

Explicitness in monogamous and nonmonogamous relationships - a methodological proposal for data collection

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Introduction

Scientific classification systems are a paradigmatic example of academic power in action. Typologies are never self-evident, and the naming and grouping behind those typologies always has a sociohistorical context, and impact - onomastic politics. This is especially true with hypernyms (vulg. "umbrella terms"). Partner number sexuality (PNS) focused research has been on the rise, making it urgent to reconsider the theoretical and methodological implications of terms like "Consensual Nonmonogamies" (CNM) as apparently-descriptive hypernyms for a whole field of study.

Context

The expression "CNM", "CNM research", and others, are not *conterminous* with the appearance of academic work focused on nonmonogamies. It operated, like other hypernyms, to create practical and identitary separations between some areas of research as opposed to others, usually along lines of White privilege and a stereotyping of both "polygamy" and "cheating"/"infidelity". Such *a priori* separations risk creating theoretical cleavages that are not empirically supported and which continue to disenfranchise minoritized groups. Likewise, the incorporation of morally-loaded terms (e.g., "consensual") can be seen as a minority stress response imported into academic discourse, as well as make it harder to address potentially abusive or unfulfilling relationship dynamics. This discussion has also been happening inside of the communities to which it pertains. Given the above, and the need to integrate research into PNS, rather than separate it between monogamies and nonmonogamies, there is **theoretical and methodological need for a less morally-loaded, more descriptive, terminology** - one that allows for the methodological inquiry into relationship characteristics as being autonomous from relationship configurations.

Tripartite explicitness categorization

To account for power and resource differentials, as well as the differing responsibilities that a speaker and a listener have, I propose the following structure:

- **Explicit** – relationships, or relationship structures and networks, or relationship paradigms, or relationship discourses, or assertions of identity or behavior, which are predicated and based on *outwardly reasonably unambiguous communication* of the fundamental (as applicable) paradigms, rules, expectations, structures, networks, practices, discourses, or similar, between all the involved parties;
- **Implicit** – relationships, or relationship structures and networks, or relationship paradigms, or relationship discourses, or assertions of identity or behavior, which are predicated and based on a *willful and/or careless (by action or inaction) lack or absence of fully explicit communication* of the fundamental (as applicable) paradigms, rules, expectations, structures, networks, practices, discourses, or similar, between any of the involved parties;
- **Covert** – relationships, or relationship structures and networks, or relationship paradigms, or relationship discourses, or assertions of identity or behavior, which are predicated and based on *purposefully misleading and/or misrepresenting communication* of the fundamental (as applicable) paradigms, rules, expectations, structures, networks, practices, discourses, or similar, from any of the involved parties to any other involved party, and/or a change in behavior from any of the involved parties that falsifies previously explicit or implicit communication, when it is not accompanied by further communication about that change to all other involved parties.

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Example implementation (abbreviated)

On a scale of 1-5, how much would you say the following statements are true, in the context of your relationship with *person X*? "We have discussed in detail..."

...the expectations we each have about whether the other person will or will not pursue *sexual/romantic/intimate/...* interactions with other people.
...each other's definitions of what "cheating" means in our relationship.
...the expected allocation of time (*money, etc*) towards our relationship, in relation to our other social and professional commitments.

As far as you know, is *person X* aware that you have a *sexual/intimate/romantic/...* involvement with *person Y*? (If several options apply, select the one that you feel is the most relevant.)

Yes, because we have talked / talk about it specifically.
Yes, because I have alluded to it, without any specific details.
Maybe, because I purposefully hinted at it, but am unsure if *person Y* understood.
Maybe, because I think *person X* might have come across reasons to think that, even though I did not intentionally provide any.
No, I am sure *person Y* knows nothing about the *sexual/intimate/romantic/...* aspect of my involvement with *person X*.

Find out more at...

