



# Manchester Metropolitan University

---

En-Griffiths, David and Cardoso, Daniel and En, Boka and Barker, Meg-John and Muscarina, Sina and Pallotta-Chiarolli, Maria (2018) Editorial: Non-Monogamies and Contemporary Intimacies. *Graduate Journal of Social Science*, 14. pp. 4-7. ISSN 1572-3763

---

**Downloaded from:** <http://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/624045/>

**Publisher:** EBSCO Publishing

**Usage rights:** Creative Commons: Attribution-No Derivative Works 3.0

Please cite the published version

<https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk>



## Editorial

David En-Griffiths, Daniel Cardoso,  
Boka En, Meg-John Barker, Sina Muscarina,  
and Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli

---

It was 2014, the 10-year anniversary of the Hamburg 'International Conference on Polyamory and Mono-normativity', organised by Marianne Piper and Robin Bauer in November 2005, was coming up, and a group of activists, artists and academics came together to try to think about issues of contemporary intimacy, specifically non-monogamies and polyamory. We felt that it was high time for another conference to be held in Europe, and even though we were acutely aware of the importance of entering and making these topics visible in other spaces, be them academic, activist or artistic, we also wanted to create a space where we did not have to start each and every intervention with a justification of the importance of this topic or with constant and redundant disclaimers about different kinds of non-monogamy.

We wanted this conference to echo that first one – one where activists, artists and academics came together for three days, where LGBTIQ\* people were very much represented, and where issues that are still relevant now (polyamory and neoliberalism, polyamory and responsibility, polyamory and the queer movement, etc.) were already being discussed.

Coordinating over the Internet, we set up an international organising committee and settled on a name: the *Non-Monogamies and Contemporary Intimacies* conference was meant to bring together not only people from academia, activism, psychotherapy/counselling, art, and more, but also to emphasise that there are transformations going on that go beyond various forms of consensual (or non-consensual) non-monogamy. Our purpose with organising the NMCI conference was not just to organise a conference but rather to kick-start community building and knowledge production as well as trying to create an event with a particular ethics of clearing a space in academia. We also felt that an excessive emphasis



on the global North and specifically on the anglosphere was alienating many researchers and overly simplifying our intellectual frameworks.

Our work is not the first of its kind, and it owes a debt of inspiration to previous work, and the spaces this work, and several past projects created, within academia. The aforementioned conference in Hamburg is one such case, as are the International Conferences in the USA, the Polyamory Day in the UK, the activism being done all over the world, the INTIMATE research project; a special issue of *Sexualities* (Haritaworn, Lin, & Klesse, 2006), the book *Understanding Non-Monogamies* (Barker and Langdridge, 2010), and many others – too many to mention here.

The name of this project is a two-part affair, and a complicated one at that. On the one hand we have ‘non-monogamies’ (in themselves a very diverse set of practices and identities), and on the other we have contemporary intimacies. Of course, it can be argued that any intimacy that exists today is, by definition, a contemporary intimacy. As a result, the use of this term was always bound create some confusion. We did not wish to dismiss all this confusion. In fact, we wished to work on it. Through such confusion, we hope to further demonstrate how intimacies are changed and are changing, as well as how different spaces and times construct contemporaneity. A clean dichotomous break between pre-modern or traditional intimacies on the one side, and contemporary intimacies on the other, misses out on the (dis)continuities and the co-constitution of all intimacies, on their negotiated and dialogical dimensions.

However, too wide or vague a definition of contemporaneity risks the notion of ‘contemporary intimacies’ losing its analytical value. Rather than take a strict prescriptivist position that distorts the complexity of the world we’re trying to look at into clarity (Law, 2004), or adopting so wide a definition that we lose the ability to analyse that world, a third option is found in collections such as this one.

Knowledge, of which our analytical categories are a component, can be seen as emerging out of sustained discussion and dialogue within and between communities concerned with the knowledge in question (Collins, 2009). The NMCI conference attempted to provide a space for such dialogue, a space to work out what one might mean by ‘non-monogamies and contemporary intimacies’. At a glance, the papers in this collection may appear to focus only on one specific form of non-monogamy: all of them are, on the surface, about polyamory. However, they all believe that discussions on this topic have wider implications for how we

talk about, study and analyse contemporary relationships as a whole, and they make these connections between the general and the specific in different ways.

**Michel Raab's** paper, for example, takes an empirical look at polyamorous relationships using data gained from interviews. The focus for Raab is on what the distribution of care in polyamorous relationships can tell us about their potential for encouraging a more equitable division of labour in relationships between men and women, and for wider liberatory changes to the way contemporary societies structure relationships.

**Leehee Rothschild** comes from a similarly feminist standpoint, but Rothschild's paper is more theoretical. Taking their lead from Adrienne Rich's 'lesbian continuum' (1980) Rothschild proposes analysing relationships through the concepts of 'polyamorous continuum' and 'polyamorous existence', in order to deconstruct the dominance of mononormative ideas even within the institution of monogamy itself. They argue for the usefulness of modelling monogamous relationships on the norms of polyamorous relationships.

**Jingshu Zhu**, on the other hand, comes from the opposite direction. Using data gathered from a project on marriages in China between non-heterosexual men and heterosexual women, they offer a critique of some key concepts that come up in discussions of what it means to be in a polyamorous relationship. They interrogate the usefulness of concepts such as 'radical honesty' and 'authenticity' to question whether their usefulness may be more limited than presumed by some activists in polyamorous communities.

**Nataša Pivec's** paper looks more closely at cultural products rather than taking a broad view of culture itself by presenting a comparative analysis of polyamory in film with a particular focus on Tom Tykwer's film *Three*. Pivec contrasts *Three* and its representation of a stale monogamous relationship revitalised by the introduction of a third partner with more common representations of non-monogamy that tend to represent non-monogamy as a temporary, and often punished, break in the continuous existence of a monogamous default.

Finally, **Joanna Iwanowska's** paper draws on the work of Aristotle (350 B.C.) to advance a new tool for the analysis of polyamorous relationships. Crucially, their model emphasises the importance of non-romantic connections between romantic partners of polyamorous people that are not romantic partners to each other (metamours). On the basis of this, Iwanowska argues that these 'metamours' and

one's willingness to enter into these relationships are the key to understanding polyamory, what it is and how it operates in practice.

This collection of papers offers a wide range of perspectives and approaches to the study of polyamory and non-monogamy. They are a snapshot of ongoing discussions in the study of non-monogamy – a place to start when trying to define what this field of study, and the relationships in question, might mean.

## References

- Aristotle (350. B.C.E.). *Physics*. (R. P. Hardie & R. K. Gaye, Trans.). Retrieved from <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/physics.4.iv.html>
- Barker, M., & Langdridge, D. (Eds.). (2010). *Understanding non-monogamies*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Collins, P. 2009. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Haritaworn, J., Lin, C.-j., Klesse, C. (Eds.). (2006). Polyamory. Special issue of *Sexualities*, 9(5).
- Law, J. (2004). *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, 5(4), 631–660.