approach to polyamory where some relationships, usually those with a longer history, are prioritized.

### Open Relationships

Partners (however many are in the primary relationship) allow each other additional sexual and/or romantic connections. Those in a polyamorous relationship that is not open might describe themselves as practicing *polyfidelity*.

### Throuple

A relationship between three people. Sometimes known as a *triad*.

### Metamour

Someone who is in a relationship with your partner but with whom you are not in a romantic or sexual relationship.

### Nesting Relationship

A relationship in which partners live together.

### Solo Polyamory

An individual who engages in multiple relationships but without a primary partner. They may view themselves as their primary partner.

## Why Should Christians Think about Polyamory?

Research suggests that acceptance and practice of polyamory and CNM is growing. In the UK, 39% of adults think that humans are not naturally monogamous and 34% think that polyamory is morally acceptable.<sup>1</sup> In the US,

only a little over half of adults (55%) say their ideal relationship is completely monogamous, with that figure being lowest among men and younger generations.<sup>2</sup> A third of Americans believe that open marriages are an acceptable form of relationship.<sup>3</sup>

There is little reliable data on current practice, but back in 2012 researchers estimated that 4–5% of the US population were in consensually non-monogamous relationships.<sup>4</sup> That was more than the percentage identifying as LGBT at the time (3.4%).<sup>5</sup> There are reasons to think that this figure, even when first suggested, may be an underestimate.

Dating apps reveal increasing interest in polyamory and CNM. In 2023, Tinder started to allow users to indicate an interest in polyamorous, open or ethically non-monogamous relationships. Feeld, ‘a dating app for the curious,’ reports that searches for ‘polyamory’ and ‘consensual non-monogamy’ have increased by 400% among women.<sup>6</sup> Online discussion has also increased: subscriptions to the polyamory discussion board on Reddit have quadrupled in the last five years.<sup>7</sup>

Portrayals of polyamorous relationships in popular media are becoming increasingly common. Perhaps most famous is the series *You Me Her*, an American-Canadian polyromantic comedy. Other examples include the BBC’s *Wanderlust* and *Trigonometry*, and Channel 4’s *The Couple Next Door*. Polyamorous characters and relationships have also been seen in shows such as *Gossip Girl*, Netflix’s *Sex Education*, and Australian soap *Neighbours*.

A growing number of celebrities are speaking about polyamory and CNM. Will and Jada Pinkett Smith have spoken of their open marriage,<sup>8</sup> and their daughter Willow Smith has come out as polyamorous.<sup>9</sup> Retired professional boxer David Haye seems to have been in several consensually non-monogamous relationships.<sup>10</sup> TV presenter Carol Vorderman has spoken about being romantically involved with multiple ‘special friends.’<sup>11</sup> And Whoopie Goldberg has alluded to involvement in polyamory.<sup>12</sup>

These examples from culture are important because new ideas portrayed and embraced in popular media and among celebrities often then become more widely accepted among the general population.

In the Christian world, some are putting forward arguments for the acceptance of polyamory (see chapter four). It is also arguable that the moral logic used to defend Christian acceptance of same-sex marriage in recent years would struggle to argue against polyamorous relationships, and so Christian support for polyamory is likely to grow.

**Christian support for polyamory is likely to grow**