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## Research Article

# “Polygamous perception” and couple’s relational choice: definitions, socio-cultural contexts, psychopathological profiles, and therapeutic orientations. Clinical evidence

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Starting from the concept of ‘polygamy’, this research investigates the perception and motivations behind this relational choice by couples, distinguishing between various adaptive forms, including cuckolding and troilism.

**Methods:** Clinical interview and administration of psychodiagnostic tests for personality disorders (PICI-1TA) and individual sexual matrix survey (PSM-1).

**Results:** The research on a population sample of 540 heterosexual people, aged between 18 and 72, of Italian nationality, with Italian ancestors in the last three generations, sexually active, with experience of at least two years, in a stable affective/ sentimental relationship with another person for at least one year and with a specific declaration of monogamy or polygamy, showed strong levels of dispersion of phenomenological reality linked to the polygamous world, strongly compromised by preconceptions, prejudices and subjective psychopathological conditions. In particular, if we then compare the 81 positive subjects with the results of the PICI-1 clinical interview, in relation to the PSM-1 (section A, B, C, E), we discover that 100% of those subjects present at least 3 dysfunctional traits of cluster B personality disorders (in particular borderline and narcissist), as well as other traits belonging to anxiety, depressive, phobic and somatic disorders, demonstrating that a good part of polygamous subjects are unaware of their dysfunctional clinical condition, probably deserving of specific psychotherapeutic support.

**Conclusions:** The research revealed the presence of a strong prejudice and preconception about polygamy, which is almost always confused with cuckolding or other forms of dysfunctional love. The reasons that justify the monogamous choice are often related to the idea that polygamy does not involve love, or that sex is more important than love, or that the important than love, or that social judgment is a deterrent to a free and conscious choice, or that jealousy and possessiveness prevent people from opening up to polygamous visions. Despite the fact that 63.84% (336/540) state that they are in favor of experimenting with casual threesome sex, as long as the partner is not present or does not interact with other people or does not interact with other people. The research also showed that in the young people selected, curiosity and the desire to discover make them lean more towards the idea of polygamous discovery (even if they often fall into fantasies and thoughts closer to dysfunctional forms); however, it is only in adulthood and maturity that However, it is only in adulthood and maturity that this relational system (polygamy) manages to take root, also thanks to possible individual traumatic pasts.

## Contents of the manuscript

### Introduction and background

Starting from the concept of 'polygamy', this research investigates the perception and motivations behind this relational choice by couples, distinguishing between various adaptive forms, including cuckolding and troilism.

Polygamy, in fact, can be expressed in various forms, which are very complex and often interconnected; for this reason, there is a great deal of confusion among monogamous people, who often associate polygamous conduct as sick, immoral or contrary to morality.

The behaviour of voluntarily and knowingly inducing one's partner to perform sexual acts with other people, to receive emotional and sexual gratification, is labeled with the English term (but of French derivation) improper, derogatory and incorrect of "cuckolding", even if the correct terminology of clinical matrix is "troilism" [1-3]. In the animal kingdom, this practice is rather studied about fertilization possibilities and the increase in opportunities for procreative purposes, especially in mammals and birds [4] and less in the marine kingdom [5]. About human beings, the topic under examination has been debated above all in humanistic and literary fields [5], while clinical areas have begun to interest you recently, especially in terms of relational areas, flows of consciousness, and emotional material [6]. This brief representation of the polygamous world helps us to better define the contours of the phenomenon and its existential reasons.

In fact, *a first myth that needs to be dispelled is that the cuckold / cuckqueen (the one who gets aroused by seeing his or her partner having sex with other people) is a form of polygamy.* Nothing could be further from the truth. The phenomenon of "cuck" is in fact a structured paraphilia [7] where the subject who is affected takes pleasure in sharing his or her partner with other people, turning him or her into a sexual object to be enjoyed and used for his or her own narcissistic pleasure (or maladaptive narcissism). Here there is no sharing, altruism or awareness of a shared experience, but there is only the precise will (conscious or unconscious) to use the body of one's partner to satisfy one's own sexual pleasure, one's own animal impulse that goes beyond the emotional and/or sentimental bond with the partner. The reasons for such a clear division from the polygamous world are mainly psychological [8,9] (and not biological) motivations [10-12] underlying the position of cuckolding: unconscious desire for fertility; unconscious desire to improve the genetics of one's family; unconscious desire to increase the couple's chances of fertility [13,14]; unconscious desire to receive parental care from several males [15,16]; unconscious desire to avoid betrayal or metabolize the one suffered [16]; unconscious desire to be a victim of pain and psychological humiliation, according to a masochistic scheme [16]; unconscious desire to live bisexual or homosexual drive experiences [17].

*A second myth to be debunked concerns polygamous relationships and the false perception that there is no 'love' simply because the normative rules of fidelity, typical of monogamous couples, have been broken.*

Both for cuckolding and troilism, including the hypotheses of open couples, polyamory and polygamy, the results of scientific research that examine a statistically significant sample are missing, about any psychopathologies related to these relational and sexual activities [1]. However, the data in our possession allow to make some substantial differences, related to the perceptive-reactive system [18] of the patient and his way of reacting concerning the environment around him [19]. The positive affirmation of even just one of these questions should induce him to begin a targeted psychotherapy path, possibly with a cognitive-behavioral or strategic approach [18], to find answers to his doubts and clarify any information gaps.

### Research objectives and methods

In the present research, all the motivational hypotheses that lead the population sample to prefer or not choose the polygamous relationship were investigated.

The phases of the research were divided as follows:

- 1) Selection of the population sample divided into three groups (A, B, C) as indicated in section 3 of this research work.
- 2) Administration of the PICI-ITA to each population group.
- 3) Data processing following administration.
- 4) Administration of the PSM-1 (sections A, B, C) [20], to each population group.
- 5) Data processing following administration.
- 6) Administration of the PSM-1 (section E).
- 7) Data processing following administration, in relation to the data that emerged in the third and fifth phases of the research.

All participants were guaranteed anonymity and this research has no financial backer; it's independent and does not present any conflicts of interest. This research was conducted in accordance with the principles contained in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki.

This research work aims to answer the following three questions:

1. What are the main reasons for choosing monogamy?
2. Are there differences determined by geographical location that determine the monogamous or polygamous choice?
3. Among polygamous subjects, how many actually tend towards the dysfunctional condition?

### Setting and participants

The requirements decided for the selection of the sample population are:



- 1) Age between 18 years and 72 years.
- 2) Italian nationality, with Italian ancestors in the last three generations.
- 3) Sexually active, with experience of at least 2 years.
- 4) In a stable emotional / sentimental relationship with another person for at least 1 year.
- 5) Declaration of monogamy, dialogical polygamy or polygamy.
- 6) Declaration of heterosexuality.

The selected setting, taking into account the protracted pandemic period (already in progress since the beginning of the present research), is the online platform via Skype and Videocall Whatsapp, both for the clinical interview and for the administration.

The present research work was carried out from April 2020 to December 2020.

The selected population sample is 540 participants, divided into three groups:

- a) Openly monogamous subjects, divided as follows: 180 males and 180 females.
- b) Subjects in a monogamous relationship but in favour of a polygamous perspective, divided as follows: 60 males and 60 females.
- c) Openly polygamous subjects, divided as follows: 30 males and 30 females.

In turn, for individual groups, the following were subdivided by age (in three bands):

### Results, limits and possible conflicts of interest

Following the selection of the chosen population sample (first phase) we proceeded to the administration of the PICI-1TA questionnaire [21-23] (second phase) and to the processing of the data (third phase), in order to obtain the clinical findings necessary and useful for understanding any psychopathologies not declared in the PSM-1 (section A). The data obtained substantially confirmed what was already known, with greater

accuracy with regard to dysfunctional personality traits (which will be better clarified by the data obtained from the polygamic perception questionnaire).

The research continues with the administration (fourth phase) and processing (fifth phase) of the PSM-1 (sections B, C, E), which better clarifies the participants' dysfunctional sexual behaviour, also in terms of the data obtained from the last questionnaire.

The research concludes with the comparison of psychometric results, which allows the following questions to be answered:

### What are the main reasons for choosing monogamy?

Research has shown that

a) In group A, the triad of motivations justifying the monogamous choice relate to the preconception and prejudice that in polygamy there is no love (36.12%, 129 people of which 48 are male and 81 female), no fidelity (31.92%, 114 people of which 68 are male and 46 female) and that the thought of sexually sharing a partner is an unbearable thought (19.6%, 70 people of which 51 are male and 19 female), for a total of 87.64% (313/360 people, of which 167/180 are male and 146/180 female), despite the fact that 63.84% (336/540 of the total) you declare that you are in favour of experiencing at least once an occasional sexual threesome as long as the partner is not present or does not interact with other persons. In the younger age groups, the monogamous model is often challenged by curiosity and discovery, while in the more adult and mature age groups there are deep-rooted prejudices resulting from the socio-cultural and family system of reference.

b) In group B, the triad of motivations that justify the monogamous choice relate to the preconception and prejudice that in polygamy sex is more important than love (39.76%, 71 people of which 27 are male and 43 female), that the partner has more opportunities to fall in love with other people (34.16%, 61 people of which 29 are male and 32 female) and that the judgement of family members and people is too heavy a burden to deal with (21.84%, 39 people of which 29 are male and 10 female), for a total of 95.76% (171/180 people, of which 85/90 are male and 85/90 female). In the younger age groups, the monogamous model is often challenged by curiosity and discovery, while in the more adult and mature age groups there are well-rooted prejudices resulting from the socio-cultural and family system of reference, even if individual experiences

		MONOGAMY (cluster A)			DIALOGICAL POLYGAMY (cluster B)			POLYGAMY (cluster C)		
AGE		18-36	37-54	55-72	37-54	55-72	55-72	18-36	37-54	55-72
SEX	Male	60	60	60	30	30	30	15	15	15
	Female	0	60	60	30	30	30	15	15	15
GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION	North Italy (Valle d'Aosta, Piemonte, Liguria, Lombardia, Veneto, Trentino, Friuli, Emilia)	M20 F20	M20 F20	M20 F20	M10 F10	M10 F10	M10 F10	M5 F5	M5 F5	M5 F5
	Centre Italy (Toscana, Umbria, Marche, Lazio, Abruzzo, Molise)	M20 F20	M20 F20	M20 F20	M10 F10	M10 F10	M10 F10	M5 F5	M5 F5	M5 F5
	South Italy and Islands (Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicilia, Sardegna)	M20 F10	M20 F10	M20 F10	M10 F5	M10 F5	M10 F5	M5 F5	M5 F5	M5 F5



manage to help open the mind, especially in those people who have not remained resident in the same territorial areas.

c) In group C, the polygamic choice is well structured and punctual and during the clinical interview (in the administration of the PICI-1) counter-deductions to the preconceptions and prejudices indicated as response hypotheses in the PSM-1 (sections B, E) emerged:

- *In the polygamous relationship there is no love.* In fact, in polygamy the couple shares a stable and lasting emotional bond, where sex is experienced as a game and not as the crowning glory of the romantic relationship. Everything is shared and nothing is left to individual selfishness, which, on the contrary, often happens in cuckolding where primary and instinctual needs prevail over feelings and respect.
- *In polygamous relationships there is no respect for the roles of the couple in relation to third parties.* In fact, in polygamy there is a precise identification of roles, where the couple is the judge-referee of every third party's behaviour, to be established before every meeting or before every experience, in full respect of each other's differences and needs, which does not happen in cuckolding where one of the two partners tends to manage the situation personally, forcing the other partner.
- *In polygamous relationships, more importance is attached to sex than to love.* In reality, the priority in polygamy is the well-being and happiness of the couple, creating situations and circumstances that can alleviate the pressures and frustrations of certain fantasies that in monogamy would be silent, hidden or imprisoned by prejudice, preconception and social morality. Sex becomes a game, an instrument of pleasure for the couple (and not for the individual, as happens in cuckolding), with mutual respect, far from selfishness and social obligations.
- *In the polygamous relationship, the partner is a sexual object of exchange in order to have sex with other people.* In fact, in polygamy it is quite the opposite. People outside the couple become sexual objects, unless one approaches polyamory, but this is a choice of the couple and their sentimental needs. This prejudice, on the other hand, relates to the conduct of the cuckold, who, having to satisfy his own pleasure, comes to use (often unconsciously) his partner for instinctual and primordial purposes.
- *There is no fidelity in polygamous relationships.* In fact, the polygamous relationship is based on honesty, sincerity and sharing every moment, before-during-after experiences; in cuckolding, on the other hand, there are often omissions and lies to finalise the goal.
- *Socially, the polygamous relationship is seen as something sick and perverse.* In reality, polygamy is often confused with more dysfunctional forms of love, such as cuckolding

and shared and open love where the underlying motivations are the most diverse, such as the fear of a stable relationship, the fear of being betrayed or the need to feel free to live several affective and/or sexual stories at the same time for needs of anxiety related to one's dysfunctional personality traits.

- *In the polygamous relationship one loves more than one person.* In reality, in polygamy there are different forms of relationships, some exclusively platonic, others exclusively sexual. It depends on the relationship system chosen by the couple and for the couple.
- *In the polygamous relationship I have to share my partner with other people and this thought is unbearable for me (jealousy and possessiveness).* In reality, this position presupposes selfishness and a sense of territoriality, typical of monogamy, which often demands a sense of belonging to a partner that is greater or superior to what the other person actually feels. Admitting the contrary would be intolerable and would create a wound to the partner, which therefore forces him to modify his internal model by using techniques of omission or more or less voluntary lies to keep the relational system going, perhaps because there is already a more or less stratified affective and/or sentimental bond.
- *In polygamous relationships, I am afraid that my partner may fall in love more easily with another person.* In reality, in polygamy the values of bonding are more important than those of union. Bonding is about honesty, sincerity, loyalty and sharing the relationship, whereas in union the drives, instincts and needs are stronger. Sex becomes an outlet to focus more on the relationship and therefore the bond is less spoiled by omissions and lies that if discovered would ruin the relationship and trust between the two people.
- *In the polygamous relationship, opening myself sexually to other people, I feel guilt/anguish/shame.* In fact, precisely to avoid media and social exposure, the polygamy choice is never publicised, so as to avoid unnecessary confrontation and gratuitous judgement.
- *Polygamy is just a perversion.* In reality, polygamy is a relational model; cuckolding is a paraphilia. If, in the polygamist model, the partners experience more or less dysfunctional paraphilias, that has to do with their personality model and not with the relational model itself.
- *My family / my children would never accept that I live in a polygamous relationship.* Polygamy, being strongly criticised socially, is a choice more of the heart than of the head, and therefore certain disagreements and critical points should be dealt with within the family, or in any case should be experienced with respect for individual realities, without excessive publicity or overexposure.

- In a polygamous relationship, I am afraid of contracting sexual infections or diseases more easily. In reality, in both monogamy and polygamy, the risk of contracting sexual infections depends on one's sexual conduct. Exposure to a high number of consummated sexual intercourse is certainly an element that raises the risk of contagion, but if you use the necessary precautions the risk becomes minimal.

*I want it to remain just a sexual fantasy because I would not be able to handle it for too long or I would have implications that would not leave me comfortable.* Such a position presupposes a deep-rooted prejudice in the person, which leads them to believe that polygamy is more of a source of stress; however, the targeted interviews reveal a stronger and more solid emotional and sexual bond in polygamous couples than in monogamous ones.

In the younger age group, the monogamous model is often challenged by curiosity and discovery (resulting from exposure to dysfunctional family models or traumatic events), while in the older and more mature age groups, the well-rooted prejudices among monogamous people are completely undermined by the new relational model assumed, often due to traumatic events in the past that in readjustment have opened the door to this construction.

#### Are there differences determined by geographical location that determine the monogamous or polygamous choice?

The research has shown that:

- In group A we find a higher percentage (from 3 to 4 points,) of monogamous choice especially in the regions of Central-Southern Italy, to become almost absolute in the Islands (from 4 to 5 points), probably because the classical socio-cultural model and the strong Catholic influence in relation to the conjugal duties of fidelity affects significantly.
- In group B we find a higher percentage (from 3 to 4 points) especially in the regions of Central-Southern Italy, to become almost absolute in the Islands (from 4 to 5 points). Here too the reasons given in point a) are shared.
- In group C, the polygamous choice is well structured and punctual, almost entirely in the North of Italy, while in the Regions of Central-Southern Italy polygamy is often experienced as a perversion to be hidden, of which one must feel shame and modesty.

#### Among polygamous subjects, how many actually tend towards the dysfunctional condition?

The research showed that, out of the sample of 90 subjects (45 males and 45 females), 72.9% (81 subjects) present a score higher than the threshold value of 33/60 and therefore present a dysfunctional condition closer to cuckolding. If we then compare the 81 positive subjects with the results of the PICI-1 clinical interview, in relation to the PSM-1 (section A, B, C, E), we discover that 100% of those subjects present at least 4 dysfunctional traits of cluster B personality disorders (in particular borderline and narcissist), in addition to other traits

belonging to anxiety, depressive, phobic and somatic disorders. Another figure that appears markedly significant concerns the marking of the question about infidelity (PSM-1, Section C); commits adultery:

- 86.84% (52/60) of the male population aged 18 to 36 years in group "A", with the following geographical distribution: 18 N, 10 C, 24 S;
- 78.49% (47/60) of the male population aged 37-54 in group "A", with the following geographical distribution: 14 N, 12 C, 21 S;
- 48.43% (29/60) of the male population, aged 55 to 72, in group "A" with the following geographical distribution: 11 N, 6 C, 12 S;
- 69.93% (21/30) of the male population, aged between 18 and 36, in group "B", with the following geographical distribution: 7 N, 6 C, 8 S;
- 63.27% (19/30) of the male population aged 37-54 in group "B", with the following geographical distribution: 6 N, 5 C, 8 S;
- 39.96% (12/30) of the male population, aged 55 to 72, in group "B", with the following geographical distribution: 4 N, 2 C, 6 S;
- 33.34% (5/15) of the male population, aged between 18 and 36, in group "C", with the following geographical distribution: 2 N, 0 C, 3 S;
- 33.34% (3/15) of the male population, aged 37-54, in group "C", with the following geographical distribution: 1 N, 0 C, 2 S;
- 0% (0/15) of the male population, aged 55 to 72, in group "C";
- 85.17% (51/60) of the female population, aged between 18 and 36, in group "A", with the following geographical distribution: 17 N, 11 C, 23 S;
- 91.85% (55/60) of the female population aged 37-54 in group "A", with the following geographical distribution: 16 N, 15 C, 24 S;
- 21.71% (13/60) of the female population, aged 55 to 72, in group "A", with the following geographical distribution: 4 N, 4 C, 5 S;
- 79.92% (24/30) of the female population, aged between 18 and 36, of group "B", with the following geographical distribution: 8 N, 8 C, 8 S;
- 86.58% (26/30) of the female population aged 37-54 in group "B", with the following geographical distribution: 9 N, 9 C, 8 S;
- 33.33% (10/30) of the female population aged 55 to 72 in group "B", with the following geographical distribution: 3 N, 4 C, 3 S;



p) 46.69% (7/15) of the female population, aged between 18 and 36, in group "C", with the following geographical distribution: 4 N, 2 C, 1 S;

q) 13.34% (2/15) of the female population, aged 37-54, in group "C", with the following geographical distribution: 0 N, 0 C, 2 S;

r) 0% (0/15) of the female population, aged between 55 and 72, in group "C".

From the analysis of the results it can be easily seen that:

a) in monogamy, cheating is more frequent, and tends to fade as the couple approaches the total polygamous condition;

b) there is more cheating among young and adult men than among mature men;

c) men from southern Italy (in groups A and B) and women (in group B) from central Italy tend to cheat more frequently.

#### The main limitations of the research are two:

a) The use of a population sample that is not sufficiently representative; however, the data obtained are very interesting and deserve to be further investigated with a larger population sample.

b) The PICI-1 and PSM-1 [24] are not yet standardised psychometric instruments but are proposed, despite the excellent results obtained and already published in international scientific journals [21-22].

## Discussion and Conclusions

The research on a population sample of 540 people, aged between 18 and 72, of Italian nationality, with Italian ancestors in the last three generations, sexually active, with experience of at least two years, in a stable affective/ sentimental relationship with another person for at least one year and with a specific declaration of monogamy or polygamy, demonstrated.

1. A strong prejudice and preconception about polygamy, often confused with cuckolding or dysfunctional forms of love.
2. In northern Italy, polygamy is more successful for socio-cultural and environmental reasons, while in southern Italy the classic idea of the family and monotheistic religious roots play a fundamental role. In group A, the triad of motivations justifying the monogamous choice relate to the preconception and prejudice that in polygamy there is no love (36.12%, 129 people of which 48 are male and 81 female), no fidelity (31.92%, 114 people of which 68 are male and 46 female) and that the thought of sexually sharing a partner is an unbearable thought (19.6%, 70 people of which 51 are male and 19 female), for a total of 87.64% (313/360 people, of which 167/180 are male and 146/180 female), despite the fact

that 63.84% (336/540 of the total) you declare that you are in favour of experiencing at least once an occasional sexual threesome as long as the partner is not present or does not interact with other persons. In group B, the triad of motivations that justify the monogamous choice relate to the preconception and prejudice that in polygamy sex is more important than love (39.76%, 71 people of which 27 are male and 43 female), that the partner has more opportunities to fall in love with other people (34.16%, 61 people of which 29 are male and 32 female) and that the judgement of family members and people is too heavy a burden to deal with (21.84%, 39 people of which 29 are male and 10 female), for a total of 95.76% (171/180 people, of which 85/90 are male and 85/90 female).

3. In young people, curiosity and the desire to discover make them tend more towards the idea of polygamous discovery (falling, however, into dysfunctional and paraphiliac forms) but only in adulthood and maturity does this relational system manage to become more rooted, also thanks to possible individual traumatic pasts [23-27].
4. On the sample of 90 subjects (45 males and 45 females), 72.9% (81 subjects) present a score higher than the threshold value of 33/60 and therefore present a dysfunctional condition closer to cuckolding. If we then compare the 81 positive subjects with the results of the PICI-1 clinical interview, in relation to the PSM-1 (section A, B, C, E), we find that 100% of those subjects present at least 4 dysfunctional traits of cluster B personality disorders (in particular borderline and narcissistic), in addition to other traits belonging to anxiety, depressive, phobic and somatic disorders [28-53], demonstrating that a good proportion of polygamous subjects are unaware of their dysfunctional clinical condition, probably deserving of specific psychotherapeutic support [18].
5. With regard to the issue of 'betrayal', in monogamy, betrayal is more frequent, and tends to diminish as the couple approaches the total polygamous condition; there is more betrayal in the young and adult groups than in the mature ones; men from southern Italy (in groups A and B) and women (in group B) from central Italy tend to betray more frequently.

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