



# Identifying Context-Related Socio-Cultural Predictors of Negative Attitudes Toward Polyamory

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## Abstract

There is scarce research regarding attitudes toward polyamory in different socio-cultural contexts. This study examines the role of socio-cultural variance and the situatedness of particular variables (i.e., attitudes toward monogamy, religiosity, political orientation, attitudes toward polyamorists' parental competence, and concern for polyamorous children's welfare) in predicting negative attitudes towards polyamory. Two hundred and fifty participants were recruited for this study. A between-subject, correlational design was employed. The findings of this study only partially support the role of context-related socio-cultural and social-psychological factors in determining participants' attitudes toward polyamory. This study contributes to the literature and research in this field by reporting the transformative potential of context-related socio-cultural and social-psychological factors that affect commonly shared attitudes toward polyamory.

**Keywords** Polyamory · Consensual non-monogamy · Mono-normativity · Attitudes toward polyamory scale · Stigma

## Introduction

Even though consensual non-monogamy (CNM) relationships have been the target of public media and academic attention, they remain largely demonized and misunderstood (Barker & Landridge, 2010; Cardoso et al., 2021; Matsick et al., 2013). The concept of mono-normativity, meaning the societal beliefs and cultural assumptions that exclusive coupled relationships are natural and, therefore, optimal, excludes and

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pathologizes any relationship styles and sexual behaviors outside of monogamous coupling (Moors et al., 2021a, 2021b). This monogamous model is supposed to be the most 'natural' relationship style highly related to love and intimacy in Western cultures (Ritchie & Barker, 2007). In this way, mono-normativity echoes the dominant assumption of monogamy and misrepresents CNM relationships through a language of infidelity, jealousy, and cheating (Pieper & Bauer, 2005; Ritchie & Barker, 2007). Rubin (2007) argues that the highest societal status is attached to heterosexual married couples, while sexuality that is normal and natural should be monogamous. Thus, relationships and sexual practices that confront these norms seem unnatural and unwanted.

The current study promotes research on attitudes-based discrimination towards a specific type of consensually non-monogamous relationship, namely polyamory, and also examines the impact of context-related socio-cultural factors in stigma formation regarding polyamorous relationships. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, polyamory has received no scientific attention in the Greek socio-cultural context.

### **Consensually Non-Monogamous (CNM) Relationships**

Many individuals may engage in romantically exclusive (social monogamy) and sexually exclusive (sexual monogamy) relationships, whereas others may engage in relationships with varying levels of romantic and/or sexual openness (consensual non-monogamy). Different types of consensual non-monogamy include open relationships, swinging relationships, and polyamorous relationships (Moors et al., 2021a, 2021b). The first two types of consensual non-monogamy support sex with multiple concurrent partners while at the same time disallowing emotional intimacy with these partners. However, because friendships in open and swinging relationships appear to be common, they can not be categorized as solely sexual relationships (Kimberly & Hans, 2017; Wood et al., 2018).

As regards interest and engagement in consensual non-monogamy Hauptert et al. (2016) report that past engagement did not differ greatly on age, education level, income, political affiliation, and race/ethnicity. However, two sociodemographic factors emerged. Men were more likely to have previously engaged in consensual non-monogamy. Research data show that this reported desire may be either a consequence of gendered dating norms (Moors et al., 2015) or a constitution of an evolutionary mechanism for human mating (Mogilski et al., 2015). Also, sexual minority individuals were more likely to engage in consensual non-monogamy than heterosexual individuals because sexual minority individuals questioned the heteronormative model of relationships and family formation (Fairbrother et al., 2019; Moors et al., 2014). Current estimates of sexually non-monogamous relationships or relationships in which all individuals in the relationship agree to engage in multiple sexual, romantic, and/or emotional relationships with others in the U.S. range between 2 and 23% (Rubel & Burleigh, 2020).

Consensually non-monogamous (CNM) relationships oppose contemporary social science theories of intimacy, such as the investment model of relationships (Conley et al., 2017) and the attachment theory (Moors et al., 2021a, 2021b). In

comparison to monogamy, CNM relationships are considered less suitable and more sexually risky (Conley et al., 2013), contradicting research data showing that individuals in CNM relationships are more emotionally intimate, happy, and more likely to practice safe sex than their monogamous counterparts (Cox et al., 2013; Hutzler et al., 2015).

Considering that there is no difference in relationship qualities between monogamy and CNM relationship styles, the negative evaluations of CNM may be considered inaccurate stereotypes (Balzarini et al., 2019; Conley et al., 2017; Moors et al., 2017). Recent research demonstrates that practitioners of CNM report lower jealousy, higher sexual satisfaction, and personal growth in this relationship style (Conley et al., 2018; Moors et al., 2021a, 2021b).

### **Polyamorous Relationships**

According to Robinson (2013), polyamory denotes those individuals who feel oriented toward being in polyamorous relationships in the same way that other people feel oriented toward monogamy. Barker (2005) defined polyamory as a relationship orientation grounded on a set of notions according to which it is acceptable to sustain multiple intimate and sexual relationships with many people. Haritaworn et al. (2006) argue that polyamory represents that it is possible and worthwhile to experience intimate, sexual, and/or loving relationships with more than one person (simultaneously; p.518). Furthermore, Sheff and Hammers' (2011) definition of polyamory is that polyamory is a relationship style in which people openly maintain multiple romantic sexual and/or affective relationships. Overall, scholars consider polyamory as a relationship style emphasizing love, openness, and honesty (Barker, 2005; Cardoso et al., 2021; Klesee, 2006).

Klesse (2006) argues that polyamory is a debated and questioned term by many individuals and groups depending on their objectives. The central aspect of this debate concerns the role of sex in CNM relationships. In this respect, Kean (2018) notes that definitions of polyamory may minimize the importance of sexual behavior because this could reduce stigma, making polyamory relationships better perceived than other CNM relationships. Thus, because of polyamory's emphasis on emotional connections instead of sexual ones, polyamory may be considered more favorable within CNM (e.g., swinging; Matsick et al., 2013). However, outside of CNM, polyamory is considered just as negatively as emotional and sexual infidelity, ignoring the importance polyamorous individuals place on consent and responsibility (Burris, 2013; Hutzler et al., 2015; Perez & Palma, 2018). Past research findings show that polyamorists consider their relationships authentic and genuine (e.g., Sheff, 2014). Specifically, research findings verify that polyamorous individuals can have trusted, satisfying relationships (Cox et al., 2013), while at the same time, research evidence shows that polyamorous and monogamous relationships are alike as regards their levels of passionate love (Morrison et al., 2013).

All in all, polyamory is a relationship structure in which romantic love and sexual activity with concurrent partners are encouraged (Moors et al., 2017). However, because polyamory is not a monolithic concept like mono-normativity, it may be

susceptible to social and subjective misinterpretations and, in some cases, due to its vagueness to discrimination (Barker, 2005). Indeed, public attitudes oppose polyamory as a relationship style. This means that polyamorists face various societal challenges. Mononormativity constrains polyamorists' since their stories are omitted from mainstream representations of relationships (Haritaworn et al., 2006).

### **The Impact of the Monogamous Ideal on Polyamorous Relationships**

Mono-normativity refers to “dominant assumptions of the normalcy and naturalness of monogamy, analogous to assumptions around heterosexuality inherent in the term heteronormativity (Barker & Langdridge, 2010, p. 750) and is one of the cultural norms that affect attitudes and discrimination against CNM relationships (Conley et al., 2013). Negative attitudes and discrimination against CNM relationships are grounded on the assumption that monogamy is central to fulfilling someone's relationship needs and spreads through all aspects of western culture (Barker & Langdridge, 2010; Conley et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2014). No matter what they are called (e.g., mono-normativity, mono-centrism, compulsory monogamy, or heteronormative monogamy (Anderson, 2012; Noel, 2006), these negative attitudes and beliefs constitute the monogamous (heterosexual) couple as natural and stigmatize non-monogamous relationship alternatives as unnatural (Grunt-Mejer & Campell, 2016; Sheff & Hammers, 2011). In addition, according to Cardoso et al. (2021), the use of the term consensual non-monogamy entails conceptual problems as it implies monogamy as the standard assumption and underlines the significance of monogamy.

There is evidence that all the different relationship styles that refer to CNM, including swinging (a couple involved in extradyadic sex, usually with a social element; Jenks, 1998), open relationships (partners having independent sexual relationships outside of the dyad; Matsick et al., 2013) and polyamory (i.e. simultaneous, consensual, romantic relationships with multiple partners; Mitchell et al., 2013, p.1) suffer from social stigma as they are evaluated as less desirable or even damaging for society (Cardoso et al., 2021; Rodrigues et al., 2018; Sequin, 2019). Conley et al. (2012) report a halo effect surrounding monogamy as people associated more positive characteristics with monogamous than non-monogamous individuals, even when these characteristics were unrelated to sexuality or partnering. Research data also confirm that many polyamorous individuals felt discriminated against because of their lifestyle (Cox et al., 2013), even by friends, family, and employers (Sheff, 2014; Young, 2014). Specifically, polyamorous relationships are considered less committed and less trusting, even though polyamorous persons also have long-lasting relationships (Fleckenstein & Cox, 2014; Sequin, 2019; Wosick-Correa, 2010). Also, CNM is often related to a higher chance of contracting sexually transmitted infections, a notion that research data do not support (Conley et al., 2013). The unfounded belief that polyamorous individuals are more sexually risky and unfaithful to a spouse or other sexual partner (Barker, 2005; Conley et al., 2013) could also be used to discriminate against polyamory (Hutzler et al., 2015). People may relate cheating

in monogamous and CNM relationships and condemn CNM relationships (Cardoso et al., 2021). However, connecting polyamory to cheating and infidelity adds to the social stigma related to CNM, overlooking the importance polyamorous individuals place on consent and responsibility (Perez & Palma, 2018). Moreover, individuals involved in CNM report various instances of prejudice and discrimination, such as rejection from family and friends, child custody issues, and in many cases, concealment of their relationship style (Kimberly & Hans, 2017; Moors et al., 2021a, 2021b). Also, in the context of compulsory monogamy, sexually non-monogamous relationships are often represented as cheating (Cardoso et al., 2021). Overall, in comparison to monogamous relationships, CNM is considered as less committed, harmful to children, and immoral (Moors et al., 2021a, 2021b; Rodrigues et al., 2018).

Stigma also concerns mental health professionals who may hold mono-normative bias when engaging with clients (Jordan, 2018; McCoy et al., 2015) or may try to persuade clients not to engage in CNM relationships (Grunt-Mejer & Łyś, 2019).

Child welfare is strongly associated with monogamy since monogamous relationships are considered more competent in providing a safer environment for bringing up a child (Conley et al., 2012). Polyamorous parenting challenges the default of couple-based monogamy parenting. Consequently, the social, educational, and legal themes concerning polyamorous parenting are scarcely studied and discussed in the academic literature (Klesse et al., 2022). However, the limited research data in this field document a commonly shared feeling of stigmatization among polyamorous parents (Pallotta-Chiarroli et al., 2020). Hence, child-rearing is another area of possible discrimination for polyamorous individuals, even though research data show that children raised by polyamorous parents have more resources available (e.g., economic, cognitive) and that their emotional difficulties are more likely to stem from societal discrimination (Sheff, 2014).

In addition, the consideration of polyamorous relationships as lesser than monogamous relationships may lead to polyamory being stigmatized and polyamorous people being subject to minority stress, even though polyamory is being kept secret (Sequin, 2019). Thus, polyamorous persons may suffer from minority stress (Cardoso et al., 2020) which may also be increased by the anticipation of facing prejudice and rejection by monogamous people (McCrocky, 2015). Being a member of a stigmatized minority group of sexualized identities and practices can result in possible misunderstandings (e.g., the use of the term cheaters), psychological distress, and potential discrimination (Cardoso et al., 2018).

Overall, recent research data show that polyamorous individuals face discrimination in different settings of their lives (Cardoso, 2014, 2018) and that polyamory is unfoundedly linked to negative personal characteristics (e.g., diminished trustworthiness) and inadequate parenting skills (Sheff, 2014). This means that any violation of the monogamous ideal could result in the othering of the non-conforming relationship structures (Day, 2013; Ritchie & Barker, 2006) and in considering polyamory and other forms of non-monogamy as not normal (Sheff, 2020).

Such prejudice and social sanctions against polyamorous relationships (Hauptert et al., 2016) constitute polyamorists as a minority group (see Perkins & Wiley, 2014).

The stigmatization of CNM relationships underlines the need to examine attitudes toward polyamory since negative attitudes toward polyamorists are associated with several negative effects. In particular, negative attitudes may lead to lower levels of relationship success (Lehmiller & Agnew, 2007) and chronic stress (Link & Phelan, 2006) and may also impact social and political rights (Cardoso, 2014).

Stigmatization can be more potent in socio-cultural contexts distinguished by traditional values (either on religious or political terms) where there is a high level of transphobia and homophobia at all social strata, strong support of traditional relationship structures, and a lack of legal recognition for partnering outside the monogamous boundaries of heterosexual marriage (Gusmano, 2018). More specifically, opposition toward polyamory is more prevalent among conservative and religious people (Hutzler et al., 2015). Based on previous research data, these characteristics fit well into our society's mono-normativity framework (Barker & Langdridge, 2010). Accordingly, women tend to be more religious than males. Therefore, they are less interested in polyamory than men are (Hutzler et al., 2015).

This study examined attitudes toward polyamory in a cultural context (Greece) with limited tolerance for non-normative relationships and sexual practices (Grigopoulos, 2020, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a).

Polyamorous people are engaged in recognizing their social and legal rights (Barker & Langdridge, 2010). This increasing fight against stigma indicates that the polyamorous relationship style is a sustained movement and mobilizes a continuing debate on sexuality, relationships, and family (Johnson et al., 2015). Considering that sexual and emotional intimacy are essential factors in people's lives, public attitudes towards a specific type of consensually non-monogamous relationship, namely polyamory, are most important in understanding if polyamory is likely to disturb what is considered normal, ethical, and natural in a specific socio-cultural context. To sum up, understanding the factors related to attitudes toward polyamorists is essential in appreciating and acknowledging the societal challenges polyamorists may face.

## Social Norms

In attitude-behavior models in social psychology, social norms are context-dependent, externally-derived expectations of acceptable, obligatory, and appropriate behaviors shared by other people in the same context or society (Bell & Cox, 2015; Cislighi & Heise, 2018; McDonald & Crandall, 2015). Cialdini and Trost (1998, p.152) defined social norms as "rules and standards that members of a group understand and that guide or constrain social behaviors without the force of law." In other words, what someone perceives that other people in the referent group think one should do. According to Ajzen (1991), they represent the social pressure to become involved/participate or not participate in certain behaviors. This means that social norms represent the pressure and the approval of others who are important to the individual (Ajzen, 1988).

Specifically, descriptive and injunctive social norms highlight the relevance of significant others' guiding behaviors. Even though they are supplementary, they

represent different types of social influence guided by different psychological processes. Injunctive norms refer to the perceived attitudes or approval by others and motivate conformity by social sanctions (when deviating from the prevailing group standards) or rewards (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Conner & Sparks, 2005). To conform to this type of influence (for example, by abstaining from polyamorous relationships), one does not have to agree with the opinion of others as valid. In addition, what others are perceived to do (not what others are perceived to approve of) and what is regarded as proper and foreseen in a group context is referred to as a descriptive norm (Cialdini et al., 1990). Hence, as regards the descriptive norm, the informational component might play a significant role (McDonald & Crandall, 2015).

## The Current Research

Hogg and Vaughan (2005, p.150) note that “attitudes are made of beliefs, feelings and behavioral tendencies” towards significant topics in someone’s life or community’s life. The capacity to understand attitudes towards socially discriminated groups (in this study, polyamorists) may (1) offer a better understanding of the societal challenges discriminated individuals may face, (2) promote and develop research on attitudes-based discrimination, (3) encourage a better comprehension of dominant stereotypes, which in turn may inform the public on specific topics, (4) provide ways to work with society’s negative assumptions that impact particular people’s lives in different ways, (5) help people who may feel discriminated to respond to any discrimination. To achieve the aforementioned goals research data demonstrating the existence or inexistence of specific negative attitudes is necessary.

There is scarce research regarding attitudes towards polyamory, polyamorists’ parenting rights and parental competence, and the welfare of children with polyamorous parents (Kleese et al., 2022). Considering the negative consequences related to the stigmatization of CNM individuals, this study seeks to examine the attitudes toward polyamory in the specific socio-cultural context of Greece and to identify factors that predict an individual’s attitudes towards polyamory. Also, research data concerning the predictors of polyamory stigmatization may demonstrate how monogamy functions as a dominant social system and lead to new strategies to avoid discrimination.

Barker and Langdrige (2010) argue that political conservatism and religiosity match the schema of mono-normativity in western society. Therefore, this study examined attitudes toward polyamory using as predictors social-psychological (social norms), socio-cultural (attitudes toward monogamy, religiosity, political orientation, polyamorists’ parental competence, and the welfare of children with polyamorous parents), and socio-structural variables (gender). Based on data from different cultural contexts, we expected that participants with more traditional socio-cultural traits (such as political conservatism and religiosity) would exhibit less favorable attitudes about a relationship type that confronts their values and conventional social norms (Hutzler et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2015).



Hence, we hypothesized (H1) that attitudes toward monogamy would be negatively associated with attitudes toward polyamory because this relationship model challenges the assumption that monogamy is the normal and natural relationship orientation (Barker & Langdridge, 2010). We also expected participants that oppose the welfare of children with polyamorous parents (H2) and oppose equal parenting rights for monogamous and polyamorous parents (H3) to exhibit less favorable attitudes towards polyamory. Furthermore, recent studies in this field report that attitudes toward polyamory are related to attitudes toward other sexual minorities (e.g., lesbian women and gay men; Cardoso et al., 2018). Therefore, with reference to Greek research data concerning sexual minorities, we hypothesized that male gender and highly religious and politically conservative individuals (Grigoropoulos, 2018; Grigoropoulos & Kordoutis, 2015; Iraklis & Kordoutis, 2015) would exhibit less favorable attitudes toward polyamory (H4). We also predicted, following the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008), that familiarity with polyamory (i.e., familiarity with polyamorous individuals) would predict positive attitudes towards this relationship orientation (H5). This study also examines the relationship between participants' attitudes towards polyamory and social norms concerning polyamory. Specifically, we predicted that participants' attitudes would align with what others are perceived to do (descriptive norms) and what others approve of (injunctive norms; H6).

Overall, this study aims to provide insight into how a specific culture perceives polyamorous relationships and provide a better understanding of general attitudes toward polyamorists. At the same time, this study's research data may help policymakers better understand society's attitudes, adjust their practice, and educate society on these topics. This, in turn, could reduce stigma and any possible act of discrimination (Cardoso et al., 2021). To sum up, the current study aims to present results from a different cultural context and acknowledge the role of socio-cultural variance and the situatedness of particular descriptors in different cultures.

## Method

### Participants

Two hundred and fifty participants were recruited for this study. Mean age was 25.96 ( $SD = 8.14$ ) for men and 23.63 ( $SD = 8.70$ ) for women. Most participants held a bachelor's degree (32 men—64.0%— and 169—84.5%— women), even though men mostly held bachelor's or master's degrees as opposed to women ( $\chi^2_4 = 11.98$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ) who appear to hold mostly bachelor's degree. Both men and women scored low on religiosity (38 men—76%— and 137—68.5%— women), while on average, they had only one polyamorous friend (Men:  $M = 1.42$ ,  $SD = 2.34$ , Women:  $M = 1.22$ ,  $SD = 3.06$ ). Men and women scored differently on political positioning, with men reporting support to the center and around center parties, while women were either center-left party or center party. The two samples (men and women) were matched in all other



**Table 1** Demographic characteristics presented as mean  $\pm$  stand. deviation or numbers (%)

	Men, $n = 50$	Women, $n = 200$	$\chi^2/t$	$p$ value
Age, years	25.96 $\pm$ 8.14	23.63 $\pm$ 8.70	- 1.72	0.087 <sup>a</sup>
<i>Education</i>			11.98	0.005 <sup>b</sup>
Junior high school	0	3 (1.5)		
High school	13 (26.0)	20 (10.0)		
Undergraduate	32 (64.0)	169 (84.5)		
Postgraduate	5 (10.0)	8 (4.0)		
<i>Political positioning</i>			16.51	0.001 <sup>b</sup>
Left party	4 (8.0)	7 (3.5)		
Center-left party	13 (26.0)	46 (23.0)		
Center party	19 (38.0)	127 (63.5)		
Center-right party	11 (22.0)	18 (9.0)		
Right party	3 (6.0)	2 (1.0)		
<i>Religiosity</i>			1.07	0.301 <sup>c</sup>
Low religiosity	38 (76)	137 (68.5)		
High religiosity	12 (24)	63 (31.5)		
No of polyamorous friends	1.42 $\pm$ 2.34	1.22 $\pm$ 3.06	- 0.44	0.659 <sup>a</sup>

Percentages are column percentages

<sup>a</sup>Student's *T*-test

<sup>b</sup>Fisher's exact test

<sup>c</sup>Chi-square test.

variables. Two participants were excluded as many missing and extreme values were observed. For detailed demographic characteristics, see Table 1.

## Procedure

Participants were recruited from a convenience sample with a snowball-like technique as the URL was distributed on social networks (e.g., LinkedIn) for one month starting on October 14th, 2021. In particular, an electronic web survey using Google forms was conducted. In addition, participants were asked to email the study link to other possible respondents. The online study was completely anonymous, and participants were requested to consent to participate in the survey after reading the information about the study. The inclusion criteria were: (a) agreeing to participate; (b) being at least 18 years old. The process lasted approximately 10–20 min. This study follows all the ethical instructions and directions of the institution to which the researchers belong. The survey included a definition of polyamory before the instruments were presented. This was to minimize the effect of knowledge or disinformation gaps that participants may have (Cardoso et al., 2018). The definition taken from an online polyamory community was:

... polyamory is the practice, desire, or acceptance of having more than one intimate relationship at a time with the knowledge and consent of everyone involved (i.e., the practice of having more than one romantic relationship at a time) (Trask & M., 2013).

## Materials

### Background Information

Participants were asked to respond to several demographic items (e.g., age, gender, sexual orientation, highest education achieved), political positioning (left, center-left, center, center-right, right), religiosity (frequency of religious services attendance and frequency of praying) and self-reported contacts with polyamory practitioners (i.e., intergroup contact reported in a numerical entry box).

### Attitudes to Monogamy

We assessed attitudes towards monogamy with a 2-item index including the following statements (“*I believe that monogamy is the normal orientation for relationships*” and “*I believe that humans are biologically predisposed to be monogamous*”; see Johnson et al., 2015). These items were assessed on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (*Disagree strongly*) to 7 (*Agree strongly*). Higher scores reflect more positive attitudes toward monogamy.

### Injunctive and Descriptive Norms

Participants were asked to indicate on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from (1 = *strongly disapprove* to 7 = *strongly approve*) “What their best friends would think if they would engage in polyamorous relationships” (Injunctive norm) and “If their friends and acquaintances would engage in a polyamorous relationship if they had the chance” (1 = *absolutely no* to 7 = *absolutely yes*; Descriptive norm). Similar questions (as regards descriptive and injunctive norms) were used in Buunk & Bakker’s study (1995) concerning willingness to engage in extradyadic sexual behavior.

### Attitudes Towards Polyamory (ATP)

The ATP is a unidimensional measure with seven items developed in the United States in 2015 by Johnson et al. (2015) whose translation accuracy for the Greek context has been verified through back-translation (Brislin, 1970), with appropriate cultural-linguistic adaptation (Swami & Barron, 2019). All items (e.g., “*People use polyamorous relationships as a way to cheat on their partners without consequence*,” “*Polyamorous relationships have more open communication than monogamous relationships*”) were assessed on a 7-point scale from 1 (*Disagree strongly*) to 7 (*Agree strongly*). Three items are reversed scored. Higher scores reflect more

positive attitudes toward polyamory. See the Results section for the psychometric properties assessed in the present study.

### Beliefs About Equal Parenting Rights for Polyamorists

These were assessed by three statements concerning polyamorists' equal rights to become parents through adoption and state-sponsored artificial insemination (see Hollekim et al., 2011; e.g., "Polyamorous individuals should have the same legal rights as monogamous individuals to apply for adoption", "Polyamorous individuals should be given the same legal rights as monogamous individuals to receive artificial insemination", and "The right to apply for adoption should be independent of relationship orientation"). As these statements were previously used regarding beliefs about same-sex marriage and parenthood, they were reworded in the current study to reflect beliefs about equal parenting for polyamorists (see Hollekim et al., 2011). Participants' responses to the three statements were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*Disagree strongly*) to 7 (*Agree strongly*). High scores signify positive attitudes towards such rights.

### Beliefs About the Welfare of Children with Polyamorous Parents

These were assessed by six items regarding the welfare of children with polyamorous parents (e.g., Item 1: "Society is now ready for children growing up with polyamorous individuals," Item 2: "Children who grow up with polyamorous parents are more often exposed to bullying (systematic bothering) than other children," Item 3: "Children are harmed by growing up with polyamorous parents," Item 4: "Children who grow up with polyamorous parents are just well off as other children," Item 5: "Polyamorous parents can fully meet children's needs and interests," Item 6: "Polyamory does not matter for good parenting") with high scores signifying positive attitudes towards the welfare of children with polyamorous parents. As these statements were previously used regarding beliefs about same-sex marriage and parenthood, they were reworded in the current study to reflect beliefs about the welfare of children with polyamorous parents. Participants' responses to the six statements were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*Disagree strongly*) to 7 (*Agree strongly*; see also Hollekim et al., 2011). Further testing of the instrument in the current study showed a two-factor solution (Principal Components Analysis, Varimax Rotation Method with Kaiser Normalization, Total variance explained = 56%), with the first factor being the "concern for the socio-cultural impact on children's welfare" (*eigenvalue* = 2.16, *McDonald's  $\omega$*  = 0.71; Items 1, 2 and 3) and the second factor being the "polyamorous individual's parental competence" (*eigenvalue* = 1.20, *McDonald's  $\omega$*  = 0.70; Items 4, 5 and 6) with acceptable model fit as assessed with CFA ( $\chi^2/df$  = 1.73, *CFI* = 0.97, *TLI* = 0.94, *NFI* = 0.93, *AGFI* = 0.97, *RMSEA* = 0.05).

**Design and Statistical Analysis** A between-subject, correlational design was employed. For the beliefs about equal parenting rights for polyamorous individuals and monogamous individuals, all items were averaged. For attitudes to monogamy, the two items were averaged. For the beliefs about the welfare of children with poly-

amorous parents, two different values were computed; one measured polyamorous individuals' parental competence, and one measured socio-cultural impact on children's welfare (see also subsection Materials). For the Attitudes Towards Polyamory (ATP), a single value was computed based on the average of all items but one (see also section Results).

For the statistical analysis, the SPSS (version 27) and IBM AMOS (version 25) were used. Before the main statistical analyses, the parametric assumptions were assessed (normality, outliers, homoscedasticity), and the main tools of ATP and Children Welfare were tested for both validity and reliability (see also Materials section). Demographic statistics were computed for participants' attitudes towards monogamy and polyamory, and a correlation matrix was produced to investigate associations between study variables. Finally, a multiple regression model was employed to predict ATP from the other study measures based on the significance of the associations. Alpha level was set at 0.05.

## Results

Normal distribution was found to be satisfied according to the criteria by George and Mallery (2010). No extreme values were detected. In Table 2, the attitudes towards monogamy and polyamory are presented separately for men and women. In all variables but equal parenting rights, men and women seem to agree as regards their beliefs. More specifically, men ( $M=4.36$ ,  $SD=2.32$ ) and women ( $M=4.22$ ,  $SD=2.03$ ) agree with monogamy as the normal orientation. As regards beliefs about children's welfare, both men and women scored rather high ( $>5$ ) for both the polyamorous individuals' parental competence and the socio-cultural impact on children's welfare, while for descriptive and injunctive norms, both men and women scored low ( $<3.08$ ). Finally, as regards equal parenting rights, women were more

**Table 2** Attitudes towards monogamy and polyamory

	Men, $n=50$	Women, $n=200$	$\chi^2/t$	$p$ value
<i>Attitudes towards monogamy</i>				
Normal orientation	$4.36 \pm 2.32$	$4.22 \pm 2.03$	-0.41	0.687 <sup>a</sup>
Biological predisposition	$3.66 \pm 2.18$	$3.48 \pm 1.87$	-0.55	0.583 <sup>a</sup>
<i>Equal parenting rights</i>			5.03	0.025 <sup>b</sup>
Negative attitudes	28 (56.0)	77 (38.5)		
Positive attitudes	22 (44.0)	123 (61.5)		
<i>Children welfare</i>				
Polyamorous individual's parental competence	$5.27 \pm 1.05$	$5.08 \pm 1.00$	-1.19	0.237 <sup>a</sup>
Socio-cultural impact on children's welfare	$5.44 \pm 1.58$	$5.71 \pm 1.21$	1.14	0.260 <sup>a</sup>
Descriptive norm	$2.84 \pm 1.27$	$2.71 \pm 1.32$	-0.65	0.515 <sup>a</sup>
Injunctive norm	$2.88 \pm 1.08$	$3.08 \pm 1.09$	1.17	0.245 <sup>a</sup>

Values presented as mean  $\pm$  stand. deviation or numbers (%)

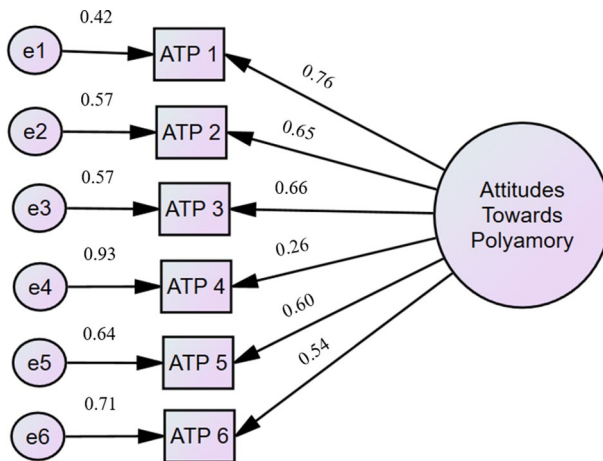
Percentages are column percentages. <sup>a</sup>Student's  $T$ -test, <sup>b</sup>Chi-square test.

**Table 3** Model fit statistics of the ATP

Model	$\chi^2/df$	RMSEA	TLI	CFI	NFI	GFI
Baseline	17.09					
6-item factor	2.28	0.06	0.94	0.96	0.94	0.97

Levels for an acceptable model fit: RMSEA < 0.06, CFI > 0.95, TLI > 0.90, NFI > 0.95, GFI > 0.90 and  $\chi^2/df < 3$ .

RMSEA Root mean square of approximation, TLI Tucker-lewis index, CFI Comparative fit index, NFI Normed fit index, GFI Goodness of fit index.

**Fig. 1** CFA of the proposed model

favored than men, who were against equal parenting rights for polyamorous parents ( $\chi^2_4 = 5.03, p = 0.025$ ).

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Based on relevant literature, we tested the one-factor solution (including six items), excluding item seven (i.e., “*Religious forms of polyamory, such as polygamy, are acceptable*”; see Cardoso et al., 2018). In Table 3, the results of CFA showed that the one-factor model had an acceptable fit to the data. RMSEA, NFI, AGFI, and CFI were acceptable, using the method of maximum likelihood (see Fig. 1). The one-factor model was further supported by items’ statistically significant loadings to the respective factor (standardized estimates = 0.26–0.76). It should be noted that no significant covariances were observed between residual errors ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table 4** Cross-Scale Correlations for the study variables (n = 250)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Demographics</i>												
1. Polyamorous network	1.26	2.93	-									
2. Political position	2.83	0.76	0.03	-								
3. Religiosity	2.56	1.13	0.08	0.40***	-							
4. Descriptive norm	2.73	1.31	0.07	0.05	0.07	-						
5. Injunctive norm	3.04	1.09	0.02	-0.05	0.08	0.05	-					
6. Attitudes toward monogamy	3.88	1.80	-0.05	0.26***	0.38***	-0.04	-0.10	-				
7. ATP	4.28	1.16	-0.06	-0.32***	-0.45***	-0.05	-0.02	-0.57***	-			
8. Socio-cultural impact on children's welfare	5.12	1.01	-0.05	0.19**	0.22***	0.01	0.05	0.39***	-0.50***	-		
9. Polyamorous individual's parental competence	5.66	1.29	-0.12	-0.26***	-0.37***	-0.08	0.02	-0.35***	0.60***	-0.27***	-	
10. Equal parenting	4.19	0.95	0.06	-0.23***	-0.17**	-0.08	-0.04	-0.26***	0.45***	-0.26***	0.34***	-

ATP Attitudes towards polyamory, *Children W.* Children Warfare.

\* $p < 0.05$ .

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$

## Correlations Between Study Variables

Table 4 presents the correlations between study variables, assessed by Pearson's bivariate correlation. The polyamorous network did not correlate significantly with any of the other study variables ( $r_{240}$  from  $-0.06$  to  $0.12$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) along with descriptive and injunctive norms ( $r_{240}$  from  $-0.08$  to  $0.10$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). On the other hand, political positioning correlated significantly and positively, even weakly, with attitudes towards monogamy ( $r_{240} = 0.26$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), with concern for the socio-cultural impact on children's welfare ( $r_{240} = 0.19$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and moderately with religiosity ( $r_{240} = 0.40$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The more participants reported support to the right parties, the more reported higher levels of religiosity, positive attitudes toward monogamy, and higher levels of concern for the socio-cultural impact on children's welfare. In addition, political positioning was negatively associated with ATP ( $r_{240} = -0.32$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), positive beliefs about children's welfare with polyamorous parents ( $r_{240} = -0.26$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and equal parenting rights ( $r_{240} = -0.23$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Supporting right parties is associated with lower ATP scores, polyamorists' parental competence, and equal parenting rights for polyamorous parents. An identical pattern was observed for religiosity and attitudes toward monogamy. ATP was positively associated with polyamorous individual's parental competence ( $r_{240} = 0.60$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and equal parenting rights ( $r_{240} = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), while it was negatively associated with the concern for the socio-cultural impact on children's welfare ( $r_{240} = -0.50$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Rationally, the reversed pattern was observed for the concern for the socio-cultural impact on children's welfare and polyamorous individual's parental competence ( $r_{240} = -0.27$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and equal parenting ( $r_{240} = -0.26$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Finally, polyamorous individuals' parental competence was found to positively but weakly correlate with equal parenting ( $r_{240} = 0.34$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Overall, it seems that those who oppose polyamory believe more in monogamy, are concerned about the socio-cultural impact on polyamorous children's welfare, exhibit higher levels of religiosity, and support right parties. Consequently, the results above do not support H5 and H6.

## Prediction of ATP

Standard multiple regression models showed that both models were statistically significant (Men:  $F_{6,43} = 15.31$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , *Adjusted R*<sup>2</sup> = 0.68, Women:  $F_{6,193} = 47.26$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , *Adjusted R*<sup>2</sup> = 0.60), explaining a significant proportion of variance of the dependent variable. In men, only attitudes towards monogamy negatively predicted ATP ( $\beta = -0.19$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), and polyamorous individual's parental competence positively predicted ATP ( $\beta = 0.48$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). In this case, H1 is supported, whereas H2 is partially supported. In women, religiosity ( $\beta = -0.16$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), attitudes towards monogamy ( $\beta = -0.28$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and concern for the socio-cultural impact on children's welfare ( $\beta = -0.22$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) negatively predicted ATP. In contrast, polyamorous individuals' parental competence ( $\beta = 0.30$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and equal parenting rights ( $\beta = 0.19$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) positively predicted ATP. Thus, H1 and H3 are supported for women, while H2 is partially supported. Political positioning did not predict ATP either in men or women, despite the significant associations observed



**Table 5** Standard multiple linear regression models for predicting attitudes towards polyamory ( $n=250$ )

Predictors	Males ( $n=50$ )			Females ( $n=250$ )		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
Political positioning	-0.12	0.14	-0.10	-0.03	0.08	-0.02
Religiosity	-0.07	0.14	-0.07	-0.17	0.05	-0.16**
Attitudes towards monogamy	-0.12	0.06	-0.19*	-0.18	0.04	-0.28***
Concern for the socio-cultural impact on children's welfare	-0.21	0.12	-0.18	-0.25	0.06	-0.22***
Polyamorous individual's parental competence	0.38	0.10	0.48**	0.28	0.05	0.30***
Equal parenting rights	0.12	0.13	0.10	0.23	0.06	0.19***
<i>F</i>	15.31***			47.26***		
<i>Adjusted R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.64			0.58		

*SE* Standard error of the unstandardized coefficient

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

previously (see also subsection *Correlations between study variables*). Therefore this study's results partially support H4. See also Table 5 for detailed results of the multiple regression models.

## Discussion

Research evidence documents that multi-partner relationships have been subject to scandalization and stigmatization as the monogamous ideal maintains the highest societal status framing relationship practices and discourses on love and intimacy (Klesse, 2018; Ritchie & Barker, 2006). In particular, Klesse (2018) argues that the legislative bodies, the judiciary, and educational settings and institutions have mostly remained ignorant of CNM relationships. Therefore it is most important to examine this social tabooisation and identify context-related socio-cultural and socio-psychological predictors of negative attitudes towards polyamory relationships.

The findings of this study only partially support the role of context-related socio-cultural and socio-psychological factors (H1 to H6) in determining participants' attitudes toward polyamory.

In the present study socio-cultural (religiosity, concern for the socio-cultural impact on polyamorous children's welfare, equal parenting rights, and polyamorists' parental competence) and socio-psychological factors (mono-normativity) negatively predicted women's attitudes toward polyamory. Interestingly, only mono-normativity and polyamorists' parental competence predicted men's negative attitudes towards polyamory. Thus, in the current study, both women and men consider any violation of the monogamous ideal that frames non-conforming relationships as

deviant confirming H1. Hence, in the specific socio-cultural context of Greece polyamory may be regarded as a threat to the dominating monogamous culture (Sheff, 2020). This study's result coincides with previous studies in this field, suggesting that attitudes toward polyamory may be negatively affected by the predominately monogamous Western culture (see Conley et al., 2013; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2014; Pallota-Chiarrolli, 2006). Specifically, in the Western heterosexual context monogamy is considered the main accepted way to love, make commitments and raise children (Conley et al., 2013). However, this perspective reinforces the stigmatization of people engaging in relationships out of normativity's bounds (e.g., polyamorous relationships or other CNMs). Thus, mono-normativity operating as a hegemonic social system devalues any non-typical, non-conventional relationship forms and, consequently, different parenting forms and family practices (Conley et al., 2013).

Most importantly, participants reporting a mono-normative approach to relationships may imply that monogamous relationships are better than any other relationship types (Sizemore & Omstead, 2018, p.1428). Accordingly, this approach supports a "lesser than" status as regards polyamory relationships leading to an outgroup (people who may present stigma)- ingroup (those we identify with) status (social identity theory; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

This study's findings also show that polyamorists' parental competence is a significant predictor of negative attitudes toward polyamory both for women and men. Also, concern for the socio-cultural impact on polyamorists' children's welfare and polyamorists' equal parenting rights significantly predicted opposition to polyamory but only for women (H2 and H3 are partially supported). Thus this study's findings show that conservative representations of family structure come along with a narrow understanding of non-typical relationship structures for the study participants. These findings, especially for women, suggest that ideal notions of relationship forms and parental roles, along with typical-stereotyped representations of family structure and family life, result in the stigmatization of polyamorists.

As regards our fourth hypothesis (H4) women's higher religiosity strongly predicted their opposition to polyamory. This result coincides with previous studies reporting that women tend to be more religious than males and, therefore, less interested in polyamory than men (Hutzler et al., 2015). The absence of political positioning as a significant predictor of attitudes toward polyamory for men and women could be attributed to participants' moderate political positioning in this study.

The contact hypothesis (H5) was not significant for women or men. The absence of the contact hypothesis as a significant predictor of negative attitudes for women and men may be because contact was measured with a single item. In future studies, using more variables concerning the contact hypothesis may be more helpful.

Also, according to this study's results, there is no significant relationship between attitudes toward polyamory and social (descriptive and injunctive) norms (H6). Specifically, attitudes toward polyamory were not associated with what participants perceived that significant people in their referent group do or think one should do. One explanation is that people in several cases are pressured by the perceived social norms to report the opposite of what they lean toward (Cislaghi & Heise, 2018). Thus, there was no relationship between the private attitudes of this study's participants and the social beliefs supported by this study participants. Future studies could

emphasize in examining further if perceived and actual norms align or not as regards polyamory.

The present study shows that participants had a relatively positive attitude toward polyamory. However, this study's results should be considered having in mind that younger participants (as in this study) compared to older ones are more likely to be open and friendly towards sexual diversity and non-normative relationship configurations. In addition, they are more likely to engage in polyamory because of the aforementioned progressive values (see Parker et al., 2019).

Pallotta-Chiarolli et al. (2013) argue that there is scarce research regarding polyamory, poly-parenting, and child-care practices. This study contributes to the literature by reporting the transformative potential of context-related socio-cultural and socio-psychological factors that affect commonly shared attitudes towards polyamory. Specifically, insights into poly-child-rearing and parenting practices are crucial for understanding conservative family politics that consider polyamory and poly-families as highly controversial and taboo concepts. It would be fruitful for future studies to examine the child-rearing practices of poly-families and provide the groundwork for social and political critique on monogamy as the prevalent relationship model. This kind of research may also support adequate provision for non-typical care relationships from the law and policy perspective.

Even though it is always a question of whether public beliefs form legal modifications or vice versa, attitudes may have significant implications for policy and law (Kazyak & Stange, 2018). Exposure to less permissive and more traditional socializing agents, such as religious institutions and conservative political ideology, can significantly influence individuals' attitudes according to these socializing agents (Jakobson et al., 2013; Whitehead & Perry, 2016). Therefore a key policy implication of the current study is to persuade policymakers to utilize legal and educational institutions to protect polyamorists and poly-families from discrimination. On the other hand, recognition through inclusion may reaffirm racist stereotypes (see Kleese et al., 2022). Therefore, Rhoten et al. (2021) suggest challenging institutions and social practices instead of struggling for inclusion.

Overall, research concerning public attitudes toward polyamory is essential for challenging the controversial and taboo issue of polyamory. This study adds to the field by assessing the possible predictors of attitudes toward polyamory in a cultural context (Greece) with limited tolerance for non-normative relationships (Grigoriopoulos, 2022b, 2022c). It also contributes to the literature in the field by providing a cross-cultural adaptation of the ATP instrument for use in a new culture and language.

## Limitations

This study is not without limits. There may be a sampling bias as participants more interested and favorable to relationship diversity may have taken part. This use of volunteers limits the general applicability of the results. Furthermore, research on the internet limits the participation of some social groups. Hence, another limitation is the homogeneity of the participants' group, who are generally well-educated

young women. Future studies could emphasize collecting data from a more diverse sample.

## Conclusions

This study draws attention to the stigmatization of polyamory. In many countries, there is no legal recognition of polyamorous relationships and/or multi-partner families, while at the same time, laws may prohibit any violations of the monogamous ideal (Klesse, 2018). This study also provides valuable insights into understanding attitudes toward polyamory in the Greek socio-cultural context. In addition, it increases the awareness of the stigma toward polyamorous families. In this regard, it also warns clinical professionals, policymakers, and social agents about the current monogamic Greek socio-cultural context that may negatively affect polyamorous lives, their relationship choices, and their families well-being. Stakeholders and professionals who influence people's lives (educators and health professionals) should be aware of possible stigmatization to prevent stigmatizing non-monogamous individuals. In addition, they should ensure they do not internalize and project these stereotypical assumptions.

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**Author contributions** Grigoropoulos Iraklis conceived the study, collected the data and wrote the paper. Konstantinos-Christos Daoultzis performed and wrote the statistical analysis. Kordoutis Panos reviewed the paper.

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## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**Ethical approval** 'All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.'

**Informed consent** Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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