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Faculty of Arts and Humanities

Philosophy

What's Wrong With Monogamy? Rethinking Sex and Love in the 21st Century

by

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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University of Southampton

Abstract

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A central life goal for many people, perhaps most, worldwide, is to achieve *the monogamous ideal*: a happy, successful, lifelong, monogamous relationship. Many also endorse *monogamism*: the belief that monogamy is the only ethically acceptable relationship arrangement. And many monogamists additionally endorse *monogamous idealism*: the view that the monogamous ideal ought to be a central life goal for the vast majority of people.

Against these socially dominant norms, this thesis – which is primarily focused on the ethics of monogamy and sexually open relationships – argues against monogamism and monogamous idealism and builds the case for the following proposals. We need to embrace, in a non-hierarchical manner, a plurality of sex and love lifestyles, including many different forms of sexually open relationships, various ways of living the single life, and monogamy. We should also have widespread awareness of the benefits, risks, and costs of all these lifestyles and recognise that no one size fits all. Consequently, individuals and partners can make informed choices with a range of options about how they wish to live.

This thesis also defends these proposals by arguing against several conflicting perspectives. First, it demonstrates why we should reject various cases for (views similar to) *anti-monogamism*: the belief that monogamy is immoral. Second, it critically examines conflicting perspectives within the philosophical literature on *how* monogamy can be justified. Consistent with its main proposals, this thesis defends the idea that at least some couples can appeal to the difficulty of managing jealousy to justify their monogamy; and it argues that this justification for monogamy is preferable to the problematic justifications offered by other philosophers. Finally, this thesis argues against the following popular view, one that many monogamists, monogamous idealists, and those of a similar mindset endorse – *the real-world view*: although sexually open relationships are not inherently (or in principle) unethical, and while they are theoretically appealing for many, such relationships are (in the vast majority of cases) too ethically problematic in practice; thus, successful monogamy, despite its restrictions, is the relationship style (the vast majority of) people should pursue.

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Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: NICHOLAS ALEXANDER HARDING

Title of thesis: *What's wrong with monogamy? Rethinking sex and love in the 21st Century*

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signature:

Date:

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Special thanks are owed to Brian McElwee (one of my upgrade examiners), Christopher Janaway (my other upgrade examiner and internal examiner), and Brian Earp (my external examiner and someone whose work helped to inspire this project and with whom I had some valuable but sufficiently limited contact during it). Their feedback has enabled me to substantially enhance the quality of my work, both within the thesis and beyond.

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The journey to produce this thesis has been extraordinarily challenging, mainly due to its subject matter and the wide range of reactions it generated. (This may surprise some readers since they will consider this thesis disappointingly lacking in controversy. So, I should note that much of the adverse reaction was to areas of my research that, for various reasons, did not make it into the final thesis – though most are at least briefly mentioned. Still, many elements of this thesis – particularly those contained in Parts I, II, and V – do present a hopefully forceful challenge to many people's moral convictions, values, and perception of their past, current, and future sex and love life. Consequently, I have experienced more personal abuse than constructive, critical engagement with the content of my work. I often wish that those who criticise me for not being controversial could understand this better.)

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Despite all the support I have received, this thesis – like (nearly) all works in philosophy – contains many shortcomings. I know of many of these now and will undoubtedly become painfully aware of many more as the years pass. Of course, the responsibility for these weaknesses lies squarely with me.

Introduction – Challenging monogamy

This thesis critically questions:

Monogamy: the relationship arrangement in which two partners commit, implicitly or explicitly, to sexual and romantic exclusivity.¹

Many people across most of the world (henceforth, ‘worldwide’) endorse:

Monogamism: monogamy is the *only* ethically acceptable relationship arrangement.

As far as monogamists are concerned, true love can only be monogamous. Consequently, monogamy is (most) often implicitly assumed in relationships.

Unsurprisingly, there is significant stigma for people not complying with monogamy, including promiscuous individuals, sex workers, those who avoid long-term relationships, and partners who practice:

Consensual nonmonogamy (or ‘open relationships’): an umbrella term referring to a range of relationship arrangements in which the partners agree that at least one of them can have multiple romantic and/or sexual partners.²

Examples include:

Sexually open relationships: an umbrella term for relationship arrangements in which two partners commit to romantic exclusivity, but at least one partner has permission to have casual sex with others outside the relationship.

Polyamory: the partners agree they can have multiple sexual and romantic relationships.

Polygamy: a marriage with more than two spouses.

A (2014) YouGov poll asked Americans whether they “think open relationships – where people in a relationship agree that they can see and have sex with other people – are morally acceptable?” The results were: definitely, 9%; probably, 14%; probably not, 21%; definitely not, 45%; and not sure, 11%. Another YouGov (2015) poll asked Britons about the morality of “engaging in multiple

¹ ‘Sexual exclusivity’ and ‘romantic exclusivity’ are explained later in this introduction.

² For discussions of this stigma, see DePaulo 2011; Anderson 2012; Brake 2012; Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, Rubin, & Conley 2013; Jenkins 2017; Mac & Smith 2018; Clardy 2023.

Introduction – Challenging monogamy

sexual relationships with the consent of all people involved.” 34% considered it morally acceptable, 47% thought it was morally wrong, and 19% answered ‘Don’t know’.

One need not be aware of such data to recognise monogamy’s cultural dominance in most societies. First, many of the world’s religious denominations advocate lifelong monogamous marriage. The idea that romantic love can only be monogamous prevails in popular literature and films. And one cannot help but think of monogamous love when listening to most chart-topping love songs. Also, few politicians and celebrities can escape public scrutiny for being anything other than monogamously faithful in their relationships.

Hitherto, I have mainly talked about the prevalent desire for monogamy rather than:

Nonmonogamy: an umbrella term for any sex and/or romantic love-related practice, relationship arrangement, or lifestyle that is not infidelity-free monogamy, including cheating, consensual nonmonogamy, celibacy, singledom, promiscuity, transactional sex, and being a sex worker.

However, claiming many desire monogamy is insufficient. We should also recognise that a central life goal for many people, perhaps most, worldwide is to achieve:

The monogamous ideal: a happy, successful, lifelong, monogamous relationship.

Let me unpack this. A monogamous relationship is – again – one in which two partners commit, implicitly or explicitly, to sexual and romantic exclusivity. ‘Relationship’ covers marital and non-marital relationships. For a monogamous relationship to be ‘successful’, the couple should fulfil the commitment of sexual and romantic exclusivity. Next, I presume that, in most cases, partners (implicitly) hope their relationship will last until one of the partners dies – hence, ‘lifelong’. Finally, people want their relationship to be ‘happy’, by which I mean something like ‘mostly happy’ to be realistic.

Many monogamists also (seemingly) endorse:

Monogamous idealism: the monogamous ideal *ought* to be a central life goal for the vast majority of people.

Some monogamist idealists also think people should be proactive in pursuing this goal (e.g. looking for a serious relationship) and avoiding behaviours that might hinder it (e.g. casual sex

and uncommitted relationships) from the onset of one's sexual and romantic life (e.g. Finnis 2008; Jordan B Peterson 2018: 1:12:26; Ben Shapiro Clips 2019; Lauren Chen 2020; PragerU 2020; Perry 2022). Often on such a view, the main people exempt from these rules have supposedly good reasons to pursue lifelong celibacy (e.g. being gay and wishing to be closer to God).

Clarifying the monogamous ideal is crucial as we can clearly understand that each of the following constitutes a failure to achieve it: the relationship becomes overall or entirely unhappy; at least one partner cheats; the relationship becomes consensually nonmonogamous; the couple splits before the death of one of the partners. Of course, partners can fail to achieve this goal in one or more of these ways.³

As this thesis demonstrates, the amount of people who achieve the monogamous ideal is far less than the number who try. And even when people do, it is often after several failed attempts. These sad realities alone should motivate us to question the prevailing (moral) beliefs regarding monogamy, the monogamous ideal, and nonmonogamous alternatives.

I am not alone in thinking we should question these prevailing (moral) beliefs. Many scientists (e.g. Ryan & Jethá 2011; Anderson 2012), feminists (e.g. Robinson 1997; Ziegler et al. 2014), relationship therapists and educators (e.g. Taormino 2008; Anapol 2010; Rickert & Veaux 2014; Hardy & Easton 2017; Perel 2017), cultural critics and journalists (e.g. Savage 2013; Martin 2018) have challenged our common relationship ethics, especially in the past couple of decades. Furthermore, in recent years, the ethics of monogamy and nonmonogamous alternatives have received considerable attention in many TED talks (e.g. TEDx Talks 2013; 2016), documentaries (e.g. *WhyKnot* 2016; *Monogamish* 2017), podcasts (e.g. *Savage Lovecast* 2022; *The Rubin Report* 2019), television chat shows (e.g. *Good Morning Britain* 2017; *The View* 2018), and other forums. More importantly, as we will see throughout this thesis, various philosophers have also engaged in this debate, especially in recent years. Indeed, the philosophical literature on this topic is growing – a testament to the numerous interesting philosophical issues there are to explore.

This thesis contributes to this literature by providing a focused exploration of the ethics of monogamy and sexually open relationships while at least touching upon other matters, including the ethics of casual sex, sexual infidelity, and polyamory. Mainly, the thesis helps build the case

³ Admittedly, partners can fail to achieve the monogamous ideal to a *minor* degree. For example, a couple could have a happy, lifelong, monogamous relationship, but one of the spouses cheated on one occasion. However, the evidence I present suggests that many failures to live up to the monogamous ideal, arguably most, are not minor.

Introduction – Challenging monogamy

for the following proposals. We need to embrace, in a non-hierarchical manner, a plurality of sex and love lifestyles, including many different forms of sexually open relationships, various ways of living the single life, and monogamy. We should also have widespread awareness of the benefits, risks, and costs of all these lifestyles and recognise that no one size fits all. Consequently, individuals and partners can make informed choices with a range of options about how they wish to live.⁴

(The last paragraph is a summarised version of my main conclusions – which I detail in the next subsection. I sometimes restate this paragraph. More often, though, I will refer to ‘my main proposals’ and/or talk about ‘embracing a plurality of sex and love lifestyles’ rather than restating the paragraph.)

Building on the work of others, the positive case I make for these main proposals is philosophically and empirically informed, drawing on insights regarding human nature(s) and the risks and costs to well-being that many people experience in long-term monogamous relationships due to the tension between long-term sexual exclusivity and aspects of their nature. Of course, my main proposals conflict with various other perspectives on the ethics of monogamy and nonmonogamy, including monogamism, monogamous idealism, and (views similar to) *anti-monogamism* – the belief that monogamy is immoral. Consequently, this thesis critically examines cases at the forefront of the debate for these alternative perspectives, including some that have received little or no scrutiny. It also formulates and/or strengthens other arguments for viewpoints contrasting my main proposals before demonstrating their failure. The thesis builds on previous critiques of these cases and/or offers novel arguments against them. For example, against arguments for (views similar to) anti-monogamism, and consistent with its main proposals, this thesis formulates and defends the idea – rejected by various other monogamy-challenging philosophers – that at least some couples can appeal to the difficulty of managing jealousy to justify their monogamy. Relatedly, this thesis offers detailed and mostly original critiques of philosophers who, like myself, believe both monogamy and consensual nonmonogamy can be good choices but have different perspectives on *how* monogamy can be justified, ones that have received insufficient critical analysis.

I will soon elaborate on most of these contributions while outlining the thesis. But first, I will detail my main proposals.

⁴ Others have made similar proposals (e.g. Taormino 2008; Anderson 2012; Hardy & Easton 2017; Jenkins 2017; Earp & Savulescu 2020: 43). Still, there are important differences, which I will highlight in the following subsection and elsewhere. Furthermore, I differ significantly from others regarding how I argue for and defend such proposals.

Embracing a plurality of sex and love lifestyles

Firstly, a ‘sex and love lifestyle’ is how one lives one’s life regarding sex and romantic love. Such lifestyles include relationship styles and ways of living as a single person. I will give numerous examples, starting with those I believe we should embrace. Monogamy is a sex and love lifestyle. So too, are sexually open relationships. But I believe we should embrace *many but not necessarily all* of their forms, including:

Very sexually open relationships: the partners can have extra-relationship sex with relatively few restrictions on when, where, how often, and with whom.

Swinging: both partners will typically or always be present for the extra-relationship sex, and the extra-relationship sex partners will typically or always be other couples (or single people) in the swinging community.

Threesomes only: the partners only have threesomes together with an extra-relationship sex partner. That extra-relationship partner may be a friend, someone they have met on a dating or adult website, someone they have met on a night out – perhaps at a sex party – or a sex worker.⁵

One-night stands only: one or both partners will only have casual sex with their extra-relationship sex partners on one occasion and then have no ongoing contact.

Sex workers only: one or both partners only have transactional sex with sex workers.

Other sexually open relationships may combine two or more of the above arrangements.

Moving onto “ways of living the single life” – which I will often refer to collectively as ‘singledom’ – the kinds I believe we should embrace include:

Promiscuous singledom: one avoids committed, long-term relationships but instead enjoys transactional sex and/or casual sex in contexts such as one-night stands, sex parties, and friends-with-benefits arrangements. Such a person may also have relationships in which both partners know and agree that it will be short-term, semi-

⁵ Like here, I sometimes mention sex work in a permissive manner. Of course, the ethics of sex work is a big topic, one I cannot possibly cover. Thus, I will be assuming a liberal view that paying for and selling sexual services are morally permissible given that various conditions are met, including the following: the sex worker is a consenting adult, the working conditions are safe and dignified, the relationship between client and provider is respectful, etc. (For an excellent defence of such views on sex work, see Moen 2014.)

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casual (i.e. where there is some degree of romance, non-sexual intimacy, and attachment), and perhaps exclusive.

Being a single sex worker: one avoids committed, long-term relationships so they can engage in one or more forms of sex work – such as stripping, pornography, or prostitution – as a single person.

Voluntary celibacy: one avoids sexual and romantic relationships altogether.

Of course, it is possible to be a sex worker and practice promiscuous singledom.

To 'embrace' all these sex and love lifestyles is to accept them willingly and enthusiastically. This contrasts with mere toleration, where people reluctantly accept, allow, and do not interfere with people practicing all these lifestyles, even though they disagree with and dislike at least some.

Of course, I am not suggesting that each individual embraces all these sex and love lifestyles for themselves. Instead, when we think about how *people* should live regarding the sex and love aspects of life, we willingly and enthusiastically accept the plurality of lifestyles I have described.

I also stated that we should embrace a plurality of sex and love lifestyles *in a non-hierarchical manner*. To explain this idea, I will first describe how people might embrace these lifestyles in a *hierarchical* manner. One might, for example, think that we should willingly and enthusiastically accept all the lifestyles I have mentioned. Yet, they may still deem successful monogamy ethically best. Indeed, many people may see it as the most romantic, respectable, and virtuous lifestyle and uphold it as the ideal. Alternatively, one might deem a *very* sexually open relationship the best of all the lifestyles mentioned above because it allows the most sexual freedom.

To embrace a plurality of sex and love lifestyles in a *non-hierarchical* manner instead is to willingly and enthusiastically accept them *equally*. So we should not embrace all these lifestyles yet rank them from best to worst or even merely judge some as ethically preferable to others.

Nevertheless, we can believe certain lifestyles (e.g. monogamy) will be preferable for *more people* than others (e.g. being a single sex worker). Accordingly, we could, *in theory*, believe that monogamy should be adopted by more people than any other sex and love lifestyle and, perhaps, think it is optimal for *most* people, that is, more than 50% – although this would go against the *spirit* of embracing a plurality of sex and love lifestyles. Still, a crucial aspect of my proposals is that we should not deem monogamy – or any other sex and love lifestyle – most preferable for the *vast majority*, that is, more than 90%. This point distinguishes my main proposals from

monogamous idealism and the idea – discussed in Chapter 11 – that (sexually) open relationships are only (ethically) viable and workable for a tiny minority, which may purely or primarily consist of gay male couples.

Furthermore, we do not have to willingly and enthusiastically accept each individual's choice. Indeed, often we should critically question a person's choice to pursue a particular lifestyle, be it monogamy, a sexually open relationship, or a form of singledom. Relatedly, we should promote widespread awareness of the benefits, risks, and costs of all the sex and lifestyles I include so individuals and partners can make informed choices with a range of options about how they wish to live. We should also understand that a cost-risk-benefit analysis of each sex and love lifestyle will produce different results for different individuals. This is because people vary in how well-suited they are towards living each – hence, why we should recognise that no one size fits all.

Finally, let me stress that this thesis only *helps build* the case for these proposals – it does not present a (complete) defence for every aspect of them.

Unlike others who have made similar proposals (e.g. Taormino 2008; Anderson 2012; Hardy & Easton 2017; Jenkins 2017; Earp & Savulescu 2020: 43), I do *not* include styles of consensual nonmonogamy involving multiple *romantic* partners – most notably, polyamory and polygamy – in the list of sex and love lifestyles that we should embrace. I am not necessarily morally opposed to such relationship styles. But I have not included them here for the following reasons. First, few points in this thesis provide (moral) reasons *in favour* of such sex and love lifestyles, while various sections (indirectly) provide substantial (moral) reasons against them. Second, open relationships involving multiple romantic partners raise many further and different philosophical questions to those regarding *sexually* open relationships (see Jenkins 2017).

Another (noticeable) absent sex and love lifestyle from my list is the following kind of sexually open relationship:

Cuckolding/hotwife lifestyle: the man is sexually and romantically exclusive to his girlfriend/wife, but – with his permission and full support – she enjoys casual sex with other men.

This is because Chapter 4 argues this relationship style (as it is typically practised) is at least ethically problematic.

Outline of the thesis

Part I begins building the case for these proposals, mainly by explaining how and why monogamy and pursuing the monogamous ideal are so problematic for many people with respect to well-being. Chapter 1 primarily examines how an understanding of human nature(s) informed by evolutionary psychology combined with a normative framework that emphasises well-being can contribute to building the case for my main proposals rather than for monogamism, monogamous idealism, and similar views.⁶ Next, Chapter 2 details the significant risks and costs to well-being that many people (would) face, to varying degrees, in long-term monogamous relationships – due to the tension between long-term sexual exclusivity and aspects of their nature – and why, consequently, it is highly unlikely that they will/would achieve the monogamous ideal.

Part II outlines much of the philosophical debate over *sexual* jealousy in relation to monogamy and sexually open relationships and assesses two perspectives on sexual jealousy that, if correct, could help form an argument for monogamism. Chapter 3 assesses the view that sexual jealousy is a reasonable response to the threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown). And Chapter 4 examines the view that sexual jealousy is a reasonable response to your partner expressing dissatisfaction with your sexual attractiveness and the desire to have sex with someone more sexually attractive. I will argue that these perspectives highlight that extra-relationship sex can *often* be ethically problematic, at the very least, and reasonably evoke sexual jealousy. And when this is the case, we have moral reasons, at the very least, to restrict the relevant extra-relationship sex. However, I will also argue that these perspectives on sexual jealousy do not give us sufficient reasons to believe any of the following: that sexual jealousy is *always* a reasonable response to extra-relationship sex; that *all* instances of extra-relationship sex are at least ethically problematic; and that we have moral reasons, at the very least, to restrict *all* extra-relationship sex in *all* relationships. Thus, these perspectives on sexual jealousy do not help to establish monogamism.

The following two parts discuss the ideas of various philosophers and others who, like me, have critically questioned monogamy. These other monogamy challengers have reached different, arguably bolder, conclusions than mine. While I agree with most on many points, I identify the problems in their case and explain why we should not accept their conclusions.

Part III examines challenges to monogamy that either (seemingly) suggest that *all* relationships should be (sexually) open or explicitly make a case for anti-monogamism. Chapter 5 focuses on

⁶ I explain that I adopt such a normative framework later in this introduction.

the following challenges that have been around for a relatively long time: the critiques of monogamy from Bertrand Russell (1929) and John McMurtry (1972); and the idea – expressed by many – that monogamy and jealousy inherently and unjustifiably involve partners treating each other as though they are each a possession. Then Chapter 6 examines the works of the following contemporary monogamy challengers who argue explicitly for anti-monogamism: Harry Chalmers (2019; 2022), Justin Clardy (2020), and Ole Martin Moen & Aleksander Sørli (2022).

Part IV mostly evaluates the works of Bryan R. Weaver & Fiona Woollard (2008) and Natasha McKeever (2014). Like me, these monogamy challengers do not endorse (something like) anti-monogamism but, instead, argue monogamy is justifiable. Indeed, they each offer a justification for monogamy that they believe applies to some/many but not all couples. Partly as a consequence, they believe both monogamy and consensual nonmonogamy can be good choices. Nevertheless, there are crucial and philosophically-interesting differences between all three perspectives, especially regarding *how* monogamy can be justified.

Chapter 7 evaluates Weaver & Woollard's justification. Chapter 8 evaluates McKeever's. And Chapter 9 explores some further critical questions regarding both. I will identify numerous issues with their justifications and explain why they require much development, elaboration, revision, and – in Weaver & Woollard's case – clarification before we can accept them. Then Chapter 10 formulates and defends the difficulty of managing jealousy justification, explains how it answers nearly all the challenges to monogamy I discussed in Parts III and IV, and demonstrates its (current) preferability to Weaver & Woollard's and McKeever's justifications.

Finally, Part V, consisting of just Chapter 11, primarily addresses:

The real-world view: although sexually open relationships are not inherently (or *in principle*) unethical, and while they are theoretically appealing for many, such relationships are (in the vast majority of cases) too ethically problematic *in practice*; thus, successful monogamy, despite its restrictions, is the relationship style (the vast majority of) people should pursue.

This perspective is generally supported by the claim that sexually open relationships face severe practical issues, making them too ethically problematic in practice, at least for the vast majority. I discuss the three main problems: the difficulty of managing sexual jealousy, the threat of extra-relationship love (which I cover in §3.2), and the risks posed to child welfare.

I am more optimistic about the practical workability of sexually open relationships than proponents of the real-world view. Nevertheless, I think there is at least one challenge such relationships present that is too hard for many people to manage: the difficulty of managing

sexual jealousy. Thus, I tentatively conclude with a central position between the real-world view and the idea – (seemingly) held by various other monogamy challengers – that most, if not all, partners can make a (sexually) open relationship work.

The use of empirical claims

When philosophical works involve many empirical claims, there are concerns about whether those claims are correct. So I will make some points to alleviate such worries. First, it is often acceptable to grant one or more empirical claims – especially when they are widely accepted (as plausible) – as this enables exploration of the philosophical implications *if* the claim(s) are correct. I often employ this method. However, many of my empirical claims generate ideological, emotional, and/or scientific resistance. In such cases, I provide sufficient explanation and evidence for these claims so the reader can accept them or, at least, consider them (highly) plausible. Additionally, I (generally) limit myself to empirical claims that are modest and safe. For example, even when the evidence strongly suggests *most* members of a particular demographic have a specific trait, I often limit myself to claiming (something like) *many* of this demographic have this trait. Finally, all these points apply to my empirical claims regarding human nature(s) informed by evolutionary psychology; still, Chapter 1 will make further points to address questions and concerns regarding their use.

The underlying normative framework

Before embarking on this *practical/applied* ethics project, I must address matters primarily within *normative* ethics, which is concerned with identifying the criteria for assessing whether acts, practices, and character traits are right, wrong, permissible, obligatory, valuable, etc. Of course, there are several *sets* of normative ethical theories, including consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics. Each set has many *specific variants* (or ‘specific normative ethical theories’). And many of these specific variants fall within one or more *subsets* of the set to which they belong. For example, (many) specific variants of consequentialism fall within one of the following subsets: act-consequentialism and rule-consequentialism. And there are many subsets and specific variants of act- and rule-consequentialism largely due to disagreement over what consequences we should care about. For example, a subset of act-consequentialism is act-utilitarianism, and a specific variant of act-utilitarianism is classical hedonistic act-utilitarianism.⁷

⁷ Readers unfamiliar with any of these topics can consult the following: consequentialism (Sinnott-Armstrong 2022), utilitarianism (Driver 2022), deontology (Alexander & Moore 2021), and virtue ethics (Hursthouse & Pettigrove 2022).

Unsurprisingly, there is no consensus among moral philosophers as to which set of normative ethical theories is the best, let alone which *specific* normative ethical theory is correct. This lack of consensus in normative ethics seems to throw a spanner in the field of practical ethics. It seems the best method in the latter is to apply a specific normative ethical theory to the actions, practices, or character traits we wish to assess to determine their moral status (i.e. whether they are permissible, impermissible, obligatory, etc.). Yet, if we do this, the conclusion seems only acceptable to those who endorse the specific normative ethical theory chosen, which could be relatively few.

As Hugh LaFollette (2005: 8-9) contends in the introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Practical Ethics*, this is not how the relationship between normative and practical ethics should be, but nor should the latter abandon the enterprise of applying normative ethical theory altogether: “practice without theory lacks direction; it becomes little more than a loose amalgam of reactions to specific cases...Sound practical ethics must be theoretically sophisticated” (p. 8). Fortunately, there are various ways to incorporate normative ethical theory into applied ethics without merely applying a specific theory in the problematic manner just discussed. I will describe two.

The first is to argue for a conclusion from moral premises that adherents of a range of normative ethical theories can accept. This method may be supplemented with an explanation as to why these moral premises and the conclusion are compatible with the different normative ethical theories. Some of the philosophers I engage with take (something like) this approach.

Alternatively, an ethicist can assume a particular normative framework in making the case for their conclusions. By a ‘normative framework’, I mean a set or subset of normative ethical theories rather than a specific variant. Although such an ethicist assumes a particular normative framework, they can also explain how certain other normative frameworks (may) reach the same or similar conclusions. Additionally, they can highlight where certain other normative frameworks (may) reach (drastically) different conclusions. Relatedly, and more importantly, they can defend their conclusions by exposing the problems in the argument(s) for opposing conclusions, arguments which may implicitly or explicitly assume an alternative normative framework.

I will take this second approach, adopting Ross-style deontological pluralism, which is based on – rather than strictly conforming to – the version of deontology advanced by William David Ross. Ross (2022: 16-27) argues that we have the following five duties:

1. *Fidelity*: keep our implicit and explicit promises
2. *Reparation*: correct previous wrongs we have done
3. *Gratitude*: return good to those who have done good for us

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4. *Beneficence*: promote maximum aggregate good
5. *Non-maleficence*: do not harm or injure others

He thinks these five duties contribute to explaining other non-basic moral considerations. For example, lying can violate at least two duties: non-maleficence (because lying to someone harms them) and fidelity (because there is an implicit promise to be truthful in conversations). Although he notes that there may be more duties to add to this list (p. 20).

The duty of fidelity will be relevant, at least in the background, when I briefly discuss the ethics of infidelity. However, the duties of beneficence and non-maleficence are the key duties throughout this thesis. So I must explain them further, starting with how I will understand 'good'. Like other (deontological pluralist) philosophers (e.g. Audi 2004), I will understand 'good' as consisting of at least the following element: the well-being of sentient creatures. Relatedly, regarding the duty of non-maleficence, I will understand doing something that reduces a sentient creature's well-being as at least one way we can harm or injure another.

Thus, I will often talk about well-being rather than using terms like 'good', 'harm', and 'injury'. But the glaring question regarding this approach is how we should understand well-being. Of course, there are various theories of well-being – hedonistic theories, desire fulfilment theories, and objective list theories (see Crisp 2021). However, on the practical matters I address, the theories generally agree on what promotes or adversely affects well-being. Therefore, I will stay neutral on which specific theory or set of theories is best.

Returning to all the duties: unlike those in other forms of deontology, the duties in Ross-style deontological pluralism are not *absolute* or *exceptionless*. For example, Ross does not suggest breaking a promise or injuring someone is *always* wrong. Instead, Ross characterises these duties as *prima facie* duties. In explaining the nature of such duties, Anthony Skelton writes:

[E]ach duty rests on a separate and distinct ground and specifies a consideration counting in favour of or against an act or what to set ourselves to do, morally speaking...For example, that an act fails to fulfil a promise counts against it being right, and that an act produces the most surplus good counts in favour of it being morally right. Considerations of this sort have to be weighed and balanced against each other in deciding what we ought to do all things considered...(2022: 10-11).

Indeed, in many, if not most, situations, we will have a conflict between two or more duties. And, in such situations, Ross thinks the correct actions or our actual obligations have "the greatest balance of *prima facie* rightness, in those respects in which they are *prima facie* right, over their *prima facie* wrongness, in those respects in which they are *prima facie* wrong" (Ross 2002: 41).

Determining which is our all things considered duty requires judgment – there is no precise algorithm. Consequently, we can never be sure our decision was correct. Although some criticise Ross’s approach because of this impreciseness, others think it captures the “messy” reality of real-world ethics.

Although Ross’s *idea* of *prima facie* duties is attractive, the *term* ‘*prima facie* duties’ is not for various reasons (see Skelton 2022: 10-11), which I need not explain here. However, as Skelton explains, there are various ways suggested by Ross and/or others for how we can think of a *prima facie* duty, including thinking of them as constituting one of the following: a *tendency* to be morally right or wrong; a *responsibility*; a *moral reason* for or against an act; or just a *reason* in favour of or against an act (2022: 11-12). In this thesis, I will state my moral arguments and conclusions in terms of ‘moral reasons’.

Given my normative framework, many of my arguments and conclusions will appeal to those who endorse or, at least, are most sympathetic to an alternative normative framework that also emphasises the importance of well-being in moral deliberations – most notably, consequentialist frameworks. Also, as I will explain in Chapter 1, my normative framework is compatible with *the principle of default natural ethics*, which, in short, is the idea that all else being equal, society should adopt scripts that are maximally consistent with people’s evolved biological natures (Earp, Sandberg, & Savulescu 2012: 573-574). I utilise this principle when explaining how an understanding of human nature(s) helps build the case for my main proposals rather than for conflicting perspectives.

But, of course, my approach regarding all the underlying normative matters I have discussed will limit this thesis’s appeal to those who endorse or, at least, are most sympathetic to a (sub)set of normative ethical theories or a specific normative ethical theory that differs significantly in its approach to ethical questions and/or would reach (very) different conclusions to mine. Examples include versions of virtue ethics, natural moral law theory, and absolutist deontology.⁸ However, this kind of problem is faced by most, if not all, work in applied ethics and is not one I can avoid.

⁸ On how a virtue ethics approach would treat the issues I tackle in this thesis (and reach similar conclusions), see the works of Raja Halwani (e.g. 1998; 2003; 2007; 2008; 2012).

Sex, romantic love, and related concepts

I use 'sex' to refer to a range of activities involving at least two people that generate sexual pleasure in at least one of them. The standard cases involve a *physical* interaction between the persons, including penile-vaginal intercourse, oral sex, anal sex, mutual masturbation, and making out. But I also include instances of non-physical interaction, such as sexting and webcam sex. Accordingly, monogamy's sexual exclusivity component requires that the two partners not engage in any of these and other such sexual activities with anyone but each other. However, solo masturbation to fantasies or pornography is not sex nor, consequently, a monogamy violation. Of course, some philosophers seek more precise definitions, perhaps by analysing the concept of 'sexual pleasure' (e.g. Goldman 1977; Scruton 2001; Christina 2002; Morgan 2003). However, such a detailed conceptual analysis is unnecessary here.

Relatedly, philosophers through the centuries have theorised about how we should understand romantic love (henceforth often just 'love') (see Solomon & Higgins 1991; May 2011; McKeever 2014; Jenkins 2017). Again, a detailed conceptual analysis is unnecessary here. Plus, tying this thesis to a specific account of love is unwise. Indeed, my use of 'romantic love'/'love' will be relatively broad. That said, later chapters will introduce some specific (plausible) empirical details about romantic love and make normative claims and arguments about it. In addition, I must provide some details here about how I do and do not understand romantic love.

Firstly, I wish to avoid constraining what counts as love by any normative claims. As Brian Earp & Julian Savulescu (2020: 10) explain, some people want to give "a normative definition of love...[which] says that the very concept should be reserved for relationships that are essentially positive, good, or healthy." There are reasons for finding this approach attractive: for example, we can avoid regarding physically abusive relationships as loving, which may, to some degree, legitimise them. Still, there are risks. As Earp & Savulescu explain, "[o]nce we start defining for other people what love is, even overriding their personal judgements, we can slip into a narrow-minded paternalistic way of thinking that discounts their lived experiences" (p. 10). They give the example of people regarding love between same-sex partners as a conceptual impossibility.

Given such problems with normative definitions, in their work, Earp & Savulescu broadly "opt for a more neutral or descriptive route, giving wide berth to individuals to feel and conceive of love in their own way" (p. 11). They explain that some philosophical accounts of love support this approach, including Berit Brogaard's (2014), which, as they explain, claims the following:

[L]ove is, first and foremost, an emotion: a subjective, conscious, relational feeling that persists through various circumstances and lengths of time which only *you* the

individual, can directly access. In other words, barring special circumstances like obvious delusion, if you sincerely believe you are in love with someone, then you are (Earp & Savulescu 2020: 10).

I endorse this approach. If people sincerely believe that they love or are in love with someone, this counts as romantic love, “barring special circumstances”. Likewise, if people sincerely think they are in a romantic love-based relationship with someone, they are – again, “barring special circumstances”.

This broad understanding of romantic love covers (nearly) all paradigmatic cases. However, my use of ‘romantic love’/‘love’ will be explicitly broader and even cover feelings and relationships that the people experiencing them would not describe with such terms.

Firstly, there is a tendency to (implicitly) include one or more of the following elements in an account of (ideal) romantic love/relationships: the aim for the relationship to be long-term, if not lifelong, and, relatedly, the desire to share one’s life and identity with one’s partner (e.g. Weaver & Woollard 2008; McKeever 2014: 10). In contrast, my account rejects the idea that these are *necessary* features of love – though they will be common.

The view that love necessarily features these elements is not shared by many who practice certain kinds of open relationships (e.g. polyamory). Some have romantic partners with whom they openly do not intend to share their life or identity. Indeed, they might only see these partners fewer than a handful of times per month or less if they are in another country. Such relationships may last for many years. In other cases, people in open relationships may have a partner they see more regularly (with their primary partner) but only for several weeks or months, perhaps because, after this time, they will no longer be sufficiently geographically close. People in open relationships who have such (additional) relationships do not regard them as casual. They see them as romantic and loving, partly because they enjoy activities like date nights, day trips, holding hands, post-sex intimacy, and intimate conversations (on all these points, see Taormino 2008; Anapol 2010; Rickert & Veaux 2014; Hardy & Easton 2017). At least some who are only interested in monogamy sometimes enjoy such relationships. The main difference is that they would not do so while in a committed monogamous relationship unless they were having an affair (i.e. cheating with someone in a manner involving sex and love).⁹

Relatedly, I do not use ‘romantic love’/‘love’ to cover just paradigmatic cases, which include the feelings and relationships of people who *say* they love and/or are in love with their partner. These

⁹ See also Moen & Sørliie (2022: 342-344) on rejecting relationship escalator norms.

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terms also encompass the feelings and relations that people have long before they would say, even to themselves, that they love or are in love with the person they are involved with. Indeed, they cover the feelings of people who would say they “fancy”, “have a crush on”, or “have feelings for” the person of interest in a romantic sense. These terms also encompass the feelings and relations experienced by people on a first date who say they feel “a spark” or “the chemistry”.

Having such a broad notion of love is important for distinguishing between *sexually* open relationships and open relationships that allow for multiple romantic partners and, likewise, for distinguishing between casual (extra-relationship) sex and (extra-relationship) love/loving sex. On my account, if a person in a relationship is having sex with someone outside that relationship who they fancy romantically, feel a spark or chemistry with, etc., this counts as extra-relationship love, even if this person would not (yet) say they love this extra-relationship partner. Accordingly, for (extra-relationship) sex to be casual, not only must it occur outside the context of a formal loving relationship, it must not even involve the kinds of feelings and relations just described.

Of course, on this account, there will be cases of (extra-relationship) sex that are clearly casual. Examples include a 30-minute session with a sex worker, anonymous sex at a sex party, and a one-night stand while abroad with someone one firmly rules out as a romantic partner and who one will never see again. Meanwhile, other cases should clearly be considered extra-relationship love: for example, when one is going on dates with the extra-relationship partner, holds hands with them, stays up late into the night talking with them, wants to communicate frequently, engages in lengthy post-sex intimacy, and so on.

However, one problem with having such a broad understanding of love – especially one that includes hard-to-define experiences such as “a spark” and “the chemistry” – is that it arguably becomes hard to differentiate it from friendship. Indeed, we might think that one factor that differentiates casual sex from loving sex is that the former is without emotional intimacy, whereas the latter includes it. But friendships can be said to involve emotional intimacy: friends often talk about personal problems, share secrets, provide emotional support for each other, have long hugs, and so on. If a pair of friends-with-benefits engage in such emotional intimacy – as they would with other friends – many might consider their sex not casual. Indeed, they might think it counts as (extra-relationship) love on my account – if two people who are sexually attracted to each other also “get along” well enough to be emotionally intimate in such ways, does this not count as “having feelings”, experiencing “a spark” or “the chemistry”? I do not think such cases always count as extra-relationship love. If these friends were not having sex, we would not necessarily consider them romantically involved, even if there was a mutual (though mild) sexual attraction.

How we should differentiate friends-with-benefits from extra-relationship love arguably has implications for sexually open relationships since some versions allow casual extra-relationship sex to occur with people considered friends (e.g. swinging). A rough guide for determining whether (extra-relationship) sex counts as casual or (extra-relationship) love on my account would be to say it does if, apart from when you are having sex, you (desire to) do things with the sexual partner that you do not (desire to) do with people who are clearly in the ‘friends category’, especially those of the sex you are not attracted to, assuming you are heterosexual. Examples include cuddling up to watch a movie, holding hands in public, passionate kissing, and going on dates. We can also say it depends on people’s sincere beliefs about their sexual relationships. So if someone sincerely believes their sexual relationship is casual – that there are no romantic feelings, sparks, chemistry, etc. – then that sexual relationship is casual, “barring special circumstances”.

Admittedly, this methodology for distinguishing between casual (extra-relationship) sexual relations and (extra-relationship) love is not sufficiently specified to avoid ambiguous cases. Some sexual relations will be in the grey area between casual and romantic. However, this arguably reflects the real messy world of sex and dating. Sometimes people are unsure if their sexual relationship is casual or if there are romantic feelings. Such grey areas are relatively unproblematic among single people open to casual and serious dating. But at least in theory, they can be an issue for people in a sexually open relationship that, by definition, only permits casual extra-relationship sex and forbids extra-relationship love. However – as Chapter 3 similarly explains – in practice, sexually open couples can, should, and (most) often do avoid sexual relations in the grey area. For example, even though, in theory, one could have emotionally intimate friendships with their extra-relationship sex partners without these counting as extra-relationship love, in practice, it could be best to avoid having an emotionally intimate friendship with one’s extra-relationship sex partners to ensure one is never close to crossing the line between friendship and love.

PART I: MONOGAMY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Many endorse monogamism and perhaps monogamous idealism because they adopt a very different normative framework to mine, such as natural moral law theory (e.g. Finnis 2008; Geach 2008) or a religious approach to morality. Still, many people do or (presumably) would argue that (even) if well-being is the primary, if not only, moral consideration regarding these matters, we should endorse monogamism and perhaps monogamous idealism or, at least, similar positions, such as the real-world view (e.g. Scruton 1986; Shermer 2004: 192-195; Finnis 2008; Jordan B Peterson 2017; 2018: 1:12:26; Perry 2022). Therefore, I must demonstrate that insofar as the aim is to have sex and relationship-related values and norms conducive to well-being, we should, instead, embrace a plurality of sex and love lifestyles.

This part of the thesis contributes significantly to this endeavour. Chapter 1 primarily examines how an understanding of human nature(s) informed by evolutionary psychology combined with a normative framework that emphasises well-being – like mine – can contribute to building the case for my main proposals rather than for (views like) monogamism or monogamous idealism. And Chapter 2 details the significant risks and costs to well-being that many people (would) face, to varying degrees, in long-term monogamous relationships and why, consequently, it is highly unlikely that they will/would achieve the monogamous ideal.

Chapter 1 The relevance of human nature(s)

§1.1 explains what I mean by ‘human nature(s)’. §1.2 address the immediate worry that any appeal to human nature(s) in ethics is guilty of committing the naturalistic fallacy. I explain that I am, instead, utilising the principle of default natural ethics, which, in short, is the idea that all else being equal, society should adopt scripts that are maximally consistent with people’s evolved biological natures. And I discuss how this principle is compatible with my underlying normative framework and others. To see this principle’s implications for the ethical issues I explore, we must understand the relevant aspects of human nature(s). So §1.3 discusses the relevant mainstream theories in evolutionary psychology while noting their contested status and considering alternative perspectives. Then §1.4 explores what verdict(s) the principle of default natural ethics would produce regarding the ethics of monogamy, open relationships, singledom, etc., and reinforces the view that it supports my main proposals rather than monogamism, monogamous idealism, and similar views. Although the chapter’s primary purpose will be fulfilled, §1.5 highlights other ways the theories from evolutionary psychology will be relevant to philosophical issues I address later. Finally, §1.6 summarises the chapter, acknowledges the limitations of the discussion, and explains how the later chapters will overcome them.

1.1 Human nature(s)

Much debate exists over how we should understand ‘human nature’; some are even sceptical about the concept’s utility and/or if there is even such a thing as human nature (see Roughley 2021). I am not attempting to resolve this debate. Instead, I aim to present a relatively broad, uncontroversial, and common understanding of this concept that coheres with how other commentators on this thesis’ subject matter use the term and which will be appropriate for my purposes.

To this end, I use ‘human nature’ to refer to a set of traits – that is, (deep) drives, dispositions, attitudes, responses, capacities, desires, etc. – shared by the vast majority or all members of (one of the sexes of) our species because they are (predominately) evolutionarily-rooted, biological, genetic, etc. Such traits contrast those that are (predominately) the product of environmental factors, nurture, socialisation, cultural influence, etc., acting directly on groups and individuals and, which, consequently, are often not shared by all, or the vast majority of, members of (one of the sexes of) our species.

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However, as other philosophers (e.g. Jenkins 2017; Earp & Savulescu 2020) have similarly highlighted, 'human nature' will often not be the appropriate concept. This is because when it comes to sex, love, and relationships, not all or the vast majority of humans (of one of the sexes) share the same traits. And even for those traits shared by all or the vast majority of humans (of one of the sexes), individuals vary in how strong these traits are within them. Consequently, it is arguably more appropriate to talk about human *natures* to emphasise that different individuals have different natures regarding sex, love, and relationships.

Sexual orientation is a helpful example to illustrate this point. An attraction to people of the opposite sex is an element of human *nature* because the vast majority of humans possess this trait as part of their biological makeup. Yet, this trait is not possessed by gay people – that is, for present purposes, people who have only ever been attracted to people of the same sex. Nevertheless, people sensically claim some people are naturally gay, that being gay is part of some people's nature, that homosexuality – like heterosexuality – is natural, etc. Likewise, as I will discuss in §1.3, it arguably makes sense to talk about how some/many people are naturally monogamous while some/many others are naturally promiscuous, polyamorous, or nonmonogamous in some other manner.

So I will (most) often write about human/people's/individuals' *natures* rather than human nature. But when discussing the idea of a trait being possessed by all or the vast majority of humans (of one of the sexes), I will discuss the idea that this trait is part of human *nature*.

1.2 The naturalistic fallacy versus the principle of default natural ethics

As we will see, many people, including philosophers, believe an understanding of human nature(s) should play a role in our deliberations about sex and relationship ethics. But many think that to use insights on human nature(s) within the philosophical study of ethics is to commit the following infamous failure in reasoning:

The naturalistic fallacy: deriving normative conclusions about how things should be directly from descriptive claims about how things are, including claims about what is natural.

Standardly, the naturalistic fallacy is committed by deeming an act, practice, or character trait to have some kind of positive (moral) status (e.g. permissible, right, good, desirable, valuable, or obligatory) because it is natural; or conversely, judging an act, practice, or character trait to have some kind of negative (moral) status (e.g. impermissible, wrong, bad, undesirable, or disvaluable) because it is unnatural.

Such reasoning is mistaken for many reasons, including the following. Firstly, it has highly unattractive implications. Many things are (arguably) natural, but we (often) judge them negatively, such as cancer, selfishness, greed, violence, murder, and rape; and many things are (arguably) unnatural, but we (often) judge them positively, such as treatment for cancer and resisting a violent urge (Pinker 2002). Also, as far as any *secular* approach to ethics is concerned, there is ultimately no good reason to think there is a necessary direct connection between (human) nature(s) and normative ethics. The nature of life on Earth, including human nature(s), has ultimately been produced by the unconscious process of evolution, which, in short, favours traits that promote the ability of organisms to survive and reproduce (Buss 2019), not to act ethically. Finally and relatedly, as Catherine Wilson eloquently explains:

[T]he supposition that some human traits were adaptive in the past, or gave their possessors a reproductive edge, and that some patterns of behaviour represent evolutionarily stable strategies [ESS], or correspond to various types of durable polymorphism, can have no implications for prescriptive moral theory. According to the terms of G. E. Moore's Open Question Argument [Moore, 1903, Ch. 1], we are always in a position to say "I appreciate that behaviour pattern X represents an ESS, but why is X morally good?" or "I appreciate that behaviour pattern Y is fitness-inducing and predicts a larger future lineage than its competitor patterns, but does this mean that Y is morally permissible?" Why does it matter, the skeptic will ask, whether some form of behaviour that is subject to moral regulation, whether aggression, lust, lying, selfishness or neglect, is an element of a human survival-and-reproduction strategy or the result of interaction between a talking serpent and Adam and Eve? When it is argued that because "[t]he Darwinian does not expect you to feel guilt about spending money on your children rather than sending it all to Oxfam", that you are right not to feel guilt and that you are not obliged to send it all to Oxfam [Ruse, 1986, 239], it is evident that another premise is needed, though the conclusion is clearly true (2007: 238).

Nevertheless, various philosophers and scientists have suggested ways in which an understanding of human nature(s) can inform *practical* ethics that are not a case of the naturalistic fallacy (e.g. Dennett 1996: 468; Pinker 2002: xi). One way relevant to this project has been proposed by Brian Earp & Julian Savulescu (2020):

The principle of default natural ethics: "[a]ll else being equal...society should adopt scripts (like institutions and norms) that are maximally consistent with people's evolved biological natures" (p. 27).

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They believe by adopting it, “society can avoid the bad effects of misguided behavioral prohibitions and repression, whether enforced through law or custom, on individual and collective well-being” (p. 27). Their thinking builds on that of Erich Fromm, from whom they quote the following:

If man were infinitely malleable then...norms and institutions unfavorable to human welfare would have a chance to mold man forever into their patterns without the possibility that intrinsic forces in man’s nature would be mobilized and tend to change these patterns. Man would be only the puppet of social arrangements and not—as he has proved to be in history—an agent whose intrinsic properties react strenuously against the powerful pressure of unfavorable social and cultural patterns. In fact if man were nothing but the reflex of culture patterns no social order could be criticized or judged from the standpoint of man’s welfare since there would be no concept of “man” (1947: 31-32).

In earlier work, Earp and Savulescu, along with Anders Sandberg, build on all these ideas:

[H]uman nature should be managed only very carefully, toward well-justified moral goals, based on a keen understanding of our evolved psycho-biologies, and always with an empirical eye trained on the real world outcomes of any intervention. Otherwise Fromm’s warning that our natures will “react strenuously” against the external impositions—with potentially disastrous side-effects—may come swiftly into play (2012: 573-574).

Supporting this, Earp & Savulescu (2020: 27-28) note how sexual repression can “backfire”, *arguably* leading to issues such as more teenage pregnancies and STIs among young religious Americans receiving abstinence-only education (Stanger-Hall and Hall 2011) and the sexual abuse of children by “celibate” Catholic priests (Berry 1992; Plante 1996).

But as the principle of default natural ethics allows, sometimes we should manage human nature:

[I]t is only when biologically friendly norms about human drives and behavior lead to harm or violate clear moral standards, like justice, that laissez-faire policies should be reconsidered. Then the costs and benefits of different forms of social regulation can be tallied up (p. 28).

Indeed, Earp & Savulescu believe there are some nature-consistent values and norms we ought to reject outright. To illustrate this, they argue that *even if* biological dispositions can partly explain rape and paedophilia, the principle of default natural ethics would not deem these behaviours

morally permissible since they often lead to terrible harm and violate firmly grounded moral standards (pp. 28-29).

All these ideas are attractive. So, unsurprisingly, others have expressed similar views. Among them is Wilson, who proposes the following as the seemingly best candidate for establishing the very possibility of evolutionary ethics:

Is-to-Ought-Principle: Since behaviour patterns in a species that have arisen as a result of selective pressures are apt to be pleasurable and satisfying to the organisms engaging in them, supported by redundant mechanisms, and overprogrammed or difficult to extinguish, one ought not try to suppress behaviour that can be shown to have arisen in the course of evolution, unless there are strong reasons for doing so. Either the attempt will likely produce stress if repression is successful, or it will consume resources to no avail if it is not. Further, if some alternative practice or form of social organization would permit people to act in ways that were more natural, hence more pleasurable and satisfying, then it is obligatory to introduce them unless there are strong reasons for altering the practice (2007: 238-239).

Perhaps the main difference between Wilson's and Earp & Savulescu's presentations of their similar principles is this. Wilson emphasises the *positive* effects of biologically *friendly* scripts on well-being. Meanwhile, Earp & Savulescu emphasise the *negative* effects of biologically *unfriendly* scripts on well-being. But, presumably, Earp & Savulescu would agree with Wilson's points. In any case, we should recognise them as further reasons to endorse the principle of default natural ethics: that is, all else being equal, society should adopt scripts that are maximally consistent with people's natures *partly* because they will *promote* well-being.

This focus on promoting well-being while acknowledging other potential non-well-being considerations makes the principle of default natural ethics compatible with various normative frameworks, including consequentialist ones and, most crucially, the Ross-style deontological pluralist framework I adopt. Indeed, promoting well-being coheres with the duty of beneficence. Meanwhile, avoiding harm and not violating clear moral standards coheres with the duty of non-maleficence and the other *prima facie* duties. Therefore, utilising the principle of default natural ethics in this project makes sense.

So what guidance does this principle give regarding the matters this thesis addresses? To answer this, I must fill in the relevant details regarding human nature(s).

1.3 Human nature(s) pertaining to sex, love, and relationships

There has been a wealth of fascinating research, including massive cross-cultural studies, in evolutionary psychology on human nature(s) pertaining to sex, love, and relationships (hereafter, often just ‘human nature(s)'). I will only briefly summarise this research here, focusing on the elements relevant to this thesis. §1.3.1 presents the mainstream view in evolutionary psychology on human nature(s) concerning sex, love, and relationships (hereafter, often just ‘the mainstream view’). It will primarily draw on the work of biological anthropologist Helen Fisher, arguably the world’s leading researcher on romantic love, and evolutionary psychologist David Buss, arguably the world’s leading researcher on the evolution of human sexuality. Next, §1.3.2 notes some controversies regarding the mainstream view, discusses alternative perspectives, and emphasises the potential amount of variation among individuals in their traits regarding sex and relationships.

1.3.1 The mainstream view in evolutionary psychology

1.3.1.1 A crash course in evolutionary psychology

In evolutionary terms, the point of life is to *survive* and *reproduce*, so evolution selects for:

Adaptations: inherited and reliably developing characteristics that came into existence through natural selection because they helped to solve problems of survival or reproduction better than alternative designs existing in the population during the period of their evolution (Buss 2017: 36).

Examples of adaptations that aid survival include the immune system (which helps solve the problem of disease) and our sweat glands (which help solve the problem of hot environments).

Problems of reproduction that our ancestors faced included making sure they passed on their genes and reproducing with a partner of suitable genetic quality. Evolutionary psychologists call the adaptations that help us overcome such challenges ‘mating strategies’ (Buss 2016).

Before discussing these mating strategies, I should note two points. First, they do not require conscious awareness and planning (Ibid. 8-9). We do not consciously make ourselves sweat to survive. Likewise, when a man and woman have a one-night stand, they are not thinking, “I want to have sex with this person to produce offspring, thereby increasing my reproductive success.” Secondly, with the mating strategies I discuss, there are often a few, some, or even many exceptions to the “rules”. For example, gay people are exceptions to the “rule” that humans have evolved to desire people of the opposite sex.

1.3.1.2 Pair-bonding

The consensus in evolutionary psychology is that humans are a pair-bonding species. That is, *in general*, we are disposed to forming pair bonds – which, here, we can think of as a long-term, romantic love-based relationship involving attachment, among other standard features of love, between two people – and to (generally) have only one such relationship at a time. As a pair-bonding species, scientists believe we are in the company of around 90% of avian species but only about 3-5% of mammals and a small minority of species in general. The males and females of these species form pair bonds to rear their offspring together. This is because the newborns of these species are highly vulnerable in their early months or even years of life, and the mother would struggle to raise them through infancy without a father. Evolutionary theorists confidently believe this is why pair-bonding was also selected in human evolution (Fisher 2016). Indeed, such pair-bonding is also considered our (primary) long-term mating strategy. It is also why humans are considered a *socially* monogamous species – though we will soon see that we are not considered *sexually* monogamous (Barash & Lipton 2001).

Many, like Fisher, additionally think that human pair-bonds – like the pair-bonds of other species – were generally not “designed” by evolution to last for a lifetime – as most relationships in the modern world are intended to – but, instead, for several years. This is for various reasons, including the following: it only takes several years to rear children through infancy; our ancestors had a relatively short life expectancy, with death ending most pair bonds; and reproducing with various partners could have been evolutionarily advantageous for our ancestors since their offspring would have had more genetic variety. Of course, this theory could partly explain why many modern couples struggle to maintain the levels of romantic love and happiness in the early years of their relationship for the several decades that follow it (Fisher 2016).

1.3.1.3 Short-term and extra-pair mating

In addition to the long-term mating strategy of pair-bonding, evolutionary psychologists (generally) agree that humans also have an evolutionary history of *short-term mating* (i.e. casual sex) and *extra-pair mating* (i.e. adultery/infidelity). This is partly because, like long-term mating, such behaviours could further our ancestors’ reproductive success. However, the theorised adaptive benefits of short-term and extra-pair mating differ for males and females.

For males, the primary potential benefit of short-term mating is a direct increase in their number of offspring: the more females they impregnate through short-term mating, the more opportunity they have to pass on their genes. Additionally, the more varied those females are, the better since having more genetic variety in one’s offspring can increase reproductive success. All these points

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remain true even for males in a long-term pair bond, no matter how high in quality their relationship and partner are. Thus, short-term mating in the form of extra-pair mating is also evolutionarily advantageous. One of the other main adaptive benefits of extra-pair mating for males is the opportunity to form a new pair bond with a superior female – typically, a more fertile female than their current partner, indicated by a more youthful and attractive appearance. Then, they can eventually switch to that new pair bond or, in arguably fewer cases, try to maintain both pair bonds simultaneously (Buss 2016; 2019: 159-171).

In the case of females, there are numerous hypotheses for why short-term and/or extra-pair mating could have been conducive to their reproductive success and even survival. I will name and briefly explain several prominent examples (see Buss 2019: 171-175, unless a separate reference is provided).

1. *Good genes*: by having casual sex with a relatively high-status male, a female may be able to secure his good genes for her offspring, giving them a better chance of surviving and reproducing.
2. *The dual-mating strategy*: a female can pair-bond with a relatively lower-ranking male, one who is, therefore, likely to stick around and raise children with her rather than straying. However, she can discreetly engage in extra-pair mating during ovulation with a relatively higher-ranking male. She can then have her relatively lower-ranking male partner unknowingly raise the higher-ranking male's child or children (Symons 1979; Smith 1984).
3. *Different genes*: females can gain more genetic variety among their offspring by reproducing with various males.
4. *Sex for resources*: females can engage in short-term and extra-pair mating in exchange for resources. For our female ancestors, such resources would have included food, protection, tools, and shelter.
5. *Paternity confusion*: at least some of our female ancestors may have predominantly acted on a relatively promiscuous short-term mating strategy, at least at certain times in their life. That is, a female could have had short-term relations with many different males, so when they had children, the males they had previously had sex with would not know who the genetic father was. Consequently, probably none of them would be willing to invest as much into her and her offspring as they would in a long-term pair bond. However, each of these males may have been happy to provide at least some resources on the chance that he is the genetic father, especially if he continues having sex with her (see Hrdy 1981; Fisher 1998: 94).

6. *Mate-switching*: our female ancestors could use extra-pair mating as a means for switching mates. Indeed, it is likely that they were often better off having an affair to change partners rather than merely ending their current pair bond first, being single for some time, and then starting a new relationship. This is because our female ancestors could often be vulnerable to the dangers of nature if they did not have a partner. Thus, it was better to ensure they could switch straight from one pair bond to another, thereby avoiding any time being single in between.
7. *Backup mates*: for our female ancestors, there may have been times when their regular mate was absent, perhaps to go hunting for food. While away, he cannot provide certain resources, most notably protection against predators and other humans. Our female ancestors also faced the risk that their partner could sustain a severe injury, die, or desert her, perhaps for another female. In these cases, she permanently loses his protection and other resources. Consequently, it is plausible that our female ancestors engaged in extra-pair mating to cultivate backup mates. These special male friends could “fill in” for her regular partner when he was not around or replace him should she lose him completely.

What does all this mean for modern humans? All these theories predict that the evolutionary process would have selected for adaptations that promote the short-term and/or extra-pair mating behaviours in the appropriate circumstances.

So many/most modern men should continually possess traits that promote promiscuous behaviour, regardless of whether they are single or in a relationship, no matter how highly they rate their partner and relationship. Examples of such traits that evolutionary psychologists claim are found among many/most men to varying degrees cross-culturally include the following: a strong, persistent drive to have sex with many varied partners; feeling sexually frustrated by long periods of celibacy or only having sex with one female; finding casual sex highly pleasurable; having relaxed standards for casual sex partners (the more women they are attracted to, the more they can impregnate); and the disposition to lose interest in repeatedly having sex with a *familiar* female but to be more easily sexually re-aroused by *novel* females (motivating them to have multiple sexual partners rather than one). Additionally, we would expect many men with an older-looking girlfriend/wife to be inclined to desire younger-looking women, sexually and romantically – which, of course, research does find (on all these points, see Buss 2019: 159-171).

Meanwhile, the picture is more complicated for modern women, given the number and relative complexity of the hypotheses regarding the adaptive benefits of short-term and extra-pair mating

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for our female ancestors. But there are several predictions made by one or more of the theories. I will explain a sample.

First, we could expect that, for many/most women, if they are in a happy, well-resourced relationship with a sufficiently high-quality partner (genetically speaking), they would not be inclined towards extra-pair mating – they would not need to secure better genes, acquire resources, switch partners, or secure backup mates. Indeed, it is when one or more of these conditions is not met that they would desire to engage in extra-pair mating. For example, if they are in an unsatisfactory relationship, they would be inclined to engage in extra-pair mating that would be both sexual and romantic. Additionally, suppose a woman's partner is relatively unattractive (i.e. relatively low in genetic quality) compared to the men she could be with. In that case, she might strongly desire short-term extra-pair mating with more attractive men (as per the dual-mating strategy) or even wish to have a sexual and romantic relationship with such a man (as a means to switch mates or acquire backup mates). Relatedly, we would expect women to find sex, including casual sex, more desirable and pleasurable if it is with men higher in genetic quality (as this will motivate them to acquire the best genes for their offspring). Finally, if the *paternity confusion* hypothesis is correct, we would expect that at least some women will have traits that motivate them to behave relatively promiscuously compared to other women, including desiring a greater quantity and variety of sexual partners and finding casual sex more pleasurable.

However, the empirical support for the hypotheses regarding short-term and extra-pair mating in women varies considerably. For example, the mate-switching hypothesis is considered well-supported. Meanwhile, at least some view the dual-mating strategy as falsified or, at least, only having weak support (see Buss 2019: 175-179).

1.3.1.4 Jealousy

In male-female pair bonds, a partner engaging in extra-relationship sex and/or love with someone of the opposite sex risks significant harm to their partner. Males face the issue of *paternal uncertainty*. If their female partner has sex with another male, she may become pregnant. And if so, not only will he have missed the opportunity to reproduce, but he may also waste much effort and resources over many years rearing another male's offspring. Meanwhile, females face the issue that their male partner may switch to a new pair bond or perhaps attempt to maintain multiple pair bonds simultaneously. Consequently, he will likely divert some, most, or even all his time, attention, protection, efforts, commitment, and other resources away to the rival female(s) and their children. For our female ancestors, such actions by their male partner would threaten their and their offspring's survival.

To help protect against these harms, evolution selected for jealousy. But due to the different risks our male and female ancestors faced, there are differences in what triggers jealousy. Male jealousy is *particularly* responsive to cues of their female partner's *sexual* infidelity, whereas female jealousy is *particularly* responsive to cues of their male partner's *emotional/romantic* infidelity.

As jealousy was vital for our ancestors' reproductive success, and, for our female ancestors, their survival too, it can be very intense, powerful, automatic, hard to manage, and often not responsive to reason – male sexual jealousy cannot be relieved by assurances that sufficient contraception was used. Also, on this account, jealousy consists of various emotions, including anger, rage, sadness, hurt, humiliation, grief, betrayal, agony, hopelessness, anxiety, and extreme distress. Furthermore, people can fester in jealousy, obsessively having jealous thoughts and feelings, which often results in them being unable to work, sleep properly, and enjoy activities they normally do. Worse still, jealousy can motivate vigilance behaviours, such as watching a partner's interactions at social events, following them when they are out, and inspecting their private messages and emails. And it can also lead to verbal abuse, threats, violence, and even murder against a partner and/or rival (on all the points in this section, see Buss 2000; Buss 2016: 195-240; 2017; Edlund and Sagarin 2017).¹⁰

1.3.1.5 A summary

According to the mainstream view, humans are generally disposed to forming pair bonds (that last for several years), and many/most also have proclivities towards extra-pair mating; still, because the human animal is a jealous one, we (generally) do not want our partners to engage in extra-pair mating. Consequently, many summarise the mainstream view with a variant of the following claim: what comes naturally for most humans is (serial) monogamy with cheating (e.g. Fisher 2016).

1.3.2 Recognising controversies and variations

Many people find the mainstream view (broadly) compelling. Still, many aspects of it have been contested empirically. Some have criticised Fisher's theory that human pair bonds are only built to last for around four years (e.g. Daly & Wilson 2000: 103; see also Jenkins 2017 for a more wide-ranging critical analysis of Fisher's work). Also, much of the research on short-term and extra-pair mating strategies by Buss and others has been critiqued (e.g. Conley 2011; Conley et al. 2011;

¹⁰ Since this evolutionary account of jealousy has a significant or, at least, supportive role in some of my later arguments, I have described much of the empirical evidence for it in Appendix A.

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2014). So has the evolutionary account of jealousy (e.g. Harris 2000; 2002; 2003; Anapol 2010: 108-112; Anderson 2012: 128-131). Perhaps most famously, the author Christopher Ryan & psychiatrist Cacilda Jethá critiqued much of the mainstream view and presented an alternative understanding of human sexuality in their (2011) New York Times Bestseller *Sex at Dawn*.¹¹

In providing an overview of the debate, Earp & Savulescu (2020: 40-41) claim the following:

Scientists are actually not sure about just how wide the gap is between (social) appearance and (sexual) reality when it comes to monogamy and our species. There is disagreement about whether we humans are (1) mostly monogamous, both socially and sexually, with a little bit of something extra on the side...or (2) mostly socially monogamous but sexually nonmonogamous, so that claims of “natural” sexual monogamy are little more than agitprop for outdated and oppressive cultural norms...According to [the prominent evolutionary psychologist Geoffery] Miller, the real disagreement among sex researchers is whether most people most of the time are disposed to be in long-term pair bonds that are highly sexually exclusive, or whether most people most of the time are disposed to be in (one or more) long-term pair bonds that are relatively open to other relationships.

Despite disagreements and uncertainties, all commentators in this area seem to, and should, agree that although there are or might be traits that at least most people or most members of one of the sexes share, there is still considerable variation among individuals in the degree to which they possess these traits. For example, although the mainstream evolutionary perspective is that most men are biologically disposed towards promiscuity, there is no suggestion they are equally so. Indeed, the strength of men’s sex drive is widely considered to correlate positively with their testosterone levels, and, of course, men vary significantly in their testosterone levels (Hooven 2021). Also, genetic factors may affect how promiscuously inclined men *and women* are. For example, one study on 181 men and women found a direct link between specific genes in the dopamine system and a higher frequency of casual sex encounters and instances of sexual infidelity (Garcia et al. 2010). The finding was unsurprising given that particular genes in the dopamine system have previously been linked to personality traits such as novelty-seeking, spontaneity, and risk-taking (Fisher 2009).

In making similar points, Earp & Savulescu (2020: 41-42) write:

¹¹ Of course, evolutionary psychologists have responded to many of these criticisms (e.g. Saxon 2012; Fisher 2016; Edlund & Sagarin 2017; Buss 2019).

According to Geoffrey Miller, even if we could magically filter out all heavy-handed social pressures, we would still likely find a lot of individual variation down at the level of “pure” biology. “Many people really are naturally very monogamous after their mid-20s,” he told us, “forming happy long-term pair bonds with low probability of cheating or divorce.” Other people, especially those who score high on a personality trait called sociosexuality, are “more naturally sex-positive, promiscuous, open to casual sex, interested in polyamory, and so on. Neither kind of person understands the other very well.”¹²

Carrie Jenkins (2017) is among those drawn to polyamory. Still, she recognises the existence of those Miller describes as “naturally very monogamous”:

For some people, monogamy really doesn’t seem to be a terrible struggle. They say it feels perfectly “natural” and delightful and right (p. 93).

Miller’s and Jenkin’s points here cohere with the work of psychologists Rafael Wlodarski, John Manning, and Robin Dunbar (2015). They propose there are two “phenotypes” regarding “mating strategy” in humans: the monogamous type and the promiscuous type. They believe men and women are split between these two types, with 57% of men and 43% of women preferring promiscuity. However, Jenkins criticises their work for only comparing just two models of relationship preference – “long-term monogamous bonding on the one hand and short-term promiscuous bonding on the other” (2017: 93). She believes this approach unjustifiably ignores alternative preferences, such as those for lifelong nonmonogamous bonds or short-term serial monogamy:

As a species, modern humans are a romantically diverse bunch. What “comes naturally” to us varies: our infinite variety cannot be reduced to one or two standard models” (p. 94).

Relatedly, some commentators have claimed or implied, at least in parts of their work, that there are various consensual – i.e. infidelity-free – relationship orientations (e.g. monogamy, swinging, and polyamory), just as there are different sexual orientations (e.g. heterosexuality and homosexuality). And, in both cases, we all have one (e.g. drzhana.com). Let us call this perspective ‘the various relationship orientations view’. In its boldest form, it (controversially) implies that just as people are *perfectly* suited to living per their sexual orientation – for example, a gay man can just have sexual and romantic relations with other men without conflicting desires for such

¹² Earp & Savulescu’s quotes from Miller come from personal communication with him (November 3, 2018).

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relations with women – people are *perfectly* suited to practising a particular relationship style. So many people can practice monogamy with no desire for extra-relationship sex or love, many people can practice swinging without sexual jealousy or the desire for other romantic relationships, and many can practice polyamory free from jealousy and the desire for monogamy, etc.

Earp & Savulescu express (something like) a *modest* form of the various relationship orientations view by recognising conflicting desires and not declaring certainty over the existence of these orientations:

If homosexuality is natural for some people—that is, consistent with their unchosen, innermost, most stable, hard-to-ignore preferences and desires—then polyamory is probably natural for some people, too, just as heterosexuality or monogamy may be for others.

Individual differences matter. For some people, the desire to have one main partner and to be sexually exclusive tends to be strongest and most stable, winning out over competing desires for multiple partners or sex with more than one person...For other people, the desire to have more than one partner, or sex with more than one person, is strongest and most stable...(2020: 42).

1.4 Applying the principle of default natural ethics

Recall:

The principle of default natural ethics: “[a]ll else being equal...society should adopt scripts (like institutions and norms) that are maximally consistent with people’s evolved biological natures” (Earp & Savulescu 2020: 27).

Insofar as the various relationship orientations view is correct, this principle supports my main proposals – embracing a plurality of sex and love lifestyles. Indeed, on this picture, it seems we can live happily in our sex and love life once we discover our relationship orientation and live accordingly in a society with little or no stigma for such choices. So just as a gay man who is trying to live a heterosexual life would be happier accepting his homosexual orientation and acting accordingly in an environment with little or no homophobia, a person struggling to live a monogamous lifestyle will be better off embracing and acting per their nonmonogamous orientation (which could be polyamorous, swinging, etc.) in a social context with little or no stigma for such a lifestyle.

However, as indicated, the various relationship orientations view is controversial and not one I would defend. So let us turn to what Earp & Savulescu think. After their summary of the relevant literature on human natures, they claim:

[I]f we want a society where everyone, or even just most people, can really flourish in their romantic lives, we should push for a dominant social script that recognizes and allows for a range of relationship norms, so long as these are based on mutual consent and respect for others. That way, people can figure out what works for them, and be socially supported in their decisions (p. 43).

Of course, their ‘range of relationship norms’ conclusion seems similar to my main proposals – though I will soon note some potential differences.

But a noticeable absence in Earp & Savulescu’s discussion leading up to these proposals (pp. 36-42) is any mention of the idea that jealousy is an aspect of human nature for most, if not (nearly) all, people. This is not because they reject the evolutionary account of jealousy. Indeed, shortly after, they claim “[j]ealousy has deep evolutionary roots” and “is an ingrained feature of most people’s relationship psychology”, and they explain how it can be in tension with pursuing an open relationship (p. 44). Still, some might argue that the principle of default natural ethics produces different results once we factor jealousy in. Relatedly, they might argue that insofar as the mainstream view is correct, Earp & Savulescu’s proposals – and mine – are wrong. I will discuss some forms such a critique could take.

One who adopts the mainstream view might think the principle of default natural ethics tells us to favour (serial) monogamy with cheating for most people because that is most consistent with human nature (§1.3.1.5). Indeed, they might think the principle tells us to be “more like the French” and other cultural groups who reportedly have more relaxed attitudes towards (male) infidelity (Druckerman 2008; Pew Research Center 2014). But, among other problems, this application forgets that the principle can be overridden if the biologically friendly scripts would lead to harm or violate clear moral standards, which a norm of (serial) monogamy with cheating would. Indeed, among other considerations, cheating can involve promise-breaking, deceit, unfairness to a partner acting monogamously on the understanding their partner is doing likewise, and the risk of causing severe long-term psychological suffering (Wasserstrom 1998).

Nevertheless, assuming the mainstream view is correct, this mistaken application of the principle does highlight some uncomfortable truths. If we do what arguably comes naturally – that is, if most people practice (serial) monogamy with cheating – we can cause significant suffering and/or commit other moral wrongs. However, we also face what I call ‘the threefold tension between

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human nature and infidelity-free sex and love lifestyles’ – or, more succinctly, ‘the threefold tension’:

1. Singledom is in tension with the pair-bonding aspect of human nature.
2. Successful monogamy is in tension with our proclivities towards extra-pair mating.
3. Open relationships are in tension with our propensity for jealousy.

One crucial caveat is that at least some people will not feel tension between a particular sex and love lifestyle (e.g. voluntary celibacy, successful monogamy, swinging) and any aspect of *their* nature. So suppose that lifestyle is the one they adopt, they experience little or no social stigma for it, and, if it is a relationship style, they have a partner – or partners – who experiences no such tension either. In that case, their situation is desirable, to say the least. However, as this indicates, people can still face the threefold tension even if they do not possess at least one of the three aspects of human nature mentioned *themselves*. For example, a woman might be disposed towards pair-bonding and jealousy but have never experienced desires for extra-relationship sex and love (when she is in a happy relationship with a partner of sufficiently high genetic quality); still, the men she wishes to pursue successful monogamy with may have conflicting proclivities toward extra-pair mating.

With all this in mind, let us consider what results the principle of default natural ethics generates if we factor the mainstream view, including the threefold tension, into the equation. Some might think that granting the (general) immorality of infidelity, the principle simply does not give us any clear guidance on what scripts society should adopt regarding monogamy, open relationships, and singledom – all the options are biologically unfriendly and/or violate clear moral standards.

However, there is another option for those who acknowledge the threefold tension and (broadly) agree with Earp & Savulescu’s (and Sandberg’s) principle of default natural ethics and their points about when and how human nature should be managed (see §1.2). They could examine each aspect of human nature identified in the threefold tension – pair-bonding, extra-pair mating, and jealousy – and determine which is easiest to manage (by suppression, resistance, prohibitions, etc.). In other words: which conflict is the least intense? Which aspect of our nature will react the least strenuously against external impositions? And which part of our nature will be the least risky and costly to manage?

Many (conservative) commentators on sex and relationship ethics take (something like) this approach and conclude with (something like) one or more of the following positions (partly) as a consequence: monogamism, monogamous idealism, and the real-world view (e.g. Scruton 1986: 339; Tucker 2014; Jordan B Peterson 2017; Heying & Weinstein 2021; Perry 2022). This is because

they (presumably) think that resisting dispositions towards extra-pair mating to be monogamously faithful is easier, less risky and costly, less strenuous, less of a conflict, etc., than managing jealousy to be in an open relationship or resisting the drive to pair-bond to enjoy singledom.

Such commentators might respond to Earp & Savulescu's case for a range of relationship norms by arguing that most people – or most men and at least some women – have desires for multiple sexual and/or romantic partners, to varying degrees, but (nearly) all of us have a powerful propensity for jealousy, and so (partly for this reason) monogamy should be the only relationship norm for (nearly) all people.

Although many social conservatives adopt such reasoning, many historians and sociologists would highlight that this has not always been the conservative perspective. While the *idea* of sexual fidelity may have existed for centuries, the *general expectation* of forming a lifelong union (i.e. marriage) that will *actually* be *mutually* sexually exclusive appears not to have a long history nor to be present in many cultures today. Indeed, monogamy has only become the dominant norm in many societies over the past century or two (Coontz 2005; Anderson 2012: 74-76). Throughout most of human history, when sexual fidelity was expected, it seems to have mostly just been a standard for women. Indeed, it was implicitly or explicitly accepted that men could have extra-marital sex with women (and men), including mistresses and sex workers (Bullough 1976; Hyrum 1885; Coontz 2005; Anderson 2012: 76). This was probably especially true of men who held high social status by having wealth and power (Coontz 2005; Tucker 2014).

Furthermore, renowned historian Stephanie Coontz argues that romantic love has only become a widespread prerequisite for marriage – whether with two or more spouses – over the past few centuries. In many societies, especially before the 18th Century, marriage appears to have primarily served functions such as organising society's political and economic hierarchy, acquiring suitable in-laws, developing political alliances, elevating capital, and passing on possessions, wealth, livestock, property, and other assets. These societies either (i) deemed romantic love an entirely negative force, a feeling that should always be resisted, or (ii) they valued this passion but did not believe it should be enjoyed within marriage. In the latter case, they often thought affairs were the appropriate context for romantic love (Coontz 2005).

Insofar as Coontz and others are correct regarding the history of marital norms, we may reasonably speculate the following. First, many historical societies, in some sense, judged it best to resist the disposition towards love, which, in turn, would mean not having to manage jealousy – since we are only jealous over those we love – allowing at least men to enjoy acting on proclivities towards short-term mating instead (fidelity was likely still expected of women to

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ensure paternity certainty). Second, the more recent societies that valued love in marriage obviously did not think we should suppress our disposition to pair-bond. Still, they thought it best to have *inegalitarian* (sexually) open marriages that only permitted men casual sex (and romance) with others. Thus, they thought the aspects of human nature that should be managed – insofar as they recognised their existence – were wives' proclivities towards extra-pair mating and jealousy. Meanwhile, married men's dispositions for pair-bonding and jealousy did not have to be managed, and their extra-pair mating tendencies did not have to be suppressed to the degree that successful monogamy requires.

Such historical approaches to managing human nature would be rejected by many today for multiple reasons, and they would arguably not be recommended by the principle of default natural ethics due to causing harm and/or violating clear moral standards. As Earp, Sandberg, & Savulescu write, "[e]ven if patriarchal conventions that privilege (male) promiscuity may resonate better with basic facts about human biology, they are certainly not in tune with modern ideals about mutual respect between individuals, gender equality, and so on" (2012: 572-573).

Nevertheless, the fact that relationship norms have shifted over time helps undermine the belief of many *modern* social conservatives that resisting proclivities towards extra-pair mating – rather than pair-bonding and jealousy – to achieve successful monogamy is obviously the optimal strategy for (nearly) all or even just most people.

In any case, we can grant the mainstream view, including the threefold tension, but provide alternative reasons for why the principle of default natural ethics would still support Earp & Savulescu's range of relationship norms and, indeed, my plurality of sex and love lifestyles rather than one relationship norm (e.g. successful monogamy) or a small set of lifestyles (e.g. successful monogamy, celibacy, singledom while young) for (nearly) all. We can do this by emphasising that although there are (probably) evolutionary-rooted dispositions that most people/men/women share, we still vary considerably regarding how strong these dispositions are. Consequently, the aspect of human nature that is easiest to manage – in other words, the least intense tension – will not be the same for (nearly) everyone or even most people.

Arguably many people score relatively low on the sociosexuality scale, are very sexually jealous, and suffer relatively significantly when their drive towards pair-bonding is not satisfied in the long term. So the tension between successful monogamy and their proclivities towards extra-pair mating will be the least intense for them. Thus, pursuing successful monogamy is arguably the most prudent choice – though finding a partner with a similar profile is best.

However, many others will likely not meet these conditions. At least some people probably find suppressing their drive towards pair-bonding relatively easy but find it extremely difficult to resist

their proclivities towards extra-pair mating or managing jealousy. So for them, singledom arguably makes more sense than monogamy or an open relationship. At least, these states of affairs might persist until, say, their (later) 30s or 40s.

Meanwhile, other people may find their dispositions towards pair-bonding, extra-pair mating, and jealousy are all strong; still, the latter two are manageable enough to make a relatively limited (sexually) open relationship (e.g. swinging or one-night stands only) work. Indeed, people likely vary (significantly) regarding what triggers their jealousy and how intensely they feel it (Buss 2000). And at least some people seem to have low, if not non-existent, levels of jealousy over their partner's extra-relationship sex and/or love (see Gould 1999; Jenkins 2017: 171-172). Additionally, it is compatible with the evolutionary account of jealousy that many women would not experience (significant) sexual jealousy in response to their boyfriend/husband having extra-relationship sex, so long as there are sufficient assurances that the sex is purely casual. This is comparable to how many men feel neutral or even positive about their bisexual girlfriend/wife having casual sex with other women since, for our male ancestors, their female partner having sex with another female posed no threat to paternity certainty (Buss 2000; Sagarin et al. 2003; Sagarin et al. 2012). For such people, certain kinds of (sexually) open relationships will be a plausible option.

* * *

So even if we accept the mainstream view – emphasising the threefold tension, especially the tension between jealousy and open relationships – the principle of default natural ethics may well support Earp & Savulescu's conclusion that we should recognise and allow for a range of relationship norms and my proposals regarding embracing a plurality of sex and love lifestyles. Although these proposals seem similar, I will highlight some (potential) noteworthy differences.

First, I have provided more details regarding my proposals (see pp. 9-11) because they are my main conclusions. However, for Earp & Savulescu, their similar perspective was not even the main point of the chapter it featured within. Among the details I provide is a list of most of the sex and love lifestyles I believe we should embrace. Although Earp & Savulescu elaborate on their range of relationship norms conclusion by stating that “consensually nonmonogamous relationships...should plausibly have a more prominent position on the social script for romantic love” (p. 43), they may not ethically agree with all the sexually open relationships I list. And they may wish to include other forms of consensual nonmonogamy that I remain neutral on (e.g. polyamory).

Another difference is that Earp & Savulescu discuss 'relationship norms', whereas I use the term 'sex and love lifestyles'. My terminology reflects my desire to emphasise the inclusion of ways of living the single life among the lifestyles we should embrace. Of course, avoiding (long-term) relationships altogether could be considered a relationship norm. However, Earp & Savulescu (2020: 43) do not comment on such single-life options.

1.5 Other relevances of human nature(s)

I have shown how an understanding of human nature(s) can help build the case for embracing a plurality of sex and love lifestyles rather than for opposing views, like monogamism and monogamous idealism. However, I will highlight some other key ways an understanding of human nature(s) informed by evolutionary psychology contributes to this thesis.

Firstly, if a trait increased the reproductive success or survivability of our male and/or female ancestors, we would expect it to be (very) common, if not (near) universal, among modern males and/or females; so understanding that a trait is (probably) an evolutionary-selected adaptation can help provide at least a rough idea of how prevalent certain situations are in the real modern world, which, in turn, can strengthen my arguments and/or highlight their importance and practical implications.

For example, I have found that many people in academic philosophy – and beyond – cannot see why casual extra-relationship sex would be a valuable experience for anyone or, at least, more than a tiny minority. Such people may find the later discussions about why a restriction on such sex requires justification and if and how it can be justified puzzling (why do we need to justify restricting things of no value?) or relatively unimportant (why should we care so much about an issue affecting a tiny minority?). Hopefully, the evolutionary theories regarding short-term extra-pair mating will help such potential readers recognise that casual extra-relationship sex can be a valuable experience for many people: since casual extra-relationship sex could increase reproductive success (in certain circumstances), evolution has built many of us to (desperately) want and derive intense pleasure from such sex (in those circumstances) and to suffer in various ways when we continually go without it. Therefore, the ethics of restricting such sex is important.

The next two examples are cases in which understanding the prevalence of certain traits and situations is critical in some of my arguments. First, I will appeal to the theory that humans are generally disposed to pair-bonding to challenge Harry Chalmers' (2019) and Justin Clardy's (2020) claim that additional romantic relationships are an important *human* good, which is a critical premise in their arguments for anti-monogamism (§6.1.2). Relatedly, I will appeal to the evolutionary account of jealousy to undermine Chalmers' (2022: 1029-1032) claim – which he

uses to defend anti-monogamism against the difficulty of managing jealousy justification – that it is at most rare to find people who meet all of the following conditions: (i) they are prone to suffering extreme jealousy, (ii) they would find an open relationship ineffective for managing their jealousy, and (iii) they would find monogamy effective for managing their jealousy (§10.6.1).

This last point nicely leads me to another manner in which an understanding of human nature(s) informed by evolutionary psychology contributes to this thesis. The evolutionary account of jealousy features, at least as a background matter, in many chapters. So the reader must have a sufficient understanding of it, which my presentation of the mainstream view (§1.3.1) provided.

Finally, I will often appeal to such an understanding of human nature(s) to help strengthen various arguments, including ones I ultimately reject, such as the idea that sexual jealousy is a reasonable response to the threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown) (§3.2) and appeals to the harmful unnaturalness of monogamy to argue for nonmonogamous alternatives (§5.1).

1.6 Summing up, acknowledging limitations, and looking ahead

An understanding of human nature(s) – informed by evolutionary psychology – is relevant, in various ways, to sex and relationship ethics. In addition to the ways §1.5 highlighted, I have discussed an attractive proposal regarding how human nature can be relevant to practical ethics, one which coheres with my underlying normative framework, among others: *the principle of default natural ethics*, which is the idea that society should adopt scripts that are maximally consistent with people’s evolved biological natures except when these would lead to harm or violate clear moral standards (in which case, the biologically-friendly norms should be reconsidered, and the costs and benefits of different forms of social regulation should be weighed up).

To see what this principle prescribes regarding monogamy, open relationships, singledom, etc., we need the details about human nature(s) pertaining to these practices. So I described the mainstream view in evolutionary psychology on these matters and other (conflicting) perspectives. And then, I explored the various interpretations of what the principle of default natural ethics would prescribe based on the different understandings of human nature(s). Many (seemingly) think it prescribes conservative ethics, like monogamism and monogamous idealism, whereas others (seemingly) think it prescribes (something like) my main proposals. I critiqued the former view and reinforced the latter.

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However, my analysis of what the principle of default natural ethics prescribes is, in a sense, relatively abstract. To determine which part of people's natures will be the least risky and costly to manage, which tension is the least intense, which part of people's natures will react least strenuously against external impositions, etc., we need more details. Indeed, many monogamists, monogamous idealists, and those of a similar mindset will not yet be convinced that suppressing the dispositions towards nonmonogamous behaviours will, for many people, lead to worse outcomes – i.e. a more strenuous reaction, more disastrous side effects, more repression-produced stress, etc. – than attempting to manage jealousy for an open relationship or resisting the drive to pair-bond to enjoy the single life. Likewise, many monogamy challengers will still be sceptical of the idea that jealousy is so powerful in many people that the only legitimate relationship option for them is monogamy. Furthermore, many monogamists will believe that open relationships violate clear moral standards, just as anti-monogamists think monogamy does. So the remaining chapters fill in the relevant details and address the moral arguments regarding jealousy, monogamy, open relationships, etc., to persuade monogamists, monogamist idealists, anti-monogamists, and others with views opposing mine to abandon these positions in favour of embracing a plurality of sex and love lifestyles in the manner I describe (pp. 9-11).

Chapter 2 The reality of long-term monogamy

Recall that many think monogamism, monogamous idealism, and/or similar views would be endorsed by normative frameworks in which well-being is the primary or only relevant moral consideration. Consequently, I must demonstrate that such normative frameworks – including mine – would, instead, endorse embracing a plurality of sex and love lifestyles.

This chapter contributes to this effort by detailing the significant risks and costs to well-being that many people (would) face, to varying degrees, in long-term monogamous relationships and why, consequently, it is highly unlikely that they will/would achieve the monogamous ideal. My discussion builds on Chapter 1 since these risks and costs can be understood as the strenuous reactions, unfavourable outcomes, repression-produced stresses, disastrous side effects, etc., of people attempting to practice a sex and love lifestyle that conflicts starkly with their nature.

§2.1 explains that, due to their nature, many people experience *(increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction* in long-term monogamous relationships. §2.2 details why, for many people, *(increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and/or (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction* likely have significant *adverse effects on their mental, cognitive, and physical health*. §2.3 explains why *(increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and/or (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction and/or their adverse effects on health* can lead to *significant relationship issues*. §2.4 primarily describes how one or more of the factors described in §2.1 to §2.3 can lead to *cheating*. And §2.5 explains how one or more of *all* these factors, including cheating, can lead to *relationship termination*. Finally, §2.6 summarises these risks and costs to well-being and explains how my discussion of them demonstrates that the proportion of people who achieve the monogamous ideal is significantly less than the amount who try – indeed, this failure rate may be very high. And I elaborate on how all this information supports the case for my main proposals.

2.1 (Increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction and their causes

It is widely recognised that *(increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and/or (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction* are common in long-term monogamous relationships, have multiple causes, and can have numerous adverse effects on the partners and their relationship. This does not necessarily suggest that both circumstances feature in even most such relationships. Also, people who experience one or both likely vary significantly in how they do. Many people may start experiencing a significant decline in sexual activity and/or satisfaction after two years; meanwhile,

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others might experience it within less than half a year or not until after five years. And some relationships become entirely sexless within a decade, while others remain sexually active for multiple decades (see Berkowitz & Yager-Berkowitz 2008; Barker & Langdridge 2010; Ryan & Jethá 2011; Anderson 2012; Walker 2018).

I will begin unpacking all this by explaining how I understand '(increasingly) infrequent sexual activity' and '(increasing) sexual dissatisfaction'. Sexual activity in a relationship is infrequent when it occurs, on average, less than three times per month. This definition covers cases when a couple no longer has sex (i.e. *entirely* sexless relationships/marriages). Of course, this specification is somewhat arbitrary, and there is a case for having higher rates of sexual activity count as infrequent. Still, I have chosen this rate since it is higher than one standard classification of a sexless relationship/marriage, which is having sex ten or fewer times per year (see Relate 2018); plus, I cannot find anyone who would claim that a couple who has sex twice per month are *frequently* having sex.

'(Increasing) sexual dissatisfaction' is more complex. Perhaps consequently, there are many different understandings of sexual (dis)satisfaction and no established concept (see Pascoal, Narciso, & Pereira 2014). My account will not be complete, but it will suffice here.

Firstly, there are three components to people's level of sexual (dis)satisfaction:

1. *Frequency*: are they satisfied with how often they have sex?
2. *Quality*: are they satisfied with the quality of the sex they have? This is influenced by how attractive they find their partner(s), how sexually skilled their partner(s) is/are, how strongly and often they orgasm during sex, and how adventurous, experimental, and kinky the sex is, etc.
3. *Partner(s)*: are they satisfied with who they are having sex with? This is *not* about how sexually attractive and skilled their partner(s) is/are – these factors are subsumed under *quality*. Instead, it is about the extent to which they are experiencing the quantity and variety of partners they desire.

A person's sexual dissatisfaction could be due to dissatisfaction in one, two, or all three aspects. So, for example, Mary might only desire to have sex with her monogamous partner, and she considers the sex they have with them always to be high quality; still, since she only has sex with her partner once per month or less, she is sexually dissatisfied.

Secondly, a person need not have all or even most of their sexual desires – regarding frequency, quality, and partner(s) – fulfilled to be sexually satisfied. Instead, they need enough of their

(strong) sexual desires fulfilled to feel content, that they “can’t complain”, and that their overall well-being is not adversely affected by the state of their sex life.

This coheres with how we equate satisfaction with being content, even if far from perfectly happy, in other areas of life. Consider gastronomic satisfaction. Ideally, I would like to eat at a 2 or 3-star Michelin restaurant for nearly every meal in my life. In reality, I prepare most of my food, often have meals from medium-price restaurants and takeaway places, and only very occasionally experience fine dining. Still, I would describe myself as gastronomically satisfied – I enjoy most of my meals and could not say I am consciously suffering from my unsatisfied gastronomic desires. However, when I was a vegetarian, I was gastronomically dissatisfied. Among other things, I did not enjoy most of my meals, frequently suffered from unfulfilled cravings for meat, felt that my overall well-being was significantly adversely affected by my diet, and regularly thought about changing my diet to include meat.

Accordingly, typical characteristics of being *sexually dissatisfied* include regularly feeling sexually frustrated, complaining to others about one’s sex life, often wishing that one’s sex life could improve and contemplating how that could be achieved, and consciously feeling that one’s perceived shortcomings in their sex life are adversely impacting their overall well-being.

Third, sexual (dis)satisfaction is subjective. There are no set standards regarding frequency, quality, and partner(s) a person needs to meet. So, for example, although many people in entirely sexless, infidelity-free, monogamous relationships understandably describe themselves as sexually dissatisfied, others can be sexually satisfied in these circumstances, perhaps because they no longer desire sex or only do so mildly and infrequently.

This example raises the matter of the relationship between (i) the frequency of sexual activity and (ii) sexual satisfaction. Although the former is an aspect of the latter, it is often appropriate to discuss it independently. This is because (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity arguably can adversely affect an individual’s well-being, even if that person would describe themselves as sexually satisfied. For example, suppose that person, like most people, is capable of experiencing intense pleasure from sexual activity. In that case, if they rarely or never experience sexual activity, they are (completely) missing out on such intense pleasure, which would promote their well-being on most accounts. Additionally, as I will soon discuss, (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity probably could adversely affect an individual’s health – reducing their overall well-being – even if, again, they would describe themselves as sexually satisfied. Still, as this chapter demonstrates, (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction is often, if not always, worse for well-being since this consciously-perceived issue is more often and directly a causal factor in most of the other

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risks and costs to well-being I discuss in this chapter – relationship issues, cheating, and relationship breakdown.

Why are (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction common in long-term monogamous relationships? In short, maintaining frequent sexual activity and sexual satisfaction over many years and decades within a successfully monogamous relationship is, for many people, in tension with their natures – though, of course, the degree of this tension varies among such individuals and also within the same individual between different points in their life. As Chapter 1 began explaining, people may face one or more specific tensions, including the following.

First, suppose *serial* pair-bonding – having pair bonds that last for several years before parting ways and partnering up with a new mate – is part of someone’s nature. In that case, after several years in a relationship, they may lose romantic and sexual interest in their partner – natural selection’s way of motivating them to move on.

Second, it is very plausibly in many people’s nature to strongly desire casual sex with many varied partners. So insofar as they have been monogamously faithful for an extended period, they are frustrating countless strong and persistent desires for casual extra-relationship sex.

Third, it is very plausibly natural for many to lose interest in repeatedly having sex with the same person over many months, years, or decades, especially if they are one’s only sexual partner. We need not appeal directly to any evolutionary considerations to understand why. In many realms of life – holidays, food, music, etc. – if we keep having the same type of thing repeatedly (and never try anything new), we will eventually get bored of it, no matter how great we initially found it (Anderson 2012). Nevertheless, there are also evolutionary theories for why people lose sexual interest in their partner. For example, if having sex with multiple partners would promote their reproductive success while full-fledged infidelity-free monogamy would be maladaptive, it makes evolutionary sense for their body to be “programmed” to lose interest in just having sex with the same person as this will motivate them to have sex with other people. Also, if a person keeps having sex with the same person, and no babies are born, their evolved brain may see it as a signal that their partner is infertile. Consequently, they will lose interest in sex with that partner and desire sex with others (§1.3.1).

Understanding these causes of (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction matters for a few reasons. Firstly, it reinforces the case presented in Chapter 1 – that an understanding of human nature(s) combined with a normative framework that emphasises well-being can support my main proposals. Indeed, we can see these risks and costs to well-being and the others they (partially) cause – health problems, relationship issues, cheating, relationship breakdown – as the strenuous reactions, unfavourable outcomes, repression-produced stresses, disastrous side effects, etc., of people attempting to practice a sex and love lifestyle that is significantly in tension with aspects of their nature.

Furthermore, establishing these causes pre-empts various objections to my main proposals. When presented with the risks and costs to well-being that many people experience in long-term monogamous relationships, along with (something like) my main proposals, many deny that long-term monogamy itself is, in some sense, the problem for such people. Arguably, they perceive significant and highly likely, if not (almost) inevitable, downsides to nonmonogamous alternatives – i.e. open relationships, singledom, and cheating – and, consequently, wish to argue that achieving the monogamous ideal is possible for everyone or, at least, the vast majority. So they contest the idea that many people will highly likely, if not (almost) inevitably, experience the risks and costs I discuss to a significant degree in long-term monogamous relationships and, consequently, fail to achieve the monogamous ideal.

Such pro-monogamy thinkers might argue that when individuals/couples have such bad experiences of monogamy, it is due to (easily) resolvable issues, such as the following: they are with the wrong person; there are one or more real underlying non-sexual issues in the relationship (e.g. communication issues, lack of commitment) that are causing the sexual problems; there is a health problem with one or both partners (e.g. sex addiction); the couple has not devoted sufficient effort to “spicing up” their sex life together. And from this starting point, they may construct a defence of (views like) monogamism and monogamous idealism.

However, if (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction and the other risks and costs to well-being they (partially) cause are common in long-term monogamous relationships due to the tension between long-term sexual exclusivity and many people’s sexual nature, sufficiently mitigating these risks and costs is much more challenging, if not (near) impossible. This is because, as Earp & Savulescu (2020: 27) write, “[o]ur biological nature places certain limitations on the range of social scripts we can follow while still pulling off a decent performance (or experiencing a minimum of flourishing).” Indeed, individuals cannot, through

sheer force of will, change their hormone levels, genes, and other factors about their biological makeup.¹³

Consider, for example, a young man who enters into an opposite-sex relationship, intending to achieve the monogamous ideal, but, after years of denial, he realises that his sexual orientation is entirely homosexual. Suppose – as we easily can – that he and his partner experience (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction and the other risks and costs to well-being I discuss in this chapter. In that case, no reasonable person would insist that he has not met the right woman, has some disorder, needs to work harder at his opposite-sex monogamous sex life, etc. This is *partly* because we understand that gay people’s homosexual nature is unchosen and impossible to change – at least, it would be (extremely) hard to.

Likewise, suppose it is in someone’s nature to desire casual sex with multiple, even many varied, partners and/or to lose interest in having sex with the same person repeatedly after several months or years. In that case, it is very hard, if not (near) impossible, to prevent them from experiencing (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and/or (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction and the other risks and costs to well-being they (partially) cause in long-term monogamous relationships, especially those lasting for multiple decades.

Indeed, many struggling with long-term sexual exclusivity employ strategies to prevent (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and/or (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction. These include masturbating to fantasies and pornography, efforts to “spice it up” (e.g. new outfits, locations, positions, toys), sex and relationship therapy, and Viagra. Although such strategies may help many (relatively naturally monogamous) couples for years and even decades, much research suggests that many other couples find that the long-term effectiveness of these strategies is (severely) limited (Berkowitz & Yager-Berkowitz 2008; Ryan & Jethá 2011; Anderson 2012). This is partly why, as I will explain, failures to achieve the monogamous ideal are so common, even among those who sincerely intended and tried to accomplish this relationship goal.

2.2 The adverse effects of a declining sex life on health

A growing body of evidence strongly suggests that, for at least many people, sexual activity and satisfaction can provide numerous benefits for their mental, cognitive, and physical health. More importantly, the evidence suggests that (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and/or

¹³ This is partly why Earp & Savulescu (2020) and others have explored the ethics of enhancing romantic relationships through interventions at the biological level, including neuropharmacological interventions (i.e. ‘love drugs’).

(increasing) sexual dissatisfaction – which I will often simply refer to as ‘a declining sex life’ – can have a (very) harmful impact in these respects. Before summarising this research, I should note some points.

First, in this subsection, ‘sexual (dis)satisfaction’ is not necessarily used as I described in §2.1. The same is true when I refer to the connection between sexual (dis)satisfaction and health in later sections and chapters. This is because at least some studies I reference use a different or insufficiently defined notion of sexual (dis)satisfaction.

Second, it is essential to emphasise that the importance of sexual activity and satisfaction for health will likely vary considerably between people.

Third, many may ‘suffer via stealth’ from (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and/or (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction. Ben Bramble explains this concept with the example of ageing:

[Imagine] being suddenly transported into a younger body. Isn't it likely you would learn immediately, due to the contrast, of unpleasant experiences you had been having in your older body that you had been completely unaware of at the time (say, ones due to physical pressures being put on your body as a result of aging)? Unpleasant experiences seem to be capable of sneaking up on us by starting in very small amounts or very low intensities and then slowly accumulating or intensifying over time. In this way, we can come to suffer a considerable amount without ever having any idea of it (2013: 206).

Similarly, many who experience a gradually declining sex life over a long period may consequently come to suffer significantly in various ways but not realise so because the impact on their health was incremental.

Fourth, note that I often couch my claims in modest terms (e.g. ‘may’, ‘suggest’, ‘at least many’) to avoid overstating the research. Indeed, research in these areas can often be problematic: there can be issues in research methodology, publication biases, lack of direct replications, and other problems. Thus, future research may cast doubt on some of the hypothesised causal relations I discuss. However, it may, instead, provide further support and inform us of more causal relations.

Finally, I should acknowledge that the summarised research arguably suggests that, *on average*, men suffer more than women from (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and/or (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction. If true, it would be unsurprising given the following plausible (on average) sex differences, among others: men desire sex, masturbate, and consume pornography more often, and far more men than women pay for sexual services, often at a considerable cost (Anderson 2012; Spiegelhalter 2015; Buss 2016; Regnerus 2017). Furthermore, men seem more

concerned about their sexual health and sexual dissatisfaction (Flynn et al. 2016) and have poorer health in old age and shorter life expectancies (Carmel 2019).

2.2.1 Some initial (sex-specific) considerations: testosterone, obesity, and sexual dysfunction

If we think, as per the mainstream view (§1.3.1), that it is in many/most men's nature, to varying degrees, to behave promiscuously, we should wonder what impact the long-term repression of this aspect of their nature will have on their health. As I will evidence throughout this section, there is a strong case for claiming that successful long-term monogamy – which requires such sexual repression – leads at least many men into *a spiral of decline*.

A significant part of this spiral is declining testosterone. Testosterone is thought to play a substantial role in not only the male sex drive but also many aspects of men's health, appearance, and personality, including the following: the appearance of facial and pubic hair; facial structure; bone growth and strength; muscle size and strength; development of the penis and testes; erectile function; sperm production; visuospatial ability; verbal and spatial memory; aptitude for "rule-based systems" (e.g. higher math, mechanics, computers, engineering, and music); energy levels; social dominance; status-seeking; risk-taking; aggression; assertiveness; competitiveness; impulsiveness; inventiveness; analytic thinking; strategic thinking; directness; decisiveness; exactingness; self-directedness; tough-mindedness; extraversion; and emotional stability (see Hooven 2021; Murray 2020; Soh 2020). Consequently, as I will discuss shortly, low testosterone levels are believed to cause numerous issues for men.

It is commonly thought that men's testosterone levels decline naturally as part of ageing, partly because testosterone levels have been widely observed to decrease with age in both sexes (e.g. Bancroft & Cawood 1996; Gray et al. 1991). However, much research strongly suggests that additionally and perhaps alternatively, various lifestyle factors determine the degree of this decline (for a review, see van Anders & Gray 2007). Indeed, in a longitudinal study on 2,994 healthy men aged 50-79 years, Laura DeFina and her colleagues (2018: 1) found "no evidence that low testosterone is an inevitable consequence of ageing." Instead, their findings supported the claim that fitness and maintaining a healthy weight may help with sustaining normal testosterone levels.

Relationship status is another factor that may affect the degree of this decline for many men. Many studies find that, on average, men practising long-term and presumably successful monogamy have lower testosterone levels than single men, cheating men, and men in open relationships (for reviews, see van Anders & Gray 2007; and Grebe et al. 2019). Indeed, one study

found that the testosterone levels of men in committed relationships were 21% lower than those of single men (Burnham et al. 2003). Moreover, married men with children tend to have even lower testosterone levels (see van Anders & Gray 2007). Furthermore, men in relationships who are open to sexual infidelity have higher testosterone levels than men who are not (e.g. McIntyre et al. 2006).

Much theory and evidence suggest that some or even many *successfully* monogamous men had relatively low testosterone levels in the first place, and this partly explains why they can (happily) practice this relationship style. However, research also suggests for many other such men, something about being (mostly) successfully monogamous lowers their testosterone levels rather than it being the case they had relatively lower testosterone levels beforehand (see van Anders & Gray 2007).

For example, studies find that men in the later stages of a relationship have lower testosterone levels than men in the early stages (Gray et al. 2004; Farrelly et al. 2015). Various other studies have examined men's testosterone levels over an extended period – approximately a year, many years, or even (over) a decade, depending on the study – and monitored the changes in their relationship status and other lifestyle factors. They found that testosterone levels drop after forming a committed relationship but rise after a break-up or divorce, and they also lower again after starting a new relationship. Additionally, men who got married and had children experienced an even more significant decline in testosterone levels (e.g. Mazur & Michalek 1998; Gettler et al. 2011; Dibble, Goldey, & van Anders 2017; Holmboe et al. 2017).

Part of this testosterone decline may serve a temporary evolutionary function – keeping the man focused on his partner and (potential) new children rather than being promiscuous (see Hooven 2021: 196-198). However, for many men, much of this decline likely results from one or both of the following factors, which, for them, go hand-in-hand with long-term monogamy.

First: *a declining sex life*. It is often thought that declining testosterone leads to a declining sex life for men. However, much research suggests a bidirectional relationship (A causes B and B causes A): declining testosterone leads to a declining sex life for men, and men's declining sex life leads to a decline in their testosterone.

For example, studies have found an increase in men's testosterone after watching erotic movies (Pirke, Kockott & Dittmar 1974; Hellhammer, Hubert, & Schürmeyer 1985; Rowland et al. 1987; Stoleru et al. 1993), after masturbating (Purvis et al. 1976), after penile-vaginal intercourse (Kraemer et al. 1976), and in the morning after sexual activity with unfamiliar or multiple partners (Hirschenhauser et al. 2002). Admittedly, these studies had small sample sizes. However, their

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results cohere with more recent larger studies. For example, one found that men's testosterone increased even after just talking to an attractive young woman (Roney, Lukaszewski, & Simmons 2007). Another study examined the salivary testosterone levels of 44 men (average age of 40) who attended a large U.S. sex club (Escasa, Casey, & Gray 2011). They found that their testosterone levels increased by an average of 36%. Furthermore, those men who participated in sexual activity experienced a greater average testosterone increase (72%) than those who just watched (11%). Interestingly, although the researchers' expected the older men in their sample to have less of a testosterone response, they found age did not influence men's testosterone responses. They suggested this may be because the older men in their sample may not represent the general U.S. population, most of whom do not frequent such clubs.

The second factor is *letting themselves go*. As they no longer seek sex with new people and are (growing) bored of sex with their partner, many men start losing the motivation to maintain their sexual attractiveness. Consequently, they make unhealthy lifestyle choices such as exercising less and having a poor diet. These behaviours often lead to being overweight or obese – among other issues – which, in turn, can reduce testosterone, sex within the relationship, and opportunities for extra-relationship sex. Of course, these points also apply to many women. Indeed, it is thought that many *people* become overweight or obese after a while of being in a relationship. But many may also start trying to get back into shape after relationship termination – when re-entering the dating scene.

In both men and women, evidence for the first or both transitions – (i) becoming overweight or obese after a while of being in a relationship and (ii) getting back into shape after becoming single – has been found by longitudinal studies with large and often nationally representative samples in the United States (Averett, Sikora, & Argys 2008; Syrda 2017; Mooyaart, Liefbroer, & Billari 2019; Bell & Thorpe Jr 2019), India (Shikha et al. 2019), Jordan (Ajlouni et al. 2020), Tanzania (Zubery, Kimiywe, & Martin 2021), Uganda (Arinda et al. 2021), South Africa (Mchiza et al. 2019), Australia (Schoeppe et al. 2014), Mexico (Caamaño et al. 2016), and China (Liu et al. 2021), to give *some* examples.

Furthermore, there is evidence that obesity impairs erectile functioning and that erectile dysfunction has bidirectional relationships with low testosterone and (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and/or (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction (Djordjevic & Martins 2016; Anaissie, Pastuszak, & Khera 2019; Zhao et al. 2019; Yafi & Yafi 2019). A similar hypothesis may apply to the vagina, at least for postmenopausal women. Women at this stage often experience vaginal atrophy (thinning, drying, and inflammation of the vaginal walls) and a decrease in vaginal lubrication, probably due to hormonal changes (e.g. less estrogen). However, women who

maintain an active sex life after menopause – either with sexual partner(s) or through masturbation – are at less risk of developing significant vaginal atrophy and are more likely to report sufficient vaginal lubrication (Laan & van Lunsen 1997; Leiblum et al. 1983; Masters & Johnson 1966; van Lunsen & Laan 2004).

2.2.2 Correlations and their (potential) causes

Before looking at other research with these initial considerations in mind, I should note that much of the research findings I will summarise are *correlational*: they find associations between (i) sexual activity and/or satisfaction and (ii) one or more variables relating to health. So, for example, less sexually active men tend to have more symptoms of depression. But this finding by itself does not necessarily show that (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity *causes* symptoms of depression or vice versa. Correlation does not mean causation!

Nevertheless, if there is a causal relationship between two variables, there will (typically) be a correlational one too. Furthermore, discovering a correlational relationship between two variables often motivates researchers to investigate whether there is a causal relationship. As with many of the studies I cite, the researchers try to account (or ‘adjust’ or ‘control’) for other factors that may plausibly be causing the association they find. For example, in the sex and depression case, to see if there is a causal relationship, researchers will compare participants who are similar on other variables that may influence people’s levels of sexual activity and symptoms of depression (e.g. body mass index and relationship status).

Also, scientists can often provide plausible explanations for why one variable influences the other. Regarding sexual activity and satisfaction, there are various reasons for thinking that they directly promote the associated health benefits. For example, orgasm from partnered sexual activities has a much more substantial neurophysiological impact on the body than an orgasm from masturbation. This may be more so for men compared to women, and, for both sexes, it may be that orgasm from penile-vaginal intercourse has the most significant impact (see Brody 2010).

In any case, we know that orgasms from partnered sex provide the body with a “chemical cocktail” consisting of a relatively high surge of dopamine, endorphins, prolactin, vasopressin, oxytocin, and other “ingredients”, which all have many effects on the brain and body (Mitrokokostas 2019). For example, the hormone prolactin has over 300 functions in the body divided across the following areas: reproductive, metabolic, behaviour functions, regulation of the immune system, and regulation of fluids. For both sexes, the magnitude of prolactin released following an orgasm from penile-vaginal intercourse is 400% greater than following an orgasm from masturbation (Brody & Krüger 2006; Exton et al. 2000; Krüger et al. 2003).

We should also not overlook the fact that many people, including seniors, feel that sex is important for their health. For example, a 1980s survey in the United States found that among over 800 adults, aged 60+, 92.7% of men and 70.4% of women were still sexually active, and 75% believed sex had a positive impact on their current state of health (Starr & Weiner 1981). A more recent study examined the reasons why older people (aged between 60-91) maintained an active sex life. Among the main reasons given were maintaining overall functioning, feeling young again, and feeling attractive and desirable (Gewirtz-Meydan & Ayalon 2018).

Of course, though, there may sometimes be good reasons to doubt whether there is a (direct) causal relation between (i) sexual activity and/or satisfaction and (ii) one or more variables relating to health, even when there is a correlational one. Instead, it could be that one or more other factors are behind the correlational relationship between (i) and (ii). Alternatively, it could arguably be that the level of (i) is *part* of the cause for the level of (ii), but one or more other factors are mainly determining it. However, often in both cases, the plausible candidates for the one or more other factors are arguably a product of long-term monogamy and sometimes even affected by the level of sexual activity and satisfaction.

For example, consider, again, the correlational relationship between sex and depression in men. One might find empirical grounds for questioning the extent to which (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity itself directly causes more symptoms of depression. They may think it is not a causal factor or just a minor one. Instead, they believe the symptoms of depression are (mainly) attributable to low testosterone and obesity. However, as just discussed, these issues can arise (partly) due to being in a long-term monogamous relationship for many men and, at least in the case of low testosterone, from (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and/or (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction.

2.2.3 The benefits of sexual activity and satisfaction

We can now look at a non-exhaustive list of benefits that sexual activity and satisfaction may provide for many people's health. If a benefit is or seems exclusive to males or females, this will be denoted with an '(M)' or '(F)', respectively. It should be noted that, with most of these benefits, research (strongly) suggests that they can also be gained from avoiding obesity and, for men, by maintaining healthy testosterone levels. These benefits are as follows:

- Improve immune system functioning (Charnetski & Brennan 2001)
- Improved sleep (Odent 1999; Ellison 2000)
- Slow down the loss of head and body hair (M) (perhaps due to avoiding low testosterone) (see Tsujimura 2013; Zhao et al. 2019; Yafi & Yafi 2019)

- Help maintain a youthful appearance (Weeks & James 1998; see also Zhao et al. 2019; Yafi & Yafi 2019)
- Help relieve various pains, including chronic pain, lower back pain, and migraines (see Whipple et al. 2007: 6-7)
- Enhance fertility and pregnancy (F) (see Whipple et al. 2007: 4-6)
- Enhance menstrual cycle regularity and relieve menstrual cramps (F) (Cutler 1991; Burleson et al. 1991; Ellison 2000)
- Reduce the risk of developing endometriosis (if sexually active and experiencing orgasm during menstruation) (F) (Meaddough et al. 2002)
- Improve sperm quality (M) (Levitas et al. 2005)
- Improve prostate functioning and health (M) (see Brody 2010: 1345-1346)
- Prevent and/or alleviate various mental health issues, such as stress, irritability, anxiety, and symptoms of depression (Bagley & Tremblay 1997; Charnetski & Brennan 2001; Weeks 2002; Gallup, Burch, & Platek 2002; Nicolosi et al. 2004; Brody 2006; see also Tsujimura 2013; Yeap 2014)
- Boost self-esteem (Hurlbert & Whittaker 1991)
- Enhance cognitive functioning and have a protective effect against issues such as dementia, poor memory, and lack of focus (Mauder, Schoemaker, & Pruessner 2016; Allen 2018; Wright, Jenks, & Demeyere 2019; see also Holland et al. 2011; Tsujimura 2013; Yeap 2014)
- Improve heart rate variability (see Brody 2010: 1343-1344)
- Reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, cardiac arrest, and type-2 diabetes (Abramov 1976; Feldman et al. 1998; Rexrode et al. 1998; Booth, Johnson, & Granger 1999; Ebrahim et al. 2002; Fogari et al. 2002; Brody 2004; Mamtani & Kulkarni 2005; Smith et al. 2005)
- Reduce the risk for various cancers, including prostate (M) and breast (Lê, Bachelot, & Hill 1989; Murrell 1995; Rossing et al. 1996; Petridou et al. 2000; Giles et al. 2003; Leitzmann et al. 2004)
- Improve overall life satisfaction (Jackson et al. 2019; Schmiedeberg et al. 2016)
- Extend life expectancy (though maybe just for males) (Persson 1981; Palmore 1982; Smith, Frankel, & Yarnell 1997)

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The *lack* of sexual activity and satisfaction – as well as obesity and, in men, low testosterone – likely has the opposite effect in most cases: e.g. *reduced* strength and mass of muscles, *increased* symptoms of depression, *greater risk* of heart problems, and so on.¹⁴

2.2.4 Vicious cycles

Unsurprisingly, there can be various vicious cycles in the relationship between (i) sexual activity and satisfaction and (ii) variables relating to health. In addition, and as already touched upon, there can be vicious cycles between the different variables relating to health that I have discussed.

For example, a declining sex life for men may lead them to have lower testosterone levels, experience erectile dysfunction, and become obese. Their obesity will probably also contribute to their low testosterone and erectile dysfunction. And due to their low testosterone and erectile dysfunction, they will likely have a weaker sex drive and generally less motivation and ability to have sex with their partner – or anyone else. Also, being obese can make their partner less sexually interested in them and reduce their opportunities for sex with anyone else. So too can an accelerated decline in testosterone, which can reduce their sexual attractiveness in various respects (e.g. loss of head hair, decreased strength and mass of muscles, and a lessening of personality traits associated with testosterone) – women are generally attracted to physical and psychological features linked to testosterone (Hooven 2021). Furthermore, it is not hard to imagine how an ageing appearance, symptoms of depression, irritability, lower energy levels, heart disease, stroke, cancer, and other mentioned health issues could limit one's sex life even further.

2.2.5 How many people describe monogamy

Given everything I have discussed, it is unsurprising that we can find many examples of people describing how monogamy makes them or others feel or what they experience monogamy as, with terms such as the following: “fed up” (Johnson 2019), “miserable” (Preston 2011), “despair”, “sexual death” (Dan Savage quoted in Oppenheimer 2011), “going out of their minds” (Savage quoted in Killeen 2014), “frustrating”, “upsetting”, “burdensome”, “oppression”, “sexual incarceration” (all from Anderson 2012: 124-125), “sexual isolation” (McMurtry 1972: 593),

¹⁴ A detailed summary of all this research is unnecessary here. However, Appendix B describes *some* supporting research for the following significant areas: mental health and life satisfaction, cognitive health, heart and blood health, cancer, and life expectancy. It also addresses the objection that people can maintain good health through other non-sexual means, so maintaining a frequently active and satisfying sex life is unnecessary.

“drained the color from life” (Ryan & Jethá 2011: 298) and “libido-killing boredom” (Ibid. 2). Unsurprisingly, people who describe monogamy in such terms claim that they cannot suck it up and continue to be successfully monogamous, at least not without being an unhappy person and an unpleasant partner (see Anderson 2012; Walker 2018; Martin 2018). Indeed, Ryan and Jethá (2011: 291) quote a man who described his decision to cheat as a “life-or-death situation.”

2.3 Miserably monogamous: How sexual restriction leads to relationship friction

There will be problems in (nearly) all long-term monogamous relationships that have little or nothing to do with the fact that the partners have committed to sexual exclusivity. However, there is a sense in which significant issues arise in many monogamous relationships *because* they are monogamous. Many people struggle with long-term monogamy due to (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction (§2.1) and/or the adverse effects of a declining sex life on their health (§2.2). When *even just one* partner experiences monogamy in this way, this can create significant relationship issues.

Many who struggle with monogamy say there is so much they love about their partner and the relationship. Indeed, apart from the hardship of sexual exclusivity, they may be otherwise (mostly) happy in the relationship (Anderson 2012; Martin 2018; Walker 2018). However, they also see their partner as the reason they are suffering: it is the sexual restrictions their partner imposes that make them feel trapped, fed up, bored, depressed, sexually frustrated, irritable, etc.

Unsurprisingly, research finds that this negatively impacts how they feel towards their partner and how they act in the relationship: people can feel sexually oppressed by their partner, leading them to harbour resentment and anger towards them, which, in turn, can reduce their motivation to commit to marriage or even just be romantic (Anderson 2012; Walker 2018). Of course, a person may not harbour negative feelings towards their partner due to sexual dissatisfaction. However, the adverse effects of a declining sex life on their health may still cause significant relationship issues – it is not hard to imagine how problems such as obesity, irritability, and symptoms of depression can negatively affect a relationship.

All these issues can develop to the point where the relationship is (overall) unhappy. The relationship may end, especially if the couple is unmarried and childless. Indeed, both the states of marriage and having children may incline many couples towards bearing it out, at least for a while: that is, they have an *unhappy*, successful, long-term or even lifelong monogamous relationship. In other cases, significant unhappiness in a relationship can lead one or both

partners to have an affair, which, by my definition, involves sex *and* love (see §2.4; Kinsey et al. 1953; Glass & Wright 1985; 1992; Greiling & Buss 2000; Perel 2017).

Of course, there is an activity people in monogamous relationships engage in to alleviate and even wholly prevent the relationship issues I have discussed. However, when it is discovered, it can create further relationship conflicts. The activity I am referring to – and which is a key subject of the next section – is ‘sexual infidelity’, by which, henceforth, I mean casual extra-relationship sex without the permission of the non-participating relationship partner.

2.4 Forsaking most others: When monogamy becomes “monogamy”

Cheating has been observed in every known culture (Betzig 1989), but it is hard to determine exactly how prevalent it is in any society. In a 2010 review paper of 31 different studies, the authors found a wide range of rates for infidelity: 1.2% to 85.5% (Luo, Cartun, & Snider 2010). The vast range of results is largely due to the different study designs: certain variables differ between studies, including the definition of infidelity used, the demographic assessed, and the period asked about (e.g. entire relationship or past year).

The social psychologist Justin Lehmiller (2015) has helpfully summarised two interesting statistics from this review paper. First, the proportion of married people who have had extra-marital sex “pretty reliably falls between 1 in 4 and 1 in 5, at least among samples collected in the United States (rates of infidelity can vary substantially across countries).” Second, regarding how many college students have ever cheated sexually, “the studies reported in this review paper pretty consistently put that number between 1 in 2 and 1 in 3.”

However, across marital and non-marital couples, studies (nearly) always find infidelity is more common among men. Indeed, in summarising some other literature, Earp, Sandberg, and Savulescu (2012: 571) helpfully claim that *at least* 20% of husbands and *at least* 10% of wives cheat. However, they note that “[these] numbers—for American couples—range as high as 72% and 54% respectively, depending on the survey (see Greeley 1994; Allen, Atkins, Baucom, Snyder, Gordon, and Glass 2005).” But many believe this “gender gap” has been decreasing over time due to factors such as decreasing stigma around female sexuality and more women entering areas of employment where they can meet potential extra-relationship partners (Luo et al. 2010).

Although academics vary in their estimations, they would all agree that infidelity is common. Indeed, in combining the above claims, we can say scientists agree that *at least* a substantial minority of people cheat. I emphasise ‘at least’ because scientists also (generally) agree that studies will likely *underestimate* the actual prevalence of cheating for several reasons, including

the difficulty of getting participants to admit to this highly stigmatised behaviour (Anderson 2012: 159-160) and differing perspectives on what constitutes cheating.

There are various *broad* differences between men and women regarding how and why they cheat, ones which are consistent with the mainstream view in evolutionary psychology on human nature(s) (§1.3.1). First, most women who cheat describe themselves as being unhappy in their relationship, and they may no longer love their partner and might want to leave them. However, studies (almost) never find a significant difference between married men who cheat and married men who do not cheat in terms of their marital satisfaction and how much they love their wife. Also, many unmarried men who do not have children with their partner cheat, even though they often can leave: such men (most) often report being in love with their partner and happy in their relationship. Furthermore, when men cheat, they tend to do so with more partners, and generally, they are cheating just for sex. Women, meanwhile, tend to desire more of an emotional connection with their affair partners. Indeed, they tend to cheat with just one man (at a time) (on all these points, see Kinsey et al. 1953; Glass & Wright 1985; 1992; Greiling & Buss 2000; Anderson 2012; Walker 2018).

What is particularly interesting for a critique of monogamy are those men and women who cheat even though they are happy in their relationship and love their partner. For many of them, cheating is in their best interests, and they do it because they love their partner (Anderson 2012). Let me explain why. Many people enter a monogamous relationship believing in monogamy. However, as love grows, sex goes. Their love for their partner develops, and the relationship becomes more serious and committed. However, over time, they become (increasingly) sexually dissatisfied. They may also feel that their declining sex life has considerable adverse effects on their health. In any case, there is a significant negative impact on their overall well-being. This can lead to them harbouring negative feelings towards their partner, which (can) develop into significant relationship issues.

People in this situation often have four bad options:

- 1) *Suck it up and remain monogamous*: They will continue to suffer the (increasing) strains their monogamous sex life places on them and their relationship. For many people, one thing becomes clear – they cannot do this for many years and even decades to come *and* maintain a *happy* relationship. Indeed, for them, this option is equivalent to (eventually) having a miserable relationship, which will likely end as a result.

- 2) *End the relationship*: They are free to have sex with other people as a single person. However, they will lose the partner they love and the relationship they value.
- 3) *Try to negotiate a sexually open relationship*: This will likely go (very) badly. Their partner will probably reject this request and end the relationship (Anderson 2012). Even if their partner says no but stays with them, the relationship will likely face considerable difficulties because they have let the cat out of the bag. Alternatively, their partner might say yes to a sexually open relationship, but now they have to face the challenges such a relationship will pose (e.g. managing jealousy). In many cases, sexual openness may cause significant emotional disruption in the relationship and even end it.
- 4) *Cheat*: If they can do it discreetly, they satisfy (many of) their sexual needs while maintaining the relationship. Of course, the infidelity *might* be discovered and, consequently, the relationship ends. However, the probability of this happening will often be less than that of the relationship ending with the other three options. Indeed, discovered cheaters may often successfully persuade their partner to not break up with them, often by (false) assurances that they will never cheat again.

Option 4 is often in the best interests of people struggling with monogamy. Cheating is the best, if not the only, way to meet the following two goals: maintaining a happy relationship with the partner they love and alleviating their sexual dissatisfaction.

Unsurprisingly, when people cheat, they often feel “alive” again (Ryan & Jethá 2011: 291; TED 2015: 12:41). Many also report that cheating enables them to be happy in their relationship – and life more generally – and be a better partner. Indeed, cheaters often defend their infidelity by explaining that they could not maintain their happy relationship or marriage without it (on all these points, see Anderson 2012; Perel 2017; Martin 2018; Walker 2018).

2.5 The end of the road: Breaking up, separation, and divorce

Many monogamous relationships end for reasons that have nothing to do with anything I have discussed in this chapter, but many others do.

First, many people who struggle with long-term sexual exclusivity resort to sustaining their monogamous relationship via sexual infidelity. Others try to suck it up, but there are one or more (drunken) occasions when their biology gets the better of them. Often in both marital and non-marital relationships, the other partner learns of the cheating and, consequently, ends the relationship (Betzig 1989; Amato & Rogers 1997; Anderson 2012).

Second, some people may struggle with monogamy and do not wish to suck it up, cheat, or try to negotiate a sexually open relationship. Instead, in trying to act ethically, they make the following painful decision: ending their otherwise (mostly) happy relationship – breaking their and their partner’s heart – so that they can act on their nonmonogamous sexual desires as a single person.

Third, there are likely many relationships in which one or both partners struggle with sexual exclusivity but suck it up and do not cheat (much). However, their (mostly) monogamous sex life takes a significant toll on them and/or the relationship, ultimately leading to relationship breakdown. For example, a declining sex life may adversely affect their health and other elements of their well-being, which can lead to significant relationship issues, which, in turn, leads to the relationship ending. In some cases, these adverse effects and relationship problems may lead to their partner having an affair, which leads to relationship termination.

It is difficult to estimate how many monogamous relationships follow one of these paths, partly because researchers have not directly examined such processes. But fortunately, there is data on the rates and causes of divorce, which provide valuable insights. First, unsurprisingly, infidelity is well-recognised to be a leading cause of divorce cross-culturally (see Betzig 1989; Amato & Rogers 1997; Earp et al. 2012: 571). Unfortunately, it is infamously hard to determine the exact divorce rate (see Amato 2010), and divorce rates also vary significantly across different cultures. However, even if they are not perfectly accurate, the following statistics inform us that at least a significant minority of marriages end in divorce. First, various researchers believe that, in the United States, around half of marriages end in divorce (Williams, Sawyer, and Wahlstrom 2005; US Census Bureau 2012). Second, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007) estimates that about 33% of marriages entered into in Australia between 2000-2002 will end in divorce. As for Europe, Statista Research Department (2021) provides the ‘Divorce rates in Europe in 2019, by country (per 100 marriages)’. The rates range from 13.2 (Malta) to 88.9 (Luxembourg), with most between 35 and 65, including the United Kingdom (41.2).

Of course, the end of a relationship often takes a significant toll on people’s well-being. This is particularly true of divorce, which is well-known for being an excruciating process (Nichols 1998; Spaht 1998). Indeed, there are often children involved in divorce, and many researchers believe that divorce usually has significant long-term adverse effects on the welfare of the children (see Earp et al. 2012: 566-569).

2.6 Monogamy and its discontents – a summary and a look ahead

A central life goal for many people, perhaps most, worldwide, is to have a happy, successful, lifelong, monogamous relationship – the monogamous ideal. Furthermore, many endorse monogamism, and many monogamists additionally endorse monogamous idealism.

This thesis discusses many reasons why this is the case. Still, some are relevant here, which I will recap. Firstly, many think that, for everyone, monogamy is the *only* relationship style that can be overall conducive to promoting well-being, or at least, they regard it as the *most* conducive to promoting well-being. Also, many believe having a lifelong monogamous relationship/marriage or, more specifically, pursuing the monogamous ideal is vital to living a well-lived life.

This chapter has challenged such perspectives by detailing the significant risks and costs to well-being that many people face, to varying degrees, in long-term monogamous relationships due to (severe) tension between long-term sexual exclusivity and one or more aspects of their nature. These risks and costs were as follows: (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and/or (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction; adverse effects on mental, cognitive, and physical health; significant relationship issues; cheating; and relationship breakdown. And I described the causal relationships between them.

Of course, more argument is needed to show that sexually open relationships are ethically acceptable – the fact that, for many people, long-term sexual exclusivity incurs significant risks and costs to their well-being does not, by itself, demonstrate that sexually open relationships are an ethical alternative. Still, most of the information in this chapter will be utilised in my later defences of such relationships.

The whole of Part I has been more forceful in undermining monogamous idealism. It has clearly demonstrated that many people would, to varying degrees, face significant, even severe, risks and costs to their well-being in pursuing the monogamous ideal, and it is highly unlikely, perhaps (almost) inevitable, that they would fail to achieve this goal.

Indeed, many, if not most, couples who (implicitly) set out to achieve the monogamous ideal ultimately fail to do so. What is the failure rate as a percentage? Or, instead, what is the success rate? For reasons discussed in this chapter, it is hard to estimate. Also, even if we generate an estimate, it is crucial to remember that not all the failures would necessarily indicate a problem with monogamy per se, though many, arguably most, would.

But suppose we were to attempt such a calculation. In that case, it might be worth focusing on married couples since this would likely factor out many relationships that do not work out due to

other factors (e.g. young couples who break up due to non-sex-related immaturity). The calculation could roughly proceed as follows. We could first subtract the percentage of marriages that end in separation or divorce. This group will include many marriages in which there was cheating. But it would most likely not cover all of them, especially since many happily married people cheat, often to sustain their happy marriage. So next, we should subtract the percentage of lifelong marriages in which cheating occurred. This group will include many unhappy marriages, but, as just noted, not all of them. So, we should also subtract the percentage of lifelong and infidelity-free marriages that eventually became unhappy. Finally, we should deduct the married couples who eventually became consensually nonmonogamous.

Our remaining percentage would be the success rate. I guess that it would be less than 50%, perhaps in the 15-35% region. Your estimate may be more pessimistic or optimistic. In any case, we should agree that the success rate would be substantially less than 100%. And, of course, this calculation does not even include the many relationships that do not make it to marriage.

The fact that there is such widespread failure to achieve the monogamous ideal – the fact that so many long-term monogamous partners cheat, become unhappy, break up, or experience a combination of these issues – due to (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and/or (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction ultimately because of the disharmony between long-term sexual exclusivity and their natures should, at the very least, make us highly sceptical of monogamous idealism.

Indeed, assuming we want sex and relationship norms conducive to avoiding suffering and promoting well-being, these observations should lead us towards endorsing my main proposals. That is, we need to embrace, in a non-hierarchical manner, a plurality of sex and love lifestyles, including many different forms of sexually open relationships, various ways of living the single life, and monogamy. We should also have widespread awareness of the benefits, risks, and costs of all these lifestyles and recognise that no one size fits all. Consequently, individuals and partners can make informed choices with a range of options about how they wish to live (see pp. 9-11).

But, of course, as mentioned, the main set of sex and love lifestyles I discuss the ethics of in this thesis – sexually open relationships – still require further defence. Indeed, the suggestion of such alternatives to monogamy and pursuing the monogamous ideal raises many questions, including that which is the title of the next part of this thesis.

PART II: “WHAT ABOUT JEALOUSY?”

The implicit suggestion often within this question is that there is a convincing jealousy-related argument for monogamism. Sometimes, the suggestion is more modest – that there is a jealousy-related (moral) reason why at least many people should pursue successful monogamy rather than an open relationship. So, those posing this question often have different considerations in mind.

Many would be thinking about *the difficulty of managing jealousy* as a reason why many, most, or all, should pursue monogamy (see Chapter 10; §11.2). But here, I assess two perspectives on *sexual* jealousy that, if correct, could *help* form an argument for monogamism. Chapter 3 assesses the view that sexual jealousy is a reasonable response to the threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown). And Chapter 4 examines the view that sexual jealousy is a reasonable response to your partner expressing dissatisfaction with your sexual attractiveness and the desire to have sex with someone more sexually attractive.

I will argue that these perspectives highlight that extra-relationship sex can *often* be ethically problematic, at the very least, and reasonably evoke sexual jealousy. And when this is the case, we have moral reasons, at the very least, to restrict the relevant extra-relationship sex. However, these perspectives do not give us sufficient reasons to believe any of the following monogamism-supporting conclusions: that sexual jealousy is *always* a reasonable response to extra-relationship sex; that *all* instances of extra-relationship sex are at least ethically problematic; and that we have moral reasons, at the very least, to restrict *all* extra-relationship sex in *all* relationships.

Chapter 3 Sexual jealousy and the threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown)

§3.1 outlines the ethical debate over *sexual* jealousy in relation to monogamy and sexually open relationships. §3.2 assesses the view that sexual jealousy is a reasonable response to the threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown). And §3.3 concludes the chapter.

3.1 Outlining the debate over sexual jealousy

3.1.1 Why a simplistic sexual jealousy-related case for monogamism fails

First, I must define:

Sexual jealousy: a set of emotionally painful responses to (the idea of) someone you love romantically engaging in sexual relations with someone else.

Many people say they would experience sexual jealousy if their partner had extra-relationship sex (Buss 2000; Appendix A) – though they may instead use terms like ‘hurt’, ‘pain’, or ‘distress’.

The simplistic jealousy-related case for monogamy over sexually open relationships is obvious. Monogamy restricts each partner from engaging in a behaviour (extra-relationship sex) hurtful to the other. Meanwhile, a sexually open relationship would allow one or both partners to engage in this behaviour, causing their partner pain. Thus, monogamy is preferable.

This rationale follows something like the following principle:

If a person would experience emotional pain in response to their partner doing X, this is a moral reason, at the very least, to restrict their partner from doing X.

Such a principle seems correct when we consider a person’s partner engaging in activities such as:

- Sharing their secrets without permission
- Breaking promises they made to them
- Telling them lies
- Performing dangerous, life-threatening stunts.

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Of course, we (may) think other moral reasons count against them.

However, the principle quickly loses any initial appeal once we consider activities such as:

- Spending time with any friends independently
- Talking to any non-relative of the sex(es) to whom they are attracted
- Having work colleagues of the sex(es) to whom they are attracted
- Exercising to stay fit and healthy

The difference between the two sets of activities is the *reasonableness* of the person's emotionally painful response.

Before discussing them further, I should provide some points on how I understand a reasonable versus an unreasonable response. First, consider the fear of snakes. There is compelling evidence that it is part of human nature, an adaptation selected by evolution since our snake-fearing ancestors were more likely to survive and reproduce (Mineka & Öhman 2002). However, many snakes are harmless to humans. If a person fears a harmless snake, their response is *unreasonable*: they cannot provide sufficient reasons about the trigger of their response that would justify it. They could say, "It's going to kill me", but they would be wrong. Alternatively, they might say, "I know it is harmless, and I don't know why I'm scared. I just am!" But this will not be sufficient. Finally, they could even explain why their fear is an evolved adaptation. Still, their response would be unreasonable. But, of course, many other snakes are harmful to humans. And when a person fears a harmful snake, their response is *reasonable*. Of course, their fear is natural, but this is not what makes it reasonable. Their response is reasonable because they can provide sufficient reasons about the trigger of their fear that justifies it: e.g. "If this snake bites me, I will die or, in the best-case scenario, I will suffer one or more painful bites and require medical treatment."

Let us return to the above two sets of activities. For the first set, it is reasonable for a person to be upset if their partner does them. So this is (*prima facie*) a moral reason, at the very least, to restrict their partner from engaging in them. However, this is not the case for the second set of activities. There is no good reason for a person to be upset over their partner engaging in them – the emotionally painful response is *unreasonable*. Consequently, we would not think there is (*prima facie*) a moral reason to restrict their partner from engaging in these activities. Instead, we would believe there is (*prima facie*) a moral reason, at the very least, for this person to (i) allow their partner to engage in these activities and (ii) manage or overcome the emotional pain they feel when their partner does so or end the relationship if that is not possible.

So does the fact that a person would experience sexual jealousy in response to their partner engaging in extra-relationship sex provide (prima facie) a moral reason, at the very least, to restrict their partner from engaging in such sex? It partly depends on the reasonableness of their sexual jealousy.¹⁵

3.1.2 Three broad views on the reasonableness of sexual jealousy and their implications

1. *The positive view:* Sexual jealousy over one's partner engaging in extra-relationship sex is *always reasonable*. Consequently, at the very least, we have (prima facie) moral reasons to (i) not try to manage or overcome such sexual jealousy but rather (ii) restrict *all* extra-relationship sex.
2. *The negative view:* Sexual jealousy over one's partner engaging in extra-relationship sex is *always unreasonable*. Consequently, at the very least, we have (prima facie) moral reasons to (i) try to manage and, ideally, overcome sexual jealousy and (ii) try not to restrict extra-relationship sex but, instead, aim for more sexual openness in our relationships.
3. *The mixed view:* Sexual jealousy over one's partner engaging in extra-relationship sex can be reasonable or unreasonable, depending on the circumstances. Consequently, at the very least, we have (prima facie) moral reasons to (i) not try to manage or overcome *reasonable* sexual jealousy but rather (ii) restrict the extra-relationship sex that triggers it. Also, again at the very least, we have (prima facie) moral reasons to (i) try to manage and, ideally, overcome *unreasonable* sexual jealousy and (ii) try not to restrict the extra-relationship sex that triggers it but, instead, have more openness to such sex.

3.1.3 Why try to manage unreasonable sexual jealousy and aim for more sexual openness?

The *negative and mixed* views raise the following questions. Why do we have (prima facie) moral reasons to try to manage and, ideally, overcome *unreasonable* sexual jealousy? And why do we have (prima facie) moral reasons to try not to restrict extra-relationship sex that triggers such jealousy but, instead, have more openness to such sex?

In an ethical loving relationship, the partners would (most) often allow and want each other to engage in activities that will enhance their well-being in one or more of the following ways,

¹⁵ Other philosophers writing on monogamy and (sexually) open relationships have made similar distinctions between reasonable and unreasonable sexual jealousy (e.g. Weaver & Woollard 2008; McKeever 2015).

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among others: provide intensely pleasurable experiences; satisfy their desires, especially strong and persistent desires that cause frustration when unfulfilled; strengthen the quality of the relationship; improve their cognitive, mental, and physical health; and extend their life expectancy.¹⁶

Sex *within* a relationship enhances people's well-being in one or more of these ways, which is partly why romantic partners generally have sex together, at least in their early years/decades together. Many other activities also provide one or more of these benefits, including hobbies, friendships, and exercise. And partners generally allow and want each other to engage in such activities.

However, there are exceptions. Sometimes, there is an overriding moral reason(s) against allowing, let alone wanting, one's partner to engage in a particular activity even though it would enhance their well-being. For example, a wife may typically allow and even want her husband to go on a ski trip with his friends. However, suppose she needs his support during her final months of pregnancy. Then, it would be reasonable for her not to allow him to go on this trip and be upset if he did so or just wanted to.

For many people, extra-relationship sex can enhance their well-being (Chapter 1 and Chapter 2). Accordingly, if you are in a relationship with such a person, you should allow them to enjoy extra-relationship sex that would benefit them and even want them to do so unless there is an overriding moral reason not to.

Many think their sexual jealousy provides such a reason. However, if your sexual jealousy is *unreasonable*, it does not seem to be an overriding reason against letting your partner engage in extra-relationship sex that would enhance their well-being. Indeed, it would be comparable to restricting your partner from spending time with any friends independently just because you had some unreasonable, emotionally painful response to them doing so. In both cases, we would believe there are (*prima facie*) moral reasons, at the very least, for you to allow your partner to engage in these activities and manage or overcome your unreasonable, emotionally painful response to them doing so.

Are these prescriptions too weak? Do we not have *decisive* reasons to simply get over *unreasonable* emotional responses rather than (*prima facie*) moral reasons to *try* to manage and ideally overcome them? And do we not have *decisive* reasons to allow our partner to engage in

¹⁶ Other monogamy challenging philosophers have made similar claims (e.g. Weaver & Woollard 2008; McKeever 2015; Chalmers 2019).

the behaviours that trigger these unreasonable feelings rather than (*prima facie*) moral reasons to try not to restrict but, instead, have more openness to them?

I added the ‘at the very least’ clause in the relevant statements in case these bolder claims are correct. However, I made the claims more modest because, as I will argue later (Chapter 10), even unreasonable sexual jealousy can be *very* difficult, if not *too* difficult, for many people to manage, and this often justifies restrictions on extra-relationship sex.

I will now examine an argument for *the positive view*. If successful, it lends significant support to monogamism. However, I will argue that while this argument shows that sexual jealousy can *often* be reasonable, it fails to demonstrate that it is *always* reasonable. Thus, this argument supports *the mixed view*, not *the positive view*.

3.2 Sexual jealousy as a reasonable response to the threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown)

Many people agree with the following. There is a significant risk that extra-relationship sex will lead to extra-relationship love, which, in turn, risks ending the primary relationship. For example, a person in a sexually open relationship could intend just to have casual sex with another person, but the sex may well lead to love. In addition, this could cause them to break up their original relationship to start a new relationship with the “casual” partner. If one loves their partner, they would wish to prevent these outcomes. So it seems sexual jealousy in response to one’s partner engaging in extra-relationship sex is the reasonable response, and we should not try to manage such feelings but restrict all extra-relationship sex.

Philosophers have expressed or shown sympathy to similar worries (e.g. Steinbock 1986: 14; Earp, Sandberg, & Savulescu 2012: 572; York 2020: 542), while others have recognised the prevalence of and responded to such thinking (e.g. Woollard & Weaver 2008: 513; McKeever 2015; and Chalmers 2019: 233).

Relatedly, this line of argument comes in other forms. Some do not frame it in terms of the reasonableness of sexual jealousy but present it more simply. For example, they may argue that sexual exclusivity is a practical or necessary policy for protecting the relationship against the threat of extra-relationship love and consequent break-up. Also, such considerations are part of the real-world view. These different ways of presenting the argument are fine. But I have chosen to frame it the way I have since – as we have begun and will continue to see – much of the

philosophical discussion on the ethics of monogamy and open relationships focuses on the reasonableness of (sexual) jealousy. Although, of course, my critique of this line of argument as I have presented it will also apply to other variants.

Let us return to the argument as I frame it. Monogamists forwarding such an argument for *the positive view* can utilise the work of Helen Fisher (2016). She maintains that human evolution has produced three core brain systems that underlie reproduction and human love: *lust*, the sex drive that promotes mating with various potentially suitable partners; *romantic love*, which enables us to focus our copulative behaviour on one person at a time; and *attachment*, the ability to experience deep union with this partner for the duration required to raise the offspring, ensuring their survival. But, more importantly, these systems interact: a fully committed, romantic, and sexual relationship involving all three systems can develop starting from just romantic attraction (e.g. when romantic infatuation occurs before sexual attraction), attachment (e.g. when a long-term platonic friend becomes one's partner), or – and most relevant to this discussion – lust (e.g. when casual sex develops into romantic attraction and attachment).

Furthermore, in §1.3.1.3, we saw some other evolutionary hypotheses that may well account for why casual extra-relationship sex often does not stay casual. First, many women are probably evolutionarily inclined to use extra-pair mating to switch mates or cultivate backup mates. So what may start as casual sex can often lead to 'catching feelings'. This latter point also applies to many men since they may well be evolutionarily prone to using extra-pair mating to form a relationship with a younger and, thus, more fertile woman than their girlfriend/wife.

Given all these points, the following ideas seem very attractive. First, sexual jealousy is a reasonable response to the threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown). And second, the rule of sexual exclusivity can help protect relationships.

3.2.1 A brief look at the polyamorist and anti-monogamist response

Many polyamorous people and anti-monogamists (would) pose an intriguing challenge: what is the problem with extra-relationship love? Why not have feelings for an additional partner, especially if it is just temporary emotional intimacy? And why not have multiple committed, loving relationships? (see Part III). Part IV explains how such challenges can be answered. For now, I will grant that at least many couples have decisive reasons to maintain romantic exclusivity in their relationship – an assumption that monogamists endorse.

3.2.2 Extra-relationship sex without a significant risk of love (and consequent relationship breakdown)

Demonstrating that such sex is a possibility is crucial in undermining the line of argument under scrutiny. On this matter, Harry Chalmers (2019: 233) claims, “[s]urely much of the time, we can reasonably be confident that the potential for a close emotional bond with another is low, and that the connection is purely or primarily sexual.” Ronald de Sousa (2017: 10) also comments on this matter and the related issue of romantic love leading to a long-term relationship: “both lust and intense romantic love...have relatively short shelf-lives: And both grow notoriously out of step with long-term attachment” [Fisher 2004; Perel 2007]. In addition, Natasha McKeever explains the idea that a policy of sexual exclusivity is needed to protect a relationship “does not justify restricting extra-relationship sex which is of the sort that has little or no chance of leading to an affair or to trading-up [when a person leaves their partner for someone they find more suitable and attractive], such as one-off sex with a stranger on holiday whom one knows one will never meet again, or an anonymous sexual encounter had in a sex club” (2015: 4).

Still, given the points others have made about how “casual sex” *tends* not to stay casual (e.g. Earp et al. 2012: 572; York 2020: 542), scepticism may remain, especially regarding how common it is for people to desire the kind of casual extra-relationship sex these philosophers describe and have the opportunity for it. If such conditions are rarely met, and if it is hard to determine when they are, then we may think that sexual jealousy is a reasonable response to extra-relationship sex because there is an *overwhelming tendency* for it to lead to extra-relationship love, which may, in turn, lead to relationship breakdown. Relatedly, we might also think the rule of sexual exclusivity is optimal to protect relationships from these outcomes. At the very least, even if consideration of these matters inclined us towards *the mixed view* rather than *the positive view* of sexual jealousy, we might think this conclusion was hardly significant because it would come with the caveat that only *rarely* is sexual jealousy *not* a reasonable response to the threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown). Therefore, it is helpful to emphasise that, as evidenced across Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, it is very plausible that *many* people can desire and find the opportunity to engage in casual extra-relationship sex where these risks are sufficiently low.

The evolutionary explanation for why many, if not most, men desire such sex is clear and compelling. They will desire casual sex with a high quantity and variety of women, no matter how highly they rate their partner and relationship. This is because such promiscuity furthered our male ancestors’ reproductive success. So the traits that promote promiscuous behaviour have become characteristic of the males of our species (§1.3.1.3). Among these is that men relax their standards for casual sex partners. Consequently, many women men desire casual sex with will not

be perceived by them as a potential relationship partner – often, they will firmly rule them out (Buss 2016: 120-124). All this helps to account for why many men cheat purely for casual sex outside of (very) happy relationships they wish to preserve with partners they love (§2.4).

We also saw some hypotheses that may explain why at least some women can and do desire and enjoy engaging in casual sex outside their relationship with a low risk of catching feelings. First, they could be seeking genes that are *superior* or, at least, *different* to their partner's. Additionally or alternatively, they may be geared towards acting on a promiscuous mating strategy – having short-term relations with many different males, creating *paternity confusion* by doing so with the benefit of securing resources from multiple males (§1.3.1.3).

We should also note that at least some bisexual people have no interest in having a *romantic* relationship with people of the opposite sex to their partner. However, they wish to have casual sex with them (Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor 1994).

Of course, all these points only show that, arguably, at least many people *desire* casual extra-relationship sex that poses no significant threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown). But can there be the *opportunity* for such sex? Before addressing that question, let me quickly add a related point that might help the reader appreciate my affirmative answer. People who appeal to the risk of extra-relationship love to oppose sexually open relationships often fail to acknowledge that monogamous relationships also face the threat of extra-relationship love. As others have highlighted (e.g. McKeever 2015: 4), unfortunately, there is always the risk that our partner will meet someone in a non-sexual context (e.g. work or university) with whom they fall in love. However, many monogamous people take steps to minimise this risk, often without thinking about it. For example, they may avoid spending significant time (alone) with someone they can potentially find romantically attractive.

Likewise, people in sexually open relationships can minimise the risk of extra-relationship love by avoiding sex with people for whom there is a significant risk they could develop feelings. Indeed, there are (most) often considerable rules and boundaries in sexually open relationships, chosen partly to minimise the risk of extra-relationship love. For example, some couples only permit one-time hook-ups with people who are unlikely to be seen again. Others may have a 'sex workers only' rule. And, of course, there are sexually open relationships in which the partners engage in extra-relationship sex together, for example, by swinging and/or having threesomes. Among other protections such arrangements provide against extra-relationship love, by both being present, the partners can make it clear to others that they are in a happy relationship and are not interested in anything beyond casual sex. These are just a few examples of how sexually open couples, like

monogamous couples, have strategies for preventing extra-relationship love (on all these points, see Taormino 2008; Anderson 2012; Michaels & Johnson 2015; Hardy & Easton 2017).

3.2.3 How monogamy can lead to extra-relationship love and relationship breakdown

Monogamists could concede there are ways to reduce the risk of extra-relationship love significantly in sexually open relationships. Still, they could argue that the risk of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown) is *higher* in sexually open relationships than in monogamous relationships since the latter does not permit *any* extra-relationship sex. So even if sexual jealousy is not always a reasonable response to the threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown), sexual exclusivity is still the optimal policy for protecting the relationship.

However, monogamous relationships are often, *in their own ways*, vulnerable to the risk of extra-relationship love and/or (consequential) breakdown of the partnership. Indeed, if the aim is to protect a relationship from these outcomes, the policy of sexual exclusivity will be counterproductive for many couples. I am thinking specifically of monogamous relationships in which at least one partner will struggle with long-term sexual exclusivity. As evidenced in Chapter 2, one of the following scenarios could occur.

First, the struggling partner(s) may suck it up and be successfully monogamous for what for them feels like a long time. But eventually, they crack and end up cheating in an unplanned manner that increases the risk of extra-relationship love, despite still loving their partner and being otherwise (mostly) happy in the relationship. For example, they might start sleeping with a work colleague who fancies them romantically. But suppose instead that extra-relationship sex was permitted as part of a sexually open relationship. In that case, it could have been planned to only occur in contexts with minimal risk of extra-relationship love.

Second, the struggling partner(s) do not want to cheat and (correctly) believe that any attempt to negotiate a sexually open relationship will fail. However, they also decide they cannot continue to be successfully monogamous anymore because it is, in short, making them miserable. They may also fear that one day they will crack. Consequently, they end the relationship.

The third scenario is similar to the second, but the struggling partner(s) decide to suck it up and avoid cheating. However, the resulting adverse effects on their health, general well-being, and partnership quality ultimately break down the relationship.

And the fourth scenario is like the third, but the resulting adverse effects of sexual frustration and repression lead to one or both partners intentionally having an affair, which involves both sexual and emotional infidelity.

3.2.4 The threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown) – a conclusion

So is sexual jealousy a reasonable response to the threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown)? There are undoubtedly *many* real and conceivable circumstances in which it is, and when so, there are good reasons, at the very least, to restrict the relevant sex. Furthermore, it is possible that for some couples, *any* extra-relationship sex they would be interested in would present these risks to a significant degree, perhaps because both partners are incapable of keeping sex casual. So for such couples, there are moral reasons, at the very least, to be monogamous.

However, many people can enjoy casual sex outside a happy relationship without any significant risk of catching feelings, and sexually open relationships can be structured to only allow for such sex. Furthermore, for such people, it is (most) often the case that long-term monogamy would present a higher risk of extra-relationship love and/or consequent relationship breakdown. Thus, sexual jealousy is *not always* a reasonable response to the threat of extra-relationship love and resulting relationship breakdown. Nor is sexual exclusivity always the optimal policy for protecting a relationship against these outcomes. Thus, such arguments fail to support monogamism.

3.3 Some conclusions on jealousy

I have outlined the ethical debate over *sexual* jealousy in relation to monogamy and sexually open relationships. In doing so, I described three perspectives on the reasonableness of sexual jealousy over extra-relationship sex and their implications for the ethics of monogamy and sexually open relationships (§3.1.2). If *the positive view* is correct, this will support monogamism significantly. Meanwhile, if *the negative view* is correct, this will support the case of various monogamy challengers, especially anti-monogamists. Against both views, I have demonstrated that sexual jealousy over one's partner engaging in extra-relationship sex is *often but not always* a reasonable response to the threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown). Thus, I have given us grounds for endorsing *the mixed view*.

Chapter 4 Sexual jealousy over attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex

Many people think that even if a person's partner's extra-relationship sex poses no significant risk of extra-relationship love nor consequent relationship breakdown, it is still reasonable for that person to feel:

Sexual jealousy: a set of emotionally painful responses to (the idea of) someone you love romantically engaging in sexual relations with someone else.

(Recall that they may instead use terms like 'hurt', 'pain', or 'distress'.) Indeed, many would find a lack of sexual jealousy strange and positive emotional responses downright peculiar. By extension, they probably think there is an additional or alternative case for:

The positive view: Sexual jealousy over one's partner engaging in extra-relationship sex is *always reasonable*. Consequently, at the very least, we have (prima facie) moral reasons to (i) not try to manage or overcome such sexual jealousy but rather (ii) restrict *all* extra-relationship sex.

And if this view is correct, this would substantially support monogamism.

This chapter examines a case for *the positive view* developed from the idea that if your partner engages in extra-relationship sex or wishes to, it is reasonable for you to feel sexually jealous because your partner has expressed dissatisfaction with your sexual attractiveness and the desire to have sex with someone more sexually attractive. Such ideas seem common. Many people feel personally affronted when discovering their partner has cheated sexually, even if there is no significant risk of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown) (Anderson 2012). Also, consider these comments from Roger Scruton:

It is possible to be jealous even of the most casual encounter (and indeed, especially of the most casual encounter) provided only that it was the occasion of desire. It does not matter that your rival is not loved...Although sexual desire has an individualised object, it is bound up with interest in the other's sex. In the sexual act we cease to be merely John or Mary, and become the representatives of the common attributes of our sex.

Moreover, this is what we want. It is true that the person in love wishes his beloved to focus on his body, and so to want him as a man, or as a woman, as an example of his sex: not as someone who might have been replaced in this act by another, but rather as *primus inter pares*, the best of the bunch (1986: 163).

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More recently, Dirk Baltzly (2007) has explored the idea that adultery is painful because it calls into question the non-participating partner's sexual self-worth. And although Harry Chalmers (2019: 235) has no sympathy for *the positive view*, he believes the causes of most jealousy are the fear of losing your partner to someone else and the assumption that if your partner is or wishes to be another, they must be dissatisfied with you.

However, various monogamy challengers hold (something like):

The negative view: Sexual jealousy over one's partner engaging in extra-relationship sex is *always unreasonable*. Consequently, at the very least, we have (prima facie) moral reasons to (i) try to manage and, ideally, overcome sexual jealousy and (ii) try not to restrict extra-relationship sex but, instead, aim for more sexual openness in our relationships.

They (seemingly) think that sexual jealousy is *never* reasonable for reasons relating to dissatisfaction with sexual attractiveness or the comparable sexual attractiveness of the extra-relationship sex partner (e.g. Chalmers 2019: 235-240). Indeed, some do not even address such ideas (e.g. Russell 1929; Moen & Sørliie 2022). And others praise cultivating:

Compersion: one or more positive emotional responses to (the idea of) someone you love engaging in sexual and/or romantic relations with someone else.

They do not or hardly caveat their endorsement of compersion by identifying cases in which it is not an appropriate response to casual extra-relationship sex (e.g. Sousa 2017; Brunning 2020).

I believe these monogamy challengers are overlooking an important issue. §4.1 identifies a common kind of extra-relationship sex – *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex* – and argues that it is often reasonable for people to experience sexual jealousy in response to it. When so, we have no moral reasons to manage or overcome such sexual jealousy. Instead, at the very least, there are moral reasons to restrict attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex. This gives us further reasons to reject *the negative view*. But I want to steer us from endorsing *the positive view* toward:

The mixed view: Sexual jealousy over one's partner engaging in extra-relationship sex can be reasonable or unreasonable, depending on the circumstances. Consequently, at the very least, we have (prima facie) moral reasons to (i) not try to manage or overcome *reasonable* sexual jealousy but rather (ii) restrict the extra-relationship sex that triggers it. Also, again at the very least, we have (prima facie) moral reasons to (i) try to manage

and, ideally, overcome *unreasonable* sexual jealousy and (ii) try not to restrict the extra-relationship sex that triggers it but, instead, have more openness to such sex.

So §4.2 identifies various other common kinds of extra-relationship sex for which sexual jealousy is not a reasonable response, at least not for any reasons discussed in this part of the thesis. After this, §4.3 summarises my conclusions from these preceding sections. Then §4.4 explores the potentially problematic implications of my arguments for the ethics of the cuckoldry/hotwife lifestyle. And §4.5 does likewise for (supposedly) sexist double standards regarding male versus female engagement in extra-relationship sex. In both cases, I defend my arguments in light of these implications. Finally, §4.6 summarises Part II.

4.1 Attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex

Consider:

Alex and Samuel: They have been in a monogamous relationship for two years. One day, Alex says to Samuel, “you’re a lovely guy, and I feel secure in my relationship with you. I also think you will be a stable father. However, I have never really been that sexually attracted to you and, consequently, do not achieve orgasm as I have with other men in the past. One of the reasons is that your penis is relatively small. Also, while you are nice looking, you’re not the strong, handsome, rugged, masculine, and socially dominant type of man I prefer to have sex with. I want us to stay together, but I would like to have a sexually open relationship so I can fulfil my sexual needs with other men.”

Alex desires:

Attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex: Extra-relationship sex motivated by (a) overall dissatisfaction with one’s partner’s non-reasonably-enhanceable sexual attractiveness – that is, all those aspects of their sexual attractiveness that they cannot reasonably be expected to enhance to the desired degree¹⁷ – and (b) the desire to have sex with someone more sexually attractive than one’s partner.

I expect most people will think it is reasonable for Samuel to feel sexual jealousy in response to Alex’s revelations, and they would judge that Alex has (arguably) wronged Samuel in expressing these thoughts to him. Furthermore, they would think it is reasonable for anyone to be upset by their partner engaging in or desiring *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*. And they would

¹⁷ The following subsection elaborates on this idea.

think that a person who feels neutral or positive about their partner enjoying such sex is responding inappropriately. However, not everyone is on board with these intuitions, and there are reasons to question them. So a rationale for them is required.

I do not think the attitudes I expect most people to have regarding *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex* are *entirely* correct. Still, I will argue for the following nearby position: sexual jealousy in response to *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex* is *often* reasonable, and when so, we have moral reasons to restrict such sex. I will start by answering the following question.

4.1.1 What is (non-reasonably-enhanceable) sexual attractiveness?

In this context, a person's sexual attractiveness is determined by numerous features of their entire body, personality, and sexual skills. Of course, people vary in what they find sexually attractive, but there are common, even cross-cultural, patterns. For men, sexual attractiveness arguably generally depends on factors such as their physical strength, athletic ability, height, masculinity, social dominance, social status, confidence, intelligence, humour, bravery, and facial symmetry; and for women, sexual attractiveness arguably generally depends on factors such as youthfulness, facial symmetry, waist-to-hip ratio, and femininity (Buss 2019: 99-158). Other features that arguably commonly contribute to sexual attractiveness include penis size, oral sex skills, clitoral stimulation skills, and shape and size of breasts and buttocks.

As just mentioned, I will argue that sexual jealousy is often a reasonable response when one's partner's (desired) extra-relationship sex is motivated in part by overall dissatisfaction with one's *non-reasonably-enhanceable* sexual attractiveness – that is, all those aspects of one's sexual attractiveness that one cannot reasonably be expected to enhance to the desired degree – not sexual attractiveness in general.

But which desired enhancements are reasonable to expect and which are unreasonable? A desired enhancement would be *unreasonable* to expect if it would be too demanding, if not impossible, for a person to make. Additionally, a desired enhancement would be *unreasonable* if it reflects an unethical standard of sexual attractiveness. However, a desired enhancement would be *reasonable* to expect if it is neither too demanding nor reflects an unethical standard of sexual attractiveness.

Some desired enhancements are obviously unreasonable to expect. For example, a partner cannot reasonably be expected to have a bigger penis, be a foot taller, increase their IQ by 15 points, alter their appearance to such a degree that people would not recognise them, or fundamentally change their personality – among other considerations, such changes are

impossible (to do safely). Meanwhile, some desired enhancements are reasonable to expect. For example, suppose one's partner puts little or no effort into oral sex foreplay and/or clitoral stimulation. In that case, it is reasonable to expect them to develop the relevant sexual skills.

However, with many other features of sexual attractiveness, there would be much debate over whether they count as *non-reasonably-enhanceable*, and it may vary on a case-by-case basis. Examples include the following: achieving a ("normal") BMI score; having larger breasts; having a mole removed; covering facial imperfections with make-up; achieving a relatively high level of confidence/social dominance/masculinity/femininity/social status; having no facial/armpit/leg hair, at least during sex; and being willing to perform sexual acts widely considered degrading.

Resolving such debates here is unnecessary and impossible. What matters is that we agree there are aspects of one's sexual attractiveness that one cannot reasonably be expected to enhance to the desired degree and ones that they can. When one's partner's (desired) extra-relationship sex is partly motivated by dissatisfaction with one's *non-reasonably-enhanceable* sexual attractiveness, sexual jealousy is often reasonable, partly because one cannot reasonably be expected to make the changes required to satisfy their partner. But when one's partner is, instead, partly motivated by overall dissatisfaction with one's *reasonably-enhanceable* sexual attractiveness, sexual jealousy is (arguably) *unreasonable* because one can reasonably be expected to make the changes required to satisfy their partner but is choosing not to.

* * *

Although the concept of 'non-reasonably-enhanceable sexual attractiveness' has been essential to unpack, the term is unhelpfully long. So, henceforth, I will mostly talk about 'sexual attractiveness' instead. But readers should remember that, in all cases, this is shorthand for 'non-reasonably-enhanceable sexual attractiveness'. Of course, I will provide occasional reminders of this.

4.1.2 How common is attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex?

How common is extra-relationship sex motivated by (a) overall dissatisfaction with one's partner's non-reasonably-enhanceable sexual attractiveness and (b) the desire to have sex with someone more sexually attractive than one's partner? If such extra-relationship sex is rare, anti-monogamists and others who endorse *the negative view* can claim that their perspective remains mostly intact: only in *rare* cases would sexual jealousy be a reasonable response to extra-relationship sex, so only *rarely* would we have moral reasons, at the very least, to restrict such sex.

But *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex* is plausibly quite common. When reading the *Alex and Samuel* case, you may have recalled:

The dual-mating strategy: a female can pair-bond with a relatively lower-ranking male, one who is, therefore, likely to stick around and raise children with her rather than straying. However, she can discreetly engage in extra-pair mating during ovulation with a relatively higher-ranking male. She can then have her relatively lower-ranking male partner unknowingly raise the higher-ranking male's child or children.

Although evolutionary psychologists disagree over whether this mating strategy exists among human females, at least some evidence favours it. First, at least some cheating women report the following: they are otherwise (very) happy in their relationship, love their male partner, and are cheating primarily for sex (Kinsey et al. 1953; Glass & Wright 1985; 1992; Greiling & Buss 2000). Also, women tend to cheat with men who are superior to their primary partner in various respects. For example, the 'other man' tends to be more socially dominant, masculine, and physically strong and has better facial symmetry (Gangestad, Thornhill, & Garver-Apgar 2005; Walker 2018). Indeed, some evidence suggests that many women's mate preferences shift toward higher testosterone men during ovulation (Flowe, Swords, & Rockey 2012; Gildersleeve et al. 2014; Pawlowski & Jasienska 2005; Haselton & Miller 2006; Giebel et al. 2013; Lukaszewski & Roney 2009). Furthermore, women report greater sexual satisfaction and more orgasms with their cheating partner than with their primary partner (see Buss 2016: 117-119). Finally, females in numerous other pair-bonding species have been observed engaging in (something like) the dual mating strategy (Barash & Lipton 2001: 57-86).

But even if the dual-mating strategy specifically is wrong, such findings cohere with the evolutionary logic that females pair-bonded with a relatively low-status male – one they would consequently be less sexually attracted to – would be motivated to engage in extra-pair mating with a higher-status male – one they would consequently find more sexually attractive (§1.3.1).

Of course, evolutionary theory can also explain why *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex* would also be far from rare among men: if their girlfriend/wife is beyond their (most) fertile years – and is thus older and less sexually attractive to them – they would be motivated to engage in extra-pair mating with a younger more fertile female – one that would be more sexually attractive to them. Undoubtedly, many modern men act in such ways (Buss 2016: 295-298).

Given these evolutionary theories and the supporting evidence – and common sense – we should recognise that at least a significant proportion of extra-relationship sex is *attraction-motivated*.

4.1.3 Why does sexual attractiveness matter?

Before presenting my main arguments for why sexual jealousy is often a reasonable response to *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*, I will examine an argument *against* the view that sexual jealousy is a reasonable response to *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*. Some might argue that it is unreasonable for Samuel to be hurt by Alex's dissatisfaction with his non-reasonably-enhanceable sexual attractiveness and desire to have sex with more sexually attractive men. Indeed, they would question whether there is anything problematic about Alex having such motivations. This is because we do not hold such standards for many other attributes. Consider:

Charlie and Jamie: Early in their relationship, they started playing badminton together. However, it immediately became clear that while Charlie is a great player, Jamie is not and never will be. It is somewhat enjoyable for Charlie when they play, but (s)he always wins very easily. So Charlie has never been satisfied with Jamie's 'badminton attractiveness'. Consequently, one day, Charlie informs Jamie of their desire to play badminton with people in their league or higher to enjoy the sport more.

Is it a problem if Charlie has never been satisfied with Jaime's badminton attractiveness and desires to play with better players? It is hard to understand why it would be.

Of course, badminton attractiveness is not the only attribute one can use as a counter-example against my conclusions regarding *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*. Indeed, we could use many other characteristics in the *Charlie and Jaime* case. A non-exhaustive list includes how attractive we find our partner as someone with whom to do the following activities: appreciating modern art; playing video games; enjoying heavy metal music; and discussing history, philosophy, or politics.

Relatedly, most people recognise that we cannot expect to be all things to our partner, nor can we expect our partner to fulfil all our wants and needs. Indeed, most have friendships in addition to their relationship, partly because their friends can meet wants and needs that their partner cannot. But this is not to suggest that it does not matter if our partner is not satisfied with *any* aspect of us. Indeed, someone in a good relationship should be able to list various things they love about their partner (or – to put it in less common but relevant terms – aspects of their partner that they are satisfied with).

So, suppose Jamie is upset about Charlie's dissatisfaction with their badminton attractiveness. In that case, Charlie can hopefully reassure Jamie that they love – and are satisfied with – many

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other aspects of them. Furthermore, Charlie can hopefully identify various activities they prefer doing with Jaime over everyone else.

What is different about sexual attractiveness? Why cannot Alex express their dissatisfaction with Samuel's sexual attractiveness and desire to have sex with people they find more sexually attractive? Why would this be ethically different from Charlie communicating that they have always been dissatisfied with Jaime's badminton attractiveness – or attractiveness regarding most other non-sexual activities – and wish to engage in it with someone better?

At least two reasons can justify the different standards for sexual attractiveness. I will describe each in turn.

4.1.3.1 Reasonably wanting sex to play a special role in the relationship

When a couple forms a relationship, each partner will (implicitly) want certain activities to play a special role in that relationship – though, to be clear, a 'special role' in this context does not necessarily entail an *exclusive* role. Of course, people will vary significantly regarding which activities they desire to have a special role in their relationship. Presumably, widespread examples include talking about their day, going on holiday, discussing personal problems, providing emotional support, and caring for each other "in sickness and in health". Perhaps less common examples include making one's partner laugh and cooking food for them.

If a person wants an activity to play a special role in their relationship, it is reasonable for them to want their partner to think well of them regarding that activity. For example, suppose it has always been clear that it is crucial for Ashley that they make their partner Billie laugh a lot. In that case, it is reasonable for Ashley to want Billie to consider them very funny. And it also makes sense for Ashley to be upset if Billie communicated that they did not find them that funny.

But it could be that Billie sadly does not find Ashley that funny. Billie could have formed and maintained their relationship with Ashley because they were attracted to other aspects of them. Despite this, many might think Billie should not have started a relationship with Ashley. Alternatively, Billie could have told Ashley that they do not enjoy their humour that much: this would have enabled Ashley to make an informed choice about starting the relationship.

However, relationship choices are often complicated, and the perfect relationship and partner will only ever be a fantasy for many people. There could have been sufficient moral reasons for Billie to have gotten into the relationship without declaring they do not find Ashley that funny. And it could be optimal for them to continue the relationship, perhaps because they are happy together and are (soon to be) parents. In this case, it would be better for Billie to keep their feelings about

Ashley's humour private rather than causing Ashley reasonable hurt by informing them that they do not find them that funny and would like a funnier partner.

Of course, most partners want sex to play a special role in their relationship. So, accordingly, it is reasonable for them to care that their partner is satisfied with their sexual attractiveness. Consequently, if their partner engages in *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*, they cause them reasonable sexual jealousy by expressing dissatisfaction with their sexual attractiveness.

Someone who adopts *the negative view* of sexual jealousy may object by arguing that people should not want sex to play a special role in their relationship. However, there are sufficient reasons to desire that sex take on this role, only some of which I will cover here. First, from an evolutionary viewpoint, sex is very much part of romantic love – pair-bonding was selected in our evolution to bring a male and female together to reproduce *via sex* and raise the children together. And romantic attraction very often goes hand-in-hand with sexual attraction. Consequently, it is natural for most couples to want sex to play a special role in their relationship (Fisher 2016). And, as per the principle of default natural ethics, we should adopt scripts that are maximally consistent with people's natures unless they lead to harm or violate clear moral standards (§1.2), which letting sex play a special role in a relationship will not.

There are further reasons, ones that are not directly evolutionary. Indeed, in explaining why sex can take on a significant role in a relationship, Bryan R. Weaver and Fiona Woollard write:

[T]he nature of sex makes it natural to see it as having a certain kind of significance. Sex can be seen as both symbolic of, and partly constitutive of, the love in the relationship...[I]f sex, which involves many other types of intimacy, is shared by those who love each other, it can be an integral part of the intimacy of erotic love. Sex is intensely pleasurable, and intense experiences often forge a bond between those who share them. More importantly, the intense pleasure of sex is a product of the partners' interaction. It is pleasure found in and with the other. Thus, sex is just the sort of thing out of which emotional intimacy can be built (2008: 515-516).

Of course, much more could be said on why it is reasonable to want sex to play a special role in one's relationship (see also McKeever 2014). But the reasons I have provided are sufficient.

4.1.3.2 Insecurity over one's sexual attractiveness

Many people may additionally or alternatively have an insecurity-related reason for caring that their partner is not dissatisfied with their sexual attractiveness and desires to have sex with someone they find more sexually attractive.

Sadly, there is considerable attractiveness inequality. Partly as a consequence, a *lot* of people are insecure about their sexual attractiveness. Indeed, they dislike or hate certain features of their personality or body that they believe make them less sexually attractive, ones which are hard to remove or overcome, if not (near) impossible – recall that I am focusing on *non-reasonably-enhanceable* sexual attractiveness. A non-exhaustive list of examples includes the following: skin imperfections, being overweight, facial asymmetry, small height, lack of femininity, lack of masculinity, lack of social dominance, small breasts, and small penis. Regrettably, such insecurities adversely impact many people's mental health (Eaton & Warren 2019). Furthermore, such 'insecure people' often worry that potential partners will find these features off-putting (Swami, Robinson, & Furnham 2021).

When insecure people acquire a partner, they arguably gain reassurance and validation because they assume their partner is satisfied with their sexual attractiveness. They may also worry less about their personality and/or bodily features they dislike or hate.

So if an insecure person's partner were to engage in *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*, this would undermine that assumption and the reassurance and validation it provides. Also, arguably the last person in the world who they would want to make them feel worse about their insecurities is their partner.

4.1.4 Why sexual attractiveness *often* matters

I have given two reasons why it can make sense for people to be upset if their partner engages in *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*. However, there can be people for whom neither of these factors was ever-present. Some may have never been insecure about their sexual attractiveness nor reasonably wanted sex to play a special role in their relationship. Such people could include many asexual people who form a relationship with a 'sexual person' who they let have extra-relationship sex. They may also include many gay men in sexually open relationships who have no interest in "making love" to their partner and prefer treating sex as something they just do casually with many different men.

Additionally, there can be people for whom one or both factors used to be present, but neither is anymore. That is, they may have once wanted sex to play a special role in their relationship

and/or felt insecure about their sexual attractiveness, but these feelings have now ceased. For example, a person may have lost interest in continuing their sex life and any concern about their sexual attractiveness due to bodily changes resulting from an illness, an accident, ageing, or having children.¹⁸ Consequently, their partner understandably wishes to engage in *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*.¹⁹

Nevertheless, while some or many people will be in such positions, many others will want sex to play a special role in their relationship and/or have insecurities about their sexual attractiveness. Therefore, *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex* can often invoke reasonable sexual jealousy, and we often have moral reasons, at the very least, to restrict it. However, before settling on these conclusions, I will first address a *reductio ad absurdum* objection to my argument and, secondly, explore the issue of whether sexual jealousy is reasonable if your partner is *satisfied* with your sexual attractiveness but still wishes to have sex with someone more sexually attractive.

4.1.5 A *reductio ad absurdum*?

Many people probably have desires to engage in *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*. Still, they do not act on these desires. Instead, they try to satisfy them through:

Attraction-motivated masturbation: masturbation to sexual fantasies and pornography motivated by (a) overall dissatisfaction with one's partner's non-reasonably-enhanceable sexual attractiveness and (b) the desire to have sex with someone more sexually attractive than one's partner.

Potential critics might argue that my reasoning has the following implications. It is often reasonable for people to experience sexual jealousy in response to their partner engaging in *attraction-motivated masturbation*. Accordingly, such masturbation is often at least ethically problematic, and so, at the very least, we often have moral reasons to restrict it.²⁰

These critics could think these implications are absurd on the grounds that *attraction-motivated masturbation* seems common and generally accepted, even by the partners of those who engage

¹⁸ This does not necessarily mean they no longer care about looking as nice as possible, especially for social events. But, if they do, it is not because they consciously wish to attract any sexual partners.

¹⁹ Such situations are also of another kind of extra-relationship sex that I will soon describe – *sex-motivated extra-relationship sex*.

²⁰ For this discussion, I am granting that there are sexual fantasies and pornography that it is morally permissible for a *single* person to masturbate to. Consequently, the question is: would it be ethically acceptable for a person in a relationship to engage in such masturbation if they are motivated by (a) and (b)?

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in it. Moreover, my critics might believe these practices and attitudes are morally acceptable. Accordingly, if my argument leads to the above conclusions, it must be flawed.

This *reductio ad absurdum* objection is interesting, but it ultimately fails. First, we can question whether *attraction-motivated masturbation* is commonly accepted, especially by people's partners. More importantly, it makes sense for such masturbation to be generally *not* accepted, especially by the masturbator's partner. Indeed, suppose Alex were to tell Samuel that they engage in *attraction-motivated masturbation*. In that case, Samuel could reasonably feel sexually jealous, assuming he wants Alex to be satisfied with their sexual attractiveness due to reasonably wanting sex to play a special role in their relationship and/or for insecurity-related reasons: when Alex informs Samuel of their *attraction-motivated masturbation*, Alex reveals they are dissatisfied with Samuel's sexual attractiveness, which Samuel reasonably does not want.

But, of course, most people in Alex's position would arguably not tell their partner that they engage in *attraction-motivated masturbation*. Indeed, such masturbation – like most masturbation – can be and probably most often is done privately. Consequently, such masturbators are not expressing to their partner that they are dissatisfied with their sexual attractiveness and desire sex with people they find more sexually attractive. Thus, they do not make them feel reasonable sexual jealousy. Given this, we *might* think that *discreet attraction-motivated masturbation* is ethically unproblematic; therefore, we have no moral reasons to restrict it.

However, imagine:

Dissatisfied Alex cheats discreetly: Alex cheats on Samuel by engaging in *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*. Alex's cheating is so discreet that the risk of Samuel discovering Alex's infidelity and motivations is less than the risk of Samuel finding out that Alex engages in *attraction-motivated masturbation*. Indeed, Alex ensures no one knows they are cheating on Samuel, partly by not informing their extra-relationship sex partners of Samuel's existence.

If Samuel never discovers Alex's cheating, Samuel will not feel reasonable sexual jealousy. This raises a seemingly uncomfortable question: would *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex via discreet cheating* be ethically unproblematic, and would we, thus, have no moral reasons to restrict it?

However, we could identify numerous moral reasons that (could) make such cheating *more* ethically problematic than *discreet attraction-motivated masturbation*, including the use of deception, promise-breaking, and the risk of passing on an STI to the cheated-on partner. But, of

course, we are still entertaining the view that such masturbation is not at all ethically problematic. To assess this perspective, consider:

Satisfied Skylar cheats discreetly: Skylar is satisfied with Robin's sexual attractiveness but cheats on Robin just as discreetly as Alex cheats on Samuel. However, Skylar's cheating is motivated by the desire for novelty and variety. Indeed, Skylar considers their extra-relationship sex partner less sexually attractive than Robin.

Skylar's cheating is *less* ethically problematic than Alex's because Alex's cheating contains the following often ethically problematic features: it is motivated by dissatisfaction with their partner's sexual attractiveness and desire to have sex with people they consider more sexually attractive.

However, these often ethically problematic features – the motivations – are also present in *discreet attraction-motivated masturbation*. Thus, this kind of masturbation is also often ethically problematic, even if less so than *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex via discreet cheating*, and even if one's partner never discovers it and, thus, never feels reasonably sexually jealous.

But is it a problem for my arguments if they supposedly identify moral reasons against *discreet attraction-motivated masturbation*? I do not believe so. Indeed, it is not ideal if a person is dissatisfied with their partner's sexual attractiveness and desires sex with people they find more sexually attractive. Many people would not like it if their partner felt this way. Also, if a person is dissatisfied with their partner's sexual attractiveness, this could be a red flag concerning the long-term prospects of their relationship. This dissatisfaction could lead to overall sexual dissatisfaction in the relationship, which, as evidenced in Chapter 2, could lead to one or more of the following: adverse effects on their health and other elements of their well-being; relationship issues; cheating; and relationship breakdown.

However, in any case, just because there are often moral reasons against *discreet attraction-motivated masturbation*, this does not mean it is necessarily *often immoral* and should be restricted. Indeed, other more compelling moral reasons can plausibly favour engaging in it. For example, such masturbation may be sufficient for a person to sustain a relationship that, despite their dissatisfaction with their partner's sexual attractiveness, is highly valuable and could form the basis of a happy nuclear family.

In sum: It is not absurd to think that *attraction-motivated masturbation* could reasonably cause one's partner to feel sexually jealous – it can! However, such masturbation would only be harmful

in these ways if one's partner is aware of them. This is why *attraction-motivated masturbation* most often should be and arguably is kept private. Nevertheless, even *discreet attraction-motivated masturbation* is often ethically problematic, but I have shown that this view is also correct, not absurd.

4.1.6 What if one is satisfied with their partner's sexual attractiveness?

I have shown why it is often reasonable to experience sexual jealousy in response to:

Attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex: Extra-relationship sex motivated by (a) overall dissatisfaction with one's partner's non-reasonably-enhanceable sexual attractiveness and (b) the desire to have sex with someone more sexually attractive than one's partner.

However, many might think (b) *alone* is often sufficient to invoke reasonable sexual jealousy and to render the extra-relationship sex at least ethically problematic – the additional presence of (a) would only make the sexual jealousy *more* reasonable and the sex *more* ethically problematic.

To help understand this perspective, consider the following couple:

Jordan and Elliot: Jordan tells Elliot that their sex life is amazing, but the best sex (s)he ever had was with Avery – a past friend-with-benefits – because Avery was more sexually attractive.

I presume many people would think Jordan has wronged Elliot, which supports the view that (b) is sufficient to make extra-relationship sex a cause for reasonable sexual jealousy.

However, many in sexually open relationships understandably do not (seem to) share this intuition (see Gould 1999; Hardy & Easton 2017). If Ashley wants to make Billie laugh a lot in their relationship, it is reasonable for Ashley to want Billie to consider them very funny. However, it would be immature for Ashley to be upset if Billie said they found a famous comedian to be funnier – Ashley cannot reasonably expect Billie to consider them the funniest person ever! Likewise, a partner in a sexually open relationship could reasonably care that their partner is satisfied with their sexual attractiveness. However, they could believe it is unrealistic, even absurd, to think that their partner will never find anyone else more sexually attractive. Consequently, they are not hurt when their partner expresses a desire to have sex with such a person.

I have provided more points *against* the view that motivation (b) is often sufficient to make extra-relationship sex a cause for reasonable sexual jealousy and, thus, to generate moral reasons, at the very least, against it. Nevertheless, I remain unsure about whether we should reject this view. I suspect there may be other factors to consider (e.g. *how much more* sexually attractive one finds the extra-relationship sex partner). So can you feel reasonably sexually jealous over your partner having extra-relationship sex motivated by the desire to have sex with someone they find more sexually attractive than you even when they are satisfied with your sexual attractiveness? I will leave this as an open question.

4.2 Love-risk-free, non-attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex

We have seen that sexual jealousy can often be a reasonable response to one's partner engaging in *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*. But now we should ask, are there *common* cases of the following kind of extra-relationship sex?

Love-risk-free, non-attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex: extra-relationship sex that neither (i) poses a significant threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown) nor (ii) is a case of *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*.

The inclusion of 'common' is crucial. As I similarly explained in §3.2.2, if such cases are rare, we may plausibly argue that sexual jealousy is a reasonable response to extra-relationship sex because there is an *overwhelming tendency* for it to be ethically problematic in at least one of these respects. Relatedly, we might also think the rule of sexual exclusivity is optimal to protect relationships from such sex. At the very least, even if consideration of these matters inclined us towards *the mixed view* rather than *the positive view* of sexual jealousy, we might think this conclusion was hardly significant because it would come with the caveat that only *rarely* is sexual jealousy *not* a reasonable response. Therefore, I need to identify one or more common kinds of love-risk-free, non-attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex. At least three kinds exist, which I will now describe.

4.2.1 Bisexuality-motivated extra-relationship sex

Bisexuality-motivated extra-relationship sex: extra-relationship sex motivated by bisexual desires

There are many relationships where at least one partner strongly desires sex with men and women. Research suggests that in most such relationships, it is just the woman who is bisexual since bisexuality appears to be much more common among women than men (Bailey et al. 2016;

LeVay 2017: 8-9; Balthazart 2012: 9-10). Therefore, I will focus on such cases to illustrate, but my points will equally apply to other such partnerships.

Many men are comfortable with their girlfriend/wife having casual sex with women, which makes evolutionary sense: their female partner cannot become pregnant by having sex with another female, so there is no threat to paternal certainty (§1.3.1.4). But it can also be *reasonable* for men to feel this way. We can easily imagine a bisexual woman who can truthfully assure her boyfriend/husband of the following: she is emotionally fulfilled by their relationship; she has no desire to have an additional partner, and, perhaps, she has never desired to have a same-sex relationship; she is very attracted to him; and she finds sex with him to be very satisfying. However, given his male body, he cannot fulfil her strong same-sex desires. Consequently, he can reasonably perceive her desires for and engagement in sex with women to not reflect poorly on his sexual attractiveness.²¹

4.2.2 Sex-motivated extra-relationship sex

Sex-motivated extra-relationship sex: extra-relationship sex motivated by the desire of one partner to continue being sexually active when the other partner has temporarily or permanently lost interest in sex

If Robbie no longer desires sex, but their partner Cleo does, Robbie could not necessarily reasonably feel sexual jealousy on the basis that Cleo is dissatisfied with Robbie's sexual attractiveness and wishes to have sex with someone they find more sexually attractive. Indeed, it could be that Robbie's loss of interest in sex saddens Cleo because Cleo is very much attracted to Robbie and wants to continue their satisfying sex life together (monogamously). Plus, if Robbie no longer desires sex, Robbie arguably has no reason to be concerned about how Cleo rates their sexual attractiveness (§4.1.4).

Of course, Robbie may reasonably fear that Cleo could develop feelings for a "casual" extra-relationship sex partner since Cleo is the kind of person who cannot keep sex casual. But often, people in Cleo's position wish to and can engage in casual extra-relationship that poses no significant risk of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown). Indeed, it is far from rare for people to be in a sexless relationship/marriage that they do not wish to end since they love their partner, and such people often sustain their relationship/marriage via sexual infidelity (Berkowitz & Yager-Berkowitz 2008), which they may mostly or only do with sex

²¹ Scruton (1986: 166) expresses similar observations.

workers. Indeed, it is very common for public sex workers to report that many of their clients are men in sexless but otherwise happy or, at least, worthwhile marriages (e.g. Grant 2014; X 2015).

4.2.3 Monotony/novelty/variety-motivated extra-relationship sex

*Monotony/novelty/variety-motivated extra-relationship sex: extra-relationship sex motivated by the desire to avoid monotony and/or enjoy novelty and variety*²²

Many people desire extra-relationship sex for these reasons, *regardless of how otherwise happy they are in their relationship and how highly they rate their partner's sexual attractiveness*. The mainstream view in evolutionary psychology provides a compelling explanation for why arguably most men would: being promiscuous increases their reproductive success even when happily pair-bonded with a high-quality mate, while successful monogamy would be maladaptive; consequently, evolution has built them to desire novelty and variety in their sexual partners and to lose interest in repeatedly having sex with the same woman (see §1.3.1.3).

Eric Anderson's (2012: 107-111) research on male infidelity coheres with this evolutionary perspective. Most of the young heterosexual men he interviewed about their experiences of monogamy had either cheated or were tempted to do so. Nevertheless, they were very sexually and romantically attracted to their girlfriends. Indeed, they (typically) reported high sexual satisfaction in the early months of their relationship. The problem was simply that, over time, they habituated to sex with their girlfriend and their desires for sex with other women grew stronger. They did not blame this situation on their girlfriend.

Now imagine the girlfriend of such a man discovered that he had cheated on her purely for sex. She would have one or more good reasons to feel hurt: he broke his (implicit) promise of monogamy, he may have lied to and deceived her, and so on. However, she could not reasonably feel hurt regarding her sexual attractiveness. All the theories and evidence strongly suggest that no woman in the world would prevent such men from experiencing long-term monogamy in these ways.

From an evolutionary perspective, it is harder to answer the following question: why would a woman who highly rates her male partner and relationship (strongly) desire casual sex with other men? She has ticked the three key boxes: good genes, good partner, and a good father (see §1.3.1). First, I should emphasise that it very much appears that women in this situation are

²² I group these reasons because they very often coincide.

indeed far less likely to cheat or even desire additional partners (§2.4; Buss 2019: 175-179). A similar pattern is found in other pair-bonding species (Barash & Lipton 2001: 57-86).

Nevertheless, we have seen a few possible (evolutionary) explanations for why some or many women might desire extra-relationship sex despite having a happy relationship with a man she considers highly sexually attractive (§1.3.1.3). First, as per the *paternity confusion* hypothesis, they might be (partially) geared towards pursuing a short-term mating strategy: having sex with multiple males and confusing them about paternity, but with the benefit of gaining resources from each. Alternatively, these desires could be explained by the *different genes* hypothesis: they could be desiring a variety of men so that they can have children with a range of genetic advantages – of course, they would not be consciously planning this. In addition, many women may simply habituate to having sex repeatedly with the same person over many years (§2.1). And, of course, there may be other reasons that the science so far has not uncovered.

I suggest we view the desire for a nonmonogamous sex life to avoid monotony and/or enjoy novelty and variety as comparable to the (near) universal wish to have friends other than one's romantic partner. Few people are happy only to be friends with their romantic partner, even if they are the best friend they have ever had. It would most likely become boring. Instead, people desire various friends and often enjoy making new friends. Fortunately, most people do not believe it is reasonable to be upset in response to their partner's desire to have other friendships. But sadly, many people see their partner's desire for additional sexual partners in this way, but often that is mistaken.²³

4.3 My conclusions so far: further support for the mixed view

I have argued that sexual jealousy is often a reasonable response to *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*. Consequently, we often do not have moral reasons to try to manage or overcome sexual jealousy in response to *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*. Instead, there are often moral reasons, at the very least, to restrict such sex. Consequently, we should reject *the negative view* of the reasonableness of sexual jealousy.

However, my arguments do not lead us to *the positive view* for two reasons. First, there can be cases when sexual jealousy in response to *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex* is *unreasonable* (§4.1.4). Secondly, there are at least three common kinds of *love-risk-free, non-attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*:

²³ Chalmers (2019: 238) makes similar points.

1. *Bisexuality-motivated extra-relationship sex*
2. *Sex-motivated extra-relationship sex*
3. *Monotony/novelty/variety-motivated extra-relationship sex*

And the reasons why sexual jealousy is often reasonable in response to *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex* do not apply to these kinds. And there are no other (obvious) reasons why sexual jealousy is necessarily a reasonable response to them.²⁴ So, ultimately, my arguments support *the mixed view*.

Next, I will explore the potentially problematic implications of my arguments for the ethics of the cuckoldry/hotwife lifestyle and (supposedly) sexist double standards regarding male versus female engagement in extra-relationship sex.

4.4 The ethics of the cuckoldry/hotwife lifestyle

I explained earlier that, for at least some people, they might *not* have reasons to feel sexually jealous in response to their partner engaging in *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*. This could be because they are neither insecure nor wish sex to play a special role in their relationship.

However, interestingly, at least some people are okay and not jealous about their partner engaging in *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex* even though the following is or very much seems to be the case: first, they want sex to play a special role in their relationship; and second, they are insecure about their sexual attractiveness or, at least, have (very) good reason to be. Furthermore, many such people happily encourage their partner to engage in *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*, and they derive (sexual) pleasure from knowing about, hearing about, and/or watching it. Indeed, such people often say they experience the opposite of jealousy – compersion.

The prominent examples are men who practice the:

Cuckolding/hotwife lifestyle: typically, the man is sexually and romantically exclusive to his girlfriend/wife, but – with his permission and full support – she enjoys sex and perhaps also romantic relations with other men.

²⁴ I specify ‘necessarily’ here because there may be cases when sexual jealousy in response to *love-risk-free, non-attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex* is reasonable for reasons I have not discussed here. For example, in Part IV, I discuss Bryan R. Weaver & Fiona Woollard’s (2008) and Natasha McKeever’s (2014) justifications for monogamy, which, if successful, would explain why it is reasonable for some/many people to feel hurt in response to their partner having such sex. Although I highlight significant problems with these justifications, I do not reject them outright.

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The man often watches her do so or, at least, hears about her experiences. However, if the boyfriend/husband is bisexual – which is the case in at least some such couples – the pair may sometimes have group sex with one or more other men. More notably, both the man and woman generally want the other men to be superior to the boyfriend/husband in certain respects, including being more masculine, more socially dominant, more physically attractive, of greater physical strength, and with a bigger penis. Indeed, in the cuckoldry/hotwife lifestyle, the other man is often called a ‘bull’. Also – arguably due to possessing these traits – these other men are often more capable of stimulating orgasms (especially vaginal) in the girlfriend/wife (on all these points, see Ley 2011).

Men who desire to be a cuckold are perplexing from an evolutionary perspective. We would expect such men to experience sexual jealousy instinctively in response to their girlfriend/wife having sex with other men (§1.3.1.4). Additionally, my arguments imply that it is reasonable for them to experience sexual jealousy in response to the fact that their girlfriend/wife is communicating dissatisfaction with their sexual attractiveness and making it clear that the other man or men are superior to him in this respect.

To at least some extent, my conclusions cohere with historically common attitudes towards men who have been “cuckolded”, whether through their girlfriend/wife’s infidelity or with their consent. In his authoritative book on *Insatiable wives: Women who stray and the men who love them*, clinical psychologist David J. Ley (2011: 1-14) discusses the long history of stigma for such men:

Males through history who are cuckolded have experienced social humiliation, the derision, and, ostensibly, the shame that comes with that social experience. The implicit social assumption is that a “real man” is expected to be able to satisfy his wife such that she has no need of other men, or that he can exert such fear and control over her, that she would never allow or pursue sex outside their marriage (p. 6).

Even today, men who allow their girlfriend/wife to have sex with other men are often called ‘cucks’ as an insult and stigmatised in other ways (Ley 2011).

However, various defenders and advocates of open relationships and monogamy-challenging philosophers and scientists do not condemn “cucks” or deem their compersion inappropriate. Some even praise such “cucks” and their girlfriends/wives and/or give practical advice on practising the cuckolding/hotwife lifestyle (Martin 2018: 256; Sex Science with Dr. Zhana 2017). Also, a plausible interpretation of Ronald de Sousa’s (2017) and Luke Brunning’s (2020) arguments is the ability of such men to experience compersion in response to their girlfriend/wife’s relations

with other men is appropriate and even preferable to them experiencing sexual jealousy – though these philosophers would presumably not endorse the restriction on these men from having sex and love with other people.

Although Ley also adopts a positive view of the cuckoldry/hotwife lifestyle, he can empathise with those baffled by it. He initially thought these relationships could not possibly be healthy.

However, his (2011) research led him to believe the cuckoldry/hotwife lifestyle could be a very positive choice for some people. Indeed, he found many such couples who had healthy, intimate, stable, and happy long-term marriages with impressive openness and communication. Also, if they were to be monogamously faithful instead, their relationship would very likely fail.

Furthermore, many in this lifestyle were happy, healthy, successful individuals in their life outside and before the relationship.

If these findings are correct – and I believe they are – they challenge my arguments. My reasoning concludes that (most of) those who practice the cuckolding/hotwife lifestyle are doing something at least ethically problematic. Yet, many such couples seem to have happy, successful, long-term relationships. All parties happily consent. And there is no apparent reason to think they are harming anyone else. Usually, when such conditions are met, many – particularly those of a liberal mindset – would deem the practice ethically acceptable.

When these conditions are met for couples in the cuckoldry/hotwife lifestyle – which seems standard – people should not subject them to stigma, shame, bullying, hatred, public humiliation, social or legal punishment, or any other such negativity. However, we should question the cuckolds on why they do not feel hurt by their hotwife's behaviour. And we should ask the hotwives why they do not believe they are doing something that their boyfriend/husband should be upset by. I have consumed numerous resources searching for good answers to these questions, but I cannot find any.

Therefore, I stand by the following further implications of my arguments. First, it is generally reasonable for the cuckolds to feel sexually jealous in response to their girlfriend/wife's extra-relationship sex because it typically constitutes *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*. Second, when the extra-relationship sex in such relationships is ethically problematic in this manner, there are moral reasons, at the very least, for restricting it. However, there are also moral reasons favouring cuckolds and hotwives forming and maintaining relationships of this style, including the following. First, many would likely be unhappy if they did not have such a relationship. Also, happy, successful, long-term relationships are valuable, and it seems that many in the cuckoldry/hotwife lifestyle enjoy such a relationship – which is more than can be said for many monogamous couples. And it very much appears that at least the hotwives experience a

great deal of sexual pleasure, not to mention the benefits to their health. So, although I believe there are moral reasons against (most) cuckolding/hotwife lifestyle relationships, I will leave the question of whether these relationships are outright immoral open.²⁵

On another note, I want to clarify that the implications of my earlier arguments for the cuckoldry/hotwife lifestyle also extend to other sexually open relationships that share the relevant morally problematic features. Relatedly, I would find it just as ethically questionable if the sexes were reversed, that is, if we had (something like) the *hot husband lifestyle*.

4.5 Sexist double standards?

Although, historically, “cuckolded” men have faced significant shame, social humiliation, and other stigma, women were (generally) not subjected to the same treatment if their husbands had extra-marital sex (Coontz 2005). And while male cheating is (far) less tolerated today than it used to be in even recent history, it is still often judged less harshly than female infidelity, which has (nearly) always been firmly morally condemned (Haavio-Mannila & Kontula 2003).

Many consider these differing attitudes towards male and female engagement in extra-relationship sex as condemnable sexist double standards. Of course, I oppose sexist double standards. However, many may see my arguments as subtly defending these (supposed) sexist double standards.

A sexist double standard occurs when men and women are judged differently for (effectively) the same behaviour. The optional ‘effectively’ clause highlights that the behaviours may differ slightly, but not in any morally relevant way that justifies a different judgement (e.g. a woman pays a woman £20 for a lapdance whereas a man pays £30 for a 5-minute longer lapdance from the same woman). So the difference in moral assessment is determined solely by the sex of the person or people performing the behaviour, which most agree is not a morally relevant difference.

I have not proposed different standards for men and women when they engage in (effectively) the same behaviour. Instead, I have argued for different standards for different kinds of extra-relationship sex. Furthermore, men and women can and most likely do engage in each kind.

²⁵ I have included the optional ‘most’ clauses in some statements in this section because it is possible that not all cuckoldry/hotwife lifestyle relationships involve *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*. In some cases, it could be that all the extra-relationship sex counts as one or both of the following: *sex-motivated extra-relationship sex* and *monotony/novelty/variety-motivated extra-relationship sex*.

There is, however, a more critical version of this objection. One may contend my arguments suggest that:

- A. It is *more common* for women than men to (want to) engage in extra-relationship sex that is ethically problematic.

And perhaps also that:

- B. There is something ethically problematic about *most* instances of women's (desired) extra-relationship sex but not *most* men's.

This is because the science I have discussed suggests that women are more likely to (want to) engage in *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex* and are less likely to (want to) engage in *sex-motivated extra-relationship sex* and *monotony/novelty/variety-motivated extra-relationship sex* (see Chapter 1 and Chapter 2). However, there is much evidence suggesting that more women (want to) engage in *bisexuality-motivated extra-relationship sex* (Tasker 2023). Moreover, the careful reader will notice I have not committed to such empirical claims.

Still, the data may (one day) clearly show that *more* and perhaps *most* instances of women's (desired) extra-relationship sex are cases of *attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex*.

Furthermore, the data may (one day) clearly show that *more* and perhaps *most* instances of women's (desired) extra-relationship sex are of another kind that is (most) often ethically problematic – that which presents a significant risk of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown) (§1.3.1; §2.4).

I am prepared to bite the bullet and acknowledge that, in these cases, my arguments would give considerable support to these *politically* incorrect conclusions – A and B. However, only the empirical evidence combined with the arguments *in this part of the thesis* provides this support. Furthermore, I have not covered the totality of ethical considerations regarding extra-relationship sex. There may be other ways – arguably more apparent and less philosophically-interesting ways – in which extra-relationship sex can be at least ethically problematic, if not clearly immoral, ones that men may (desire to) engage in more often. For example, probably far more men than women would not inform an extra-relationship sex partner that they are in a relationship – open or monogamous – and would feign interest in a loving relationship with them just to get sex: this is because most women are probably unwilling to have pure casual sex with no potential for a romantic relationship (Li & Kenrick 2006; Buss & Schmitt 1993). And, of course, there are horrendously immoral sexual behaviours for which the (vast) majority of perpetrators are men, including sexual harassment and assault (Buss 2021). So even though my arguments in this chapter might give considerable support to claims A and B, for the reasons just mentioned – and

many others – they do not lead us to some general view like “women are worse than men when it comes to sex and relationships”. Indeed, the opposite view is probably correct (Buss 2021).

So regarding the historically persistent differing attitudes towards men’s versus women’s extra-relationship sex I summarised earlier, I believe they *somewhat* accurately respond to ethically relevant differences between different instances of extra-relationship sex. But they are mistaken in attributing *all* the unethical or more ethically problematic instances to women while attributing *all* the ethically permissible or less ethically problematic instances to men.

4.6 “What about jealousy?” – A summary of Part II

I have described three perspectives on the reasonableness of sexual jealousy over extra-relationship sex and their implications for the ethics of monogamy and sexually open relationships – the positive, negative, and mixed views. If *the positive view* is correct, this will significantly support monogamism. Meanwhile, if *the negative view* is correct, this will support the case of various monogamy challengers (§3.1.2). But against both views, I have demonstrated that sexual jealousy over one’s partner engaging in extra-relationship sex is *often but not always* a reasonable response to the threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown) and/or attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex. Thus, I have argued for:

The mixed view: Sexual jealousy over one’s partner engaging in extra-relationship sex can be reasonable or unreasonable, depending on the circumstances. Consequently, at the very least, we have (prima facie) moral reasons to (i) not try to manage or overcome *reasonable* sexual jealousy but rather (ii) restrict the extra-relationship sex that triggers it. Also, again at the very least, we have (prima facie) moral reasons to (i) try to manage and, ideally, overcome *unreasonable* sexual jealousy and (ii) try not to restrict the extra-relationship sex that triggers it but, instead, have more openness to such sex.

Remember, however, that (prima facie) moral reasons are not *decisive* reasons. So I am not arguing for the bolder claim that people are always morally obligated to manage their unreasonable sexual jealousy and allow their partner to engage in the extra-relationship sex that triggers it. Indeed, Chapter 10 argues that some or even many couples can justify being monogamous by appealing to *the difficulty of managing jealousy*, regardless of how reasonable or unreasonable it is.

PART III: MONOGAMY UNDER FIRE

Parts I and II primarily argued against monogamism and monogamous idealism and helped build the case for the following proposals. We need to embrace, in a non-hierarchical manner, a plurality of sex and love lifestyles, including many different forms of sexually open relationships and ways of living the single life, as well as monogamy. We should also have widespread awareness of the benefits, risks, and costs of all these lifestyles and recognise that no one size fits all. Consequently, individuals and partners can make informed choices with a range of options about how they wish to live.

Of course, I am far from the first person to question our common relationship values: monogamy has been challenged by numerous philosophers, scientists, feminists, and other critics. Unsurprisingly, I agree with many of these other monogamy challengers on various points. However, most adopt approaches and endorse conclusions contradicting my arguments and proposals. I will discuss many examples throughout most of the remainder of this thesis.

Some of these monogamy challengers clarify that they are not challenging the *state* of monogamy but rather the *requirement* of monogamy (e.g. McKeever 2014: 9; Chalmers 2019: 241; Moen & Sørliie 2022: 345). To understand this, imagine a couple who only have sexual and romantic relations with each other due to the lack of desire and/or opportunity for such relations with others. Imagine also that these monogamy challengers think there is no justification for monogamy in the case of this couple. For such a couple, these monogamy challengers would not object to the monogamous *state* of their relationship. They would only be critical if the partners would restrict each other from enjoying extra-relationship sex and love if the desire and opportunity for such relations became present. While other monogamy challengers do not make this explicit, it is reasonable to assume the same is true of them.

As just mentioned, I will engage with the work of numerous monogamy challenges in this thesis. This part commences this engagement by examining challenges to monogamy that either (seemingly) suggest that *all* relationships should be (sexually) open or explicitly make a case for:

Anti-monogamism: monogamy is immoral.

Chapter 5 focuses on such challenges that have been around for a relatively long time, and Chapter 6 examines the works of contemporary monogamy challengers who argue explicitly for anti-monogamism.

PART III: MONOGAMY UNDER FIRE

Although I identify various issues with these challenges in these chapters, my critique of them continues in Chapter 10 when I present and defend *the difficulty of managing jealousy justification* and explain why it refutes most challenges to monogamy that I discuss in this thesis. Since I will mention this justification while examining the various challenges to monogamy, I will state it here before proceeding:

The difficulty of managing jealousy justification: To (partly) explain why they desire monogamy rather than an open relationship, some or many people can appeal to the difficulty of managing jealousy. They wish to avoid undesirable, intense, and painful feelings of jealousy in their relationship(s): a relationship consumed with such feelings will be highly unpleasant and will likely end. Such people can reason that to have a happy, successful, open relationship, they and their partner(s) will have to overcome or, at least, manage their jealousy to a sufficient extent. Indeed, the relationship will be unhappy if at least one partner is regularly experiencing undesirable, intense, and painful feelings of jealousy because the other has additional sexual and/or romantic relationships. However, they believe it is (very) difficult, perhaps too difficult, to overcome or manage their jealousy to this extent. So, instead, they desire monogamy because they think it is more effective for avoiding such jealousy. Plus, they can avoid the difficulties of overcoming or, at least, managing jealousy.

Chapter 5 Long-standing challenges

§5.1 examines Bertrand Russell's (1929) and John McMurtry's (1972) critiques of monogamy. §5.2 discusses the challenge that monogamy and jealousy inherently and unjustifiably involve partners treating each other as though they are each a possession. And §5.3 concludes the chapter.

5.1 Philosophers on the harmful unnaturalness of monogamy

Russell and McMurtry believed there is much unhappiness, cheating, and divorce in monogamous marriages. They thought a significant cause is the tension between long-term sexual exclusivity and the nonmonogamous elements of human nature. And they appealed to this harmful unnaturalness of monogamy to argue for nonmonogamous alternatives.

Their evidence for these claims is lacking. Still, Part I supports their case. However, I only claimed that *many* people are likely to experience the harmful unnaturalness of monogamy, though to varying degrees. In contrast, at least McMurtry thinks the harms of monogamy are severe and widespread. Nevertheless, we should not outright dismiss their critiques. Their points about the harms of monogamy are still worth consideration, even if we think that, at the very least, they just apply to a significant minority to varying degrees.

However, a significant issue in McMurtry's case is that he is unclear on what alternative(s) he advocates. But I will assume he primarily advocates sexually open relationships and marriages because of his focus on the harms of long-term sexual exclusivity. In contrast, Russell clearly proposes sexual openness as one prominent solution for marital unhappiness.

* * *

By identifying the harms of monogamy, McMurtry, Russell, and indeed, I show that more work needs to be done to justify monogamy's restrictions. Constraints on our behaviour (typically) require justification, especially when costly. The COVID-19 lockdown restrictions are good examples. Still, despite this and other (implicit) points of agreement, I have significant disagreements with Russell and McMurtry, the main two of which I will discuss here.

First, I think successful monogamy can be a rational choice for *at least some* couples, even when one or both partners finds the restrictions costly. The constraints on extra-relationship sex, although harmful, can be reasonable because they protect the partners from worse harms. These include a relationship consumed with sexual jealousy that consequently ends, causing the partners (and their children) to suffer (see Chapter 10 and Chapter 11). However, it appears

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McMurty would not think a total restriction on extra-relationship sex is reasonable if one or both partners find it costly. So, if my later arguments for these conclusions are correct, this is an issue for his case.

However, I should note that whether successful monogamy is justified in such cases depends upon *how* costly one or both partners finds it. For example, suppose long-term sexual fidelity would make at least one partner feel terribly frustrated, angry, resentful, oppressed, and generally miserable, leading to an unhappy relationship – in the ways I (Part I) and McMurtry (pp. 593-594) describe. In that case, I evidently do not think long-term, successful monogamy is the right choice for such a couple. A nonmonogamous alternative would be better, including singledom. But it is very plausible that not all people who find monogamy costly find it costly to such a degree. Indeed, many people may experience monogamy as somewhat problematic, perhaps because they mainly suffer via stealth (§2.2). Still, they can achieve the monogamous ideal. Plus, all the alternatives (i.e. cheating, being single, and having an open relationship) would undoubtedly be worse. As I expand upon in Chapter 10 and Chapter 11, these are the kinds of people for whom I think pursuing the monogamous ideal is rational, even if costly. Meanwhile, McMurtry seems to believe that such people should not be successfully monogamous (or that such people do not exist because everyone experiences monogamy as severely harmful).

Unlike McMurtry, Russell at least recognises and responds to a jealousy-related objection to sexually open marriages (p. 143). He thinks that we generally do not recognise the badness of jealousy. Consequently, those who stray from monogamy are condemned rather than those who demand it because of their jealousy (p. 316). Nevertheless, Russell understood the instinctive nature of jealousy and acknowledged the difficulty of managing it (p. 143; p. 239). However, he implicitly suggests that if we recognise jealousy's badness, we can control it to the extent required for a happy, successful, (lifelong) sexually open marriage. Unfortunately, Russell does not present any evidence for this claim nor provide practical guidance on how jealousy can be managed to this degree. He only provides claims to emphasise the moral superiority of controlling jealousy rather than our nonmonogamous instincts (p. 239).

Of course, we would not expect Russell to have provided a practical guidebook on consensual nonmonogamy. Nevertheless, simply claiming that we can control jealousy and that it is good to do so is not enough to make a case for sexual openness as a solution to infidelity and unhappiness in marriages. There must be at least some evidence that such relationships can work and information on how – though arguably, we need a lot.

I discuss such evidence and information in §11.2. Still, I argue that we only have reason to believe that some or even many couples can manage jealousy to the extent that they can have a happy,

successful, lifelong, sexually open relationship. This, of course, is not enough to help Russell's case since, at the very least, he needs to show that where there is unhappiness or infidelity in a marriage, those couples can control their jealousy enough to make a sexually open marriage work. He may even need to demonstrate that these points apply to *all* couples because, as Carrie Jenkins has discussed, it is plausible to interpret him as arguing that open marriages should be "the new norm for everyone" (2017: 60). If this interpretation is correct, Russell's case would be undermined if the difficulty of managing jealousy justification is successful.

Another significant disagreement I have with Russell and McMurtry also concerns jealousy. It is plausible to interpret them as endorsing:

The negative view: Sexual jealousy over one's partner engaging in extra-relationship sex is *always unreasonable*. Consequently, at the very least, we have (prima facie) moral reasons to (i) try to manage and, ideally, overcome sexual jealousy and (ii) try not to restrict extra-relationship sex but, instead, aim for more sexual openness in our relationships.

But, as I argued in Part II, such sexual jealousy can be reasonable in many – but not all – circumstances, including when the extra-relationship sex poses a significant threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown) and/or when it is attraction-motivated; and when sexual jealousy is reasonable, we have (prima facie) moral reasons to (i) not try to manage or overcome it but rather (ii) restrict the extra-relationship sex that triggers it. So if my arguments for these conclusions – *the mixed view* – are correct, this is another problem for Russell and McMurtry.

So, like me, Russell and McMurtry are concerned about the common problems in long-term monogamous relationships that result from the tension between long-term sexual exclusivity and the nonmonogamous elements of many people's natures. And, like me, they appeal to this harmful unnaturalness of monogamy to argue for nonmonogamous alternatives. However, I have identified critical issues in their works. In short, Russell and McMurtry go too far: they overstate the prevalence and severity of the harms of monogamy; they do not believe monogamy can be a justified choice to prevent worse harms; and they suggest all (sexual) jealousy is unreasonable and should be managed. But, of course, as mentioned, I will reinforce the conclusion that their

appeal to the harmful unnaturalness of monogamy to advocate nonmonogamous alternatives fails when I defend the difficulty of managing jealousy justification in Chapter 10.²⁶

5.2 The possessiveness of jealousy and monogamy

Jealousy always has its source in something almost as ugly as itself; namely, in the attitude of possessiveness towards another person. A man is likely to look upon his wife as *his* in the sense of a personal possession, and with this starting point he feels quite justified in imposing rules and restrictions just as he would upon any other thing to which he claims ownership. Thus, the marriage relationship, which is supposed to inspire the most exalted love and friendship, becomes instead debased, reducing a partner to a mere chattel, a *thing*, or worse than this, a thing *owned*. There is no doubt, however, that this conception of conventional marriage is generally thought to be perfectly natural and acceptable.

– Richard Taylor (1982: 143)

The rules and restrictions that are the main target of Taylor's critique are those of monogamy. He believes that monogamy and the jealousy that motivates it both inherently and unjustifiably involve partners treating each other as though they are each a possession, someone that the other has ownership rights over. Indeed, it is as though they treat each other as *things* rather than *people*.

Taylor is not alone in these thoughts. Various philosophers, scientists, and feminists have expressed such views or, at least, have questioned whether monogamy and jealousy are morally problematic for these reasons (e.g. Steinbock 1986: 13; Dawkins 2007; Ryan & Jethá 2011: 141-148; Robinson 1997: 144). Still, the most forceful presentation of such a case against monogamy and jealousy I have encountered is Taylor's (1982: 143-146). He thinks it is clear that there can be no "rights of possession" between the sexes – "No human being can be owned" (p. 144). Indeed, he argues that the possessiveness of jealousy conflicts with "the most basic requirement of ethics...that a person be treated, always and by everyone, as a person and not as an object" (p. 144-145). Supporting this claim, he explains:

A mere *object* is without mind or will, and can therefore be dealt with as we please – unless, of course, it is something owned by someone else. In this case the manner in which we treat it bears on its owner's mind and will, that is, upon the interests of

²⁶ For further criticisms of McMurtry, see Piper (2016a).

another person. But considering a thing apart from its relationship to persons, it is immune to injury, and has neither rights nor interests that can be violated. A person, on the other hand, has both mind and will. He has thoughts, feelings, purposes, aspirations, and interests. This gives an individual moral significance, and it matters overwhelmingly how he is treated. Indeed, his most basic interest is in the very treatment he receives from others, for his pride, self-esteem, and everything that gives him worth depends on it. Since, then, a person, unlike a thing, is possessed of both mind and will, the most fundamental injury to him is to treat him as though he had neither. Such treatment consists precisely in substituting your *own* mind and will for his, which is exactly what happens when anyone asserts any right of possession whatever over another person. Thus, if it is a wife's wish to do something – for instance, to paint, to write, to travel, to earn an income, to have times and places of absolute privacy, or to enjoy the company of whomever she chooses – and her husband vetoes or annuls this desire, then he quite clearly is substituting his mind and will for hers, and is treating her as though she had neither. He treats her, in short, as an object (p. 145).

Not only does Taylor think jealousy involves treating a person as an object, but he also believes it does not cohere with the love for “*each other*” that is a “fundamental ethical requirement” for marital partners (p. 146). He argues that when we think we love an *object* (e.g. a house, a watch, a car), we do not really love *it* for its own sake. Instead, we love it because it enhances us – it makes us feel better. Thus, we love it for our own sake – “it is an expression of self-love” (p. 146). Therefore, if we love our partner in a possessive manner as though they were an object, we do not love them, but instead, we love ourselves.

5.2.1 The anti-possessiveness argument

These challenges to monogamy and jealousy are intriguing and somewhat plausible. Even how people commonly refer to their partner and talk about their relationship reflects an attitude of possessiveness – consider phrases like “to have and to hold”, “I’m (all) yours”, “I want you all to myself”, and “I’m not sharing you!” Also, people in monogamous relationships can feel like their partner acts possessively. Indeed, for many people, trying to be sexually exclusive can incur high costs to their well-being, leading to harbouring negative attitudes towards their partner. They can even feel like their partner controls and limits them in life (see Chapter 2).

There seem to be no other relationships between adults in which such possessiveness receives general societal approval. Consider the following:

Clingy friend: You have a friend who gets jealous over you spending time with other friends. They want to be your one and only friend. Indeed, this friend expects you to ask for their permission to spend time with other friends, which they are unlikely ever to grant. They even want to know about everything that is going on in your life. When you do spend time with other friends without their permission, your friend becomes very upset and angry and tries to punish you.²⁷

Few people desire to have such a friend. Indeed, people would say the clingy friend is acting possessively in a morally problematic way. Furthermore, they would think this friend should work on not being so jealous and possessive. However, we often do not hold such attitudes towards romantic partners when they behave like the clingy friend.

So what is going on here? Are people inconsistent when they criticise the *clingy friend* – and, indeed, condemn other possessive relationships (e.g. slaveholder and slave, and women being treated as their father’s or husband’s property) – but accept jealousy and monogamy within romantic relationships? Indeed, should we resist jealousy and reject monogamy because they both inherently and unjustifiably involve the possessive treatment of persons?

A clear, formalised, and simple presentation of this case against monogamy will help answer such questions. What we can call *the anti-possessiveness argument* can be stated in various ways, but I will present it as follows:

- (1) It is immoral to treat a person as though they are a possession, someone that another person has ownership rights over
- (2) A monogamous relationship inherently involves partners treating each other as though they are each a possession, someone over which the other has ownership rights

Therefore,

- (3) Monogamy is immoral

I will call those who forward (something like) this argument ‘anti-possessivists’.

Taylor provides good reasons for accepting (1) and (2), and there are probably other ways to argue for (something like) (1) and other reasons – in addition to those I provided – to support (2). So (3) seemingly follows.

²⁷ Others have presented similar cases (e.g. Chalmers 2019; Emens 2004: 289)

There are several ways to object to premises (1) and (2) and respond to the argument in general. But I only need to explain the following two: showing the argument has absurd implications and demonstrating that there are alternative non-possessive-based motivations for jealousy and monogamy.²⁸

5.2.2 Reductio ad absurdum

For the sake of argument, we could accept (2) – that ‘a monogamous relationship inherently involves partners treating each other as though they are a possession, someone over which the other has ownership rights’ – because of the restrictions partners place on each other’s sex and love life. However, there are at least some restrictions in most *open* relationships on when, where, how often, and with whom the partners can engage in sexual and romantic relations with others, partly because such partners find that, without such rules, they could not have a happy, successful, long-term/lifelong relationship. For example, many swingers only have casual sex with other couples together. Also, some relationships are sexually open because one partner is only allowed to see sex workers. And even in polyamorous arrangements, there are often rules. Indeed, two people may be primary partners, but they allow each other to have a ‘date night’ with another partner a couple of times or so a month. Furthermore, practical guidebooks on consensual nonmonogamy often emphasise the importance of negotiating rules and boundaries and the ability to ‘veto’ certain potential extra-relationship partners (e.g. Taormino 2008; Anapol 2010; Rickert & Veaux 2014; Hardy & Easton 2017). Consequently, we could also claim that these open relationship styles inherently involve partners treating each other as though they are a possession, someone over which the other has ownership rights.

If we also accept (1) – that ‘it is immoral to treat a person as though they are a possession, someone that another person has ownership rights over’ – we find a severe problem with *the anti-possessiveness argument*. We can run it many times over, keeping (1) the same but changing the relationship style stated in (2) and (3) to most forms of consensual nonmonogamy. For example:

- (1) It is immoral to treat a person as though they are a possession, someone that another person has ownership rights over

²⁸ Other ways of objecting to the anti-possessiveness argument include the following: arguing against the inherent immorality of treating people possessively; and highlighting that many/most people who make such an argument cannot live up to the standard of treating their partner non-possessively, which, as I demonstrate in §5.2.2, entails having an open relationship with very few restrictions on when, where, how often, and with whom their partner can have sexual and romantic relations with others.

- (2) A swinging relationship inherently involves partners treating each other as though they are each a possession, someone over which the other has ownership rights

Therefore,

- (3) Swinging is immoral

The only exception would be an open relationship where the partners have no restrictions regarding sexual and romantic relationships with others or extremely few such restrictions that are clearly not motivated by possessiveness (e.g. members of a partner's family are off-limits).

Now consider this empirical reality: in the overwhelming majority of relationships in the real world, the partners (implicitly) place significant restrictions on each other's sex and love lives. Probably most are monogamous, while the rest are a form of consensual nonmonogamy with many rules and boundaries. Indeed, people who happily practise a long-term open relationship with no (or very few) restrictions seem to be an (extremely) tiny minority. Consequently, according to the logic of *the anti-possessiveness argument*, nearly every real-world relationship is immoral, a conclusion that seems absurd.

Consider another highly plausible empirical claim: most people could not have a *very* open relationship without being miserable due to the difficulty of managing jealousy and other issues. Evidence for this point is provided in various parts of this thesis, especially Chapter 10 and Chapter 11. If this claim is correct, *the possessiveness argument* has a counter-intuitive implication: at least many people would, throughout their life, have to choose between being in a miserable relationship or being single.²⁹ It is hard to accept that such a world would be preferable to one where people had happy, successful, long-term, *possessive* relationships (i.e. monogamy or some form of consensual nonmonogamy with significant restrictions).

Anti-possessivists could attempt to respond to this *reductio ad absurdum* objection in two ways. First, they could deny the conclusions are absurd. On the implication that nearly every real-world relationship is immoral, this approach is (somewhat) reasonable. An argument could lead to the view that the overwhelming majority of people are doing or want to do something unethical. But this does not necessarily suggest any errors in the argument. After all, philosophers and other thinkers have sometimes provided a compelling moral case against a widespread practice (e.g. slavery and consuming factory-farmed meat). However, it is hard to deny the implausibility of the

²⁹ I specify 'at least many' since there could be many very open relationships in which the partners take little or no advantage of their freedoms regarding extra-relationship sex and love.

implication that at least many people should opt for a miserable, very open relationship or singledom over a happy, successful, possessive, long-term relationship.

Anti-possesionists might respond to this point with a second approach: denying the counter-intuitive implication. For example, they could critique the difficulty of managing jealousy justification: they could argue that jealousy can be managed and even overcome, detailing the strategies for doing so. I will explain why this approach fails in Chapter 10 when I discuss the difficulty of managing jealousy justification and defend it against such responses.

5.2.3 Alternative reasons for jealousy and monogamy

I will now turn to the best way to reject *the anti-possessiveness argument*.

First, we should acknowledge that many people treat their partner possessively, at least at times. Also, jealousy and monogamy may often be (partially) motivated by possessive attitudes, and when so, it should be condemned.

However, for many other people, maybe most, their jealousy and/or monogamy do not involve treating their partner as though they are each a possession. The same is true for many open partners regarding their jealousy and restrictions on extra-relationship sex and love. Instead, their jealousy and restrictions – monogamous or consensually nonmonogamous – result from different reasons that are ethically permissible and even good.

There are, of course, several candidates for such reasons. I will redescribe three here. First and second: sexual jealousy can often be a reasonable response to the threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown) and/or attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex (Part II). Therefore, restrictions on extra-relationship sex that are problematic in one or both these ways do not constitute treating one's partner as a possession. Instead, they are a prudent strategy for protecting the relationship and avoiding reasonable hurt. And third, jealousy is (most) often an instinctive, automatic response to one's partner engaging in extra-relationship sex and/or love (§1.3.1.4). Consequently, restrictions on extra-relationship sex and love are often motivated by the difficulty of managing jealousy (Chapter 10), not by possessive attitudes.

5.3 Fighting the long-standing fire

This chapter has discussed some long-standing challenges to monogamy. First, I looked at Russell's and McMurtry's critiques of monogamy, both of which focused on its harmful unnaturalness to argue for nonmonogamous alternatives. Indeed, they seemed to suggest that *all* relationships should be (sexually) open. Secondly, I examined a challenge espoused by various

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philosophers and others: that monogamy and jealousy inherently and unjustifiably involve partners treating each other as though they are each a possession. I formulated this challenge as an argument for anti-monogamism and evaluated it as such.

The conclusions of these challenges to monogamy are bolder than mine. And they contradict my main proposals – that we should embrace a plurality of sex and love lifestyles, *including monogamy*. Consequently, I have shown that there are various significant issues with these challenges to monogamy that give us compelling, if not sufficient, reasons for rejecting them and their (implied) conclusion(s). However, Chapter 10 will reinforce my case against these challenges.

Chapter 6 Contemporary challenges

This chapter turns from the long-standing attempts to argue for (something like) anti-monogamism to some prominent contemporary cases. §6.1 examines the similar cases presented by Harry Chalmers (2019) and Justin Clardy (2020). §6.2 discusses the philosophy of relationship anarchy – as presented by Ole Martin Moen & Aleksander Sørli (2022) – which rejects the moral permissibility of monogamy. And §6.3 concludes the chapter.

6.1 Does monogamy unjustifiably deny important human goods?

6.1.1 Chalmers' and Clardy's critiques

Chalmers (2019) asks us to imagine the:

Friendship-restricting relationship: these are two romantic partners who are also friends. They each agree to abstain from having additional friends. If one partner acquires an additional friend, the other partner will not only fail to support the friendship but will also withdraw their “love, affection, and willingness to continue the relationship” (p. 225).

He claims that many will consider the *friendship-restricting relationship* morally troubling, providing (something like) the following rationale: friendships are among the important human goods that we should wish our romantic partners to have or, at least, be free to pursue as they deem appropriate; we ought not to impose costs on them when they do so. He also notes that many will even contend that romantic partners should actively support each other's efforts to forge additional friendships and be happy when the other gains such additional sources of value in their life (p. 225).

He then raises an apparent inconsistency with believing both:

- (i) The *friendship-restricting relationship* is morally impermissible.
- (ii) Monogamy is morally permissible.

In his view, the two relationships styles are morally analogous: sexual and romantic relationships, like friendships, are important human goods; monogamous relationships involve a mutually agreed to restriction on both these goods, just as the *friendship-restricting relationship* does for additional friends; and if a partner does not abide by the restriction, they are punished by the other partner's withdrawal of “love, affection, and willingness to continue the relationship.”

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Unless we can identify a morally relevant difference between the restrictions, Chalmers believes we should reject (ii) and deem monogamy morally impermissible. Another implication seems to be that we should even be happy for our partner when they find an additional romantic and/or sexual partner, just as we would be if they acquired a new friend.

Clardy (2020: particularly pp. 30-31) agrees with Chalmers' analysis – though, as I will soon discuss, he also builds on it. And, of course, both consider several standard justifications for monogamy – or, rather, arguments for why we can consistently believe (i) and (ii). Between their works, they consider justifications relating to specialness, sexual health, children, practicality, and jealousy, among others (Chalmers 2019; 2022; Clardy 2020: 31-32; 2023: 47-100). But they argue that all these justifications fail.

Consequently, Chalmers (2019: 240-241) concludes that, unless there is some less prominent successful defence of monogamy he has not examined or a new one arises, we should judge monogamy as we do the *friendship-restricting relationship* – morally impermissible. In contrast, Clardy (2019: 33) more boldly concludes that “there is no good reason to prevent one’s partner from pursuing the human goods of sexual and romantic relationships as they see fit and that to do so is morally impermissible.”

6.1.2 Challenging Chalmers and Clardy

Chalmers and Clardy have provided significant and helpful contributions to the debate. However, there are several critical problems with their cases. First, their claim that sexual and romantic *relationships* are important human goods, like friendships, is questionable. Chalmers defends it with the following points:

Sexual and romantic relationships are themselves an important human good. They...contribute to our well-being in myriad ways—whether through sexual pleasure, through a special kind of emotional support and closeness, through helping us to discover more about ourselves, or through the countless other everyday joys of sharing one’s life intimately with another (p. 225).

Clardy (2019, particularly pp. 20-21) echoes these points and notes further means by which ‘intimate relationships’ – a label under which he subsumes sexual and romantic relationships – promote well-being, including the following:

In some cases, the intimate relationships we have with others enables the pursuit of and realization of our life’s projects. If it weren’t for being cared for by others upon entering in to the world, we would have all quickly perished shortly after birth, unable to

formulate let alone pursue ends for ourselves. In other cases, they facilitate our capacities for establishing shared projects, instrumentally positioning us to cultivate other goods like caring for others, cooperating, or fine-tuning our capacity for empathy. Lacking intimate relationships in one or more of their several modes would make our lives intolerably empty. Intimate relationships importantly shape who we are as persons (p. 21).

We may gladly grant that having *one* committed, long-term *romantic* relationship is an important human good because it provides these contributions to our well-being.³⁰ And most will happily agree that non-sexual intimate friendships are also important human goods because they can promote our well-being in all these ways, aside from that regarding sexual pleasure. Monogamy, of course, permits such friendships and *one* committed, long-term *romantic* relationship but denies the partners *additional* romantic relationships. But would these *additional* romantic relationships be an important human good? Do we need them to gain such benefits to our well-being (aside from that regarding sexual pleasure)?

If, as (most) evolutionary psychologists agree, most of us are built for pair-bonding (see Fisher 2016), it is unclear why having multiple romantic relationships is an important human good, like having various friendships. Furthermore, even people who (want to) have one or more romantic affairs (most) often report no longer loving their primary partner and/or wanting to switch partners (Fisher 2016; Buss 2016). Indeed, the evidence strongly suggests that at least a significant proportion of people, perhaps a (large) majority, have little or no interest in having multiple relationships simultaneously (§1.3; Moors, Gesselman, & Garcia 2021). So while having additional romantic relationships may be very important to at least some people, it is a stretch to claim that they are an important *human* good.

We can also similarly question whether having *additional sexual* relationships outside a loving relationship is an important *human* good. Unsurprisingly, I believe it is crucial for many people (see Part I), but many others struggle to see the appeal. So it may also be a stretch to claim that sexual *relationships* are an important *human* good.

If *additional* sexual and romantic relationships are not an important human good, monogamy and the *friendship-restricting relationship* are not morally analogous. Likewise, if additional sexual and romantic relationships are not an important good for a given couple, for them, monogamy would

³⁰ Of course, we would have to unpack what we mean by an ‘important human good’. For example, we may wish to specify that an ‘important human good’ is something that is important for the vast majority but not necessarily all people to live a good life.

not be anywhere near equivalent to having a *friendship-restricting relationship* (assuming multiple friendships are an important good for them).

The implication in both cases is that monogamy's restrictions are less ethically problematic and easier to justify than a restriction on additional friendships. But even when monogamy does not deny important (human) goods for a given couple, it still requires justification – additional sexual and romantic relationships can potentially provide *at least some value* for them. Imagine:

Morgan: (s)he is very happy only having a sexual and romantic relationship with their partner over 99% of the time but very occasionally has a fleeting desire to enjoy the experience of dating someone new with the potential of it leading to sex. However, Morgan is a busy person, so (s)he would not often have the time for such dating in any case. But, if (s)he could get their head around the idea, (s)he could enjoy it very occasionally. Still, there are many other activities Morgan would find more valuable that (s)he finds insufficient time for, like reading fiction.

Monogamy does not deny Morgan anything of considerable value. Nevertheless, there still needs to be a justification for why Morgan is not allowed to act on their fleeting desires to date someone new. Indeed, consider this example. I generally do not eat carrots because, in most contexts, I dislike the taste. However, there are rare occasions when I want to eat them. Nevertheless, I could easily stick to a lifelong commitment not to eat carrots. But if I were to tell you that I have a partner who requires that I *never* eat carrots, not even on the rare occasions when I would get some value from doing so, I expect you would question why. And you should – there still needs to be a sufficient justification for this restriction (e.g. a carrot allergy).

Let us return to Chalmers' and Clardy's arguments. They should abandon the claim that *additional* sexual and romantic relationships are important human goods, like having multiple friendships is. Instead, they should make something like the following claim. When additional sexual and/or romantic relationships can be a source of value – even just a minor one – for someone in a monogamous relationship, there must be sufficient justification for restricting them from such relationships.³¹ And the more valuable such relationships would be for that person, the more difficult it would be to justify restricting them from it.

Moving on to a different problem with Chalmers' case specifically: like McMurry, he is unclear on what alternative to monogamy he proposes. He discusses 'non-monogamy' and 'non-monogamous relationships' at many points. However, many relationship styles could fall into

³¹ Their challenges to monogamy would consequently be more like McKeever's (2014).

these categories if we define them widely enough, including swinging, polyamory with many limits, polyamory with few limits, and even couples who only have the occasional threesome.

At one point, Chalmers defends his case against monogamy by reminding us “that not all forms of non-monogamy involve openness to multiple emotionally intimate relationships at a time” (2019: 233). This point suggests he considers sexually open relationships morally acceptable. But if he does, this does not cohere well with his general case since, according to his reasoning, sexually open relationships, like the friendship restricting relationship, still deny important human goods: romantic relations with others.

This is an area in which Clardy (2020) builds on Chalmers’ work. Clardy’s anti-monogamism can be thought of as one implication of his main conclusion that “intimacy confining constraints that prevent one’s romantic partner(s) from pursuing or establishing extrarelational sexual or romantic relationships is morally impermissible” (p. 19). Indeed, he argues that “some non-monogamous romantic relationships” (p. 30) also involve such morally impermissible intimacy confining constraints. The example he focuses on is polyfidelitous romantic relationships: “romantic relationships comprised of three or more people who are committed to each other and are sexually, emotionally, and/or romantically exclusive within their relationship constellation or polycule” (pp. 22-23).

So perhaps, instead, Chalmers and Clardy advocate some form of polyamory. But they cannot endorse a relatively restrictive form of polyamory since such a relationship could still deny important human goods on their reasoning. For example, two polyamorous individuals could be primary partners, but they agree they can independently have three date nights a month with others in the polyamory community. However, perhaps it becomes crucial to one partner’s happiness to develop their secondary relationship beyond a few dates per month. Or maybe they desperately want a casual fling with someone outside the polyamory community.

So Chalmers’ and Clardy’s arguments seem to lead them to advocate polyamory with relatively few restrictions on when, where, how often, and with whom partners can have other sexual and romantic relationships. And it seems that the acceptable limits are those comparable to the (implicit) rules partners can legitimately impose on each other regarding additional friendships. So, for example, just as a woman in her final weeks of pregnancy can expect her partner not to go on a ski trip with his friend, she can also expect him not to go for a romantic weekend in Paris with a new lover.

This is my understanding of their papers. But if my understanding is correct, their arguments are vulnerable to one of the same problems *the anti-possessiveness argument* faces – they have

absurd implications. (Nearly) all happy, long-term relationships in the real world – monogamous *and open* – would be immoral. Clardy (2020) presumably accepts this implication and does not consider it absurd. But, as I argued earlier, another absurd implication could be raised to such a response: most people would have to choose between lifelong singledom or being unhappy in the kind of nonmonogamous relationships they advocate (see §5.2.2).

Finally, even if Chalmers' and Clardy's cases can overcome all these issues – perhaps with revisions – I believe there is at least one defence for monogamy for which they do not provide sufficient reasons to reject – the difficulty of managing jealousy justification. However, as already noted, I will explore this matter in Chapter 10.³²

6.2 Relationship anarchy

Another challenge to monogamy – and, as we will see, (most forms of) consensual nonmonogamy – comes from the (relatively) radical philosophy of *relationship anarchy*. The philosophy of contemporary self-identifying relationship anarchists has developed within queer and countercultural communities in the 21st Century. It focuses on understanding and critiquing the power dynamics in close personal relationships.

Ole Martin Moen & Aleksander Sørli (2022) presented and defended this philosophy. I will summarise their presentation, focusing on the aspects that challenge not only monogamy but also the idea that we should embrace a plurality of sex and love lifestyles in the manner I describe.

6.2.1 Moen and Sørli on relationship anarchy

They explain that relationship anarchism encourages people “to negotiate the scope and content of one’s relationship. Moreover, while some issues related to scope and content might be up for reconsideration or compromise, it is also compatible with [relationship anarchy] to have strict requirements about the nature of a relationship one is willing to enter into, or to continue” (p. 345). So suppose you find it crucial that your romantic partner is also your domestic partner and shares your enthusiasm for domestic pleasures. In that case, it would be perfectly acceptable for you to be unwilling to form a relationship with someone who will not be around most evenings

³² We may also wonder whether the *friendship-restricting relationship* is immoral. However, I will discuss this issue in §10.7 since the question arises then as a potential criticism of my *difficulty of managing jealousy justification* for monogamy.

For more criticisms of Chalmers' case, see Kyle York's (2019) response paper.

and weekends. That said, relationship anarchism – like mainstream relationship norms – would deem it excessive for you to demand that your partner is at home *all* evenings and weekends.

But for sexual and romantic exclusivity, Moen & Sørлие highlight these requirements are not about the scope and content of the relationship between yourself and your partner. Instead, they are requirements over what your partner is permitted to do in their relationships with others during periods they are not with you.

Moen and Sørлие also point out that while exclusivity requirements are widely considered acceptable within romantic relationships, they would strike us odd in friendships. Consider:

Jack and Jane: They are friends who love reading and meeting up to discuss literature. One day, Jack informs Jane that he considers discussing literature as “their thing”. Furthermore, he will only continue their friendship if she forgoes discussing literature with anyone else, even if he is away, busy, or not up for spending time with her.

Moen and Sørлие think it seems clear that Jack’s literature exclusivity requirement is wrong – it is “controlling and restricting beyond what is acceptable” (p. 346). They also stress that Jack cannot justify this requirement by claiming that Jane only desires to discuss literature with him. If this is how Jane feels, “the requirement is redundant” (p. 346).

Echoing Chalmers (2019) and Clardy (2020), Moen and Sørлие challenge most of us to consider why we think exclusivity requirements between friends are unacceptable yet deem them acceptable in romantic relationships. And they consider various justifications for why there is a morally relevant difference between the two. The justifications they discuss derive from the following considerations: the right to set one’s own terms, jealousy, sexual intimacy, stability, and the risk of pregnancy (with some comments on STIs). But in each case, they argue that the justification is unsuccessful. Thus, they think relationship anarchism’s moral rejection of monogamy stands.

6.2.2 Pre- versus post-relationship-formation requirements

In *New Humanist*, Brian Earp (2022) presents a seemingly straightforward, decisive objection to Moen and Sørлие’s relationship anarchist case for anti-monogamism. He believes there is an apparent conflation here between:

A post-relationship-formation requirement of monogamy: You are in a close relationship that is *not* monogamous, but then you suddenly demand monogamy with the threat of relationship termination if your partner does not comply.

And:

A pre-relationship-formation requirement of monogamy: You make it clear to a *potential* partner that monogamy is crucial for you, so you are only willing to form a committed relationship with someone who also desires a monogamous arrangement. If this potential partner does not share this desire, you understand and respect their alternate preference but cannot form a relationship with them.

Your character and actions are arguably vulnerable to moral criticism in the former case. But in the latter case, it is hard to see how you are guilty of being controlling and restricting to an objectionable degree, if at all! The potential partner is not obliged to have a relationship with you, let alone promise you monogamy. Indeed, the two of you can part ways or just be friends and individually seek an alternative partner with compatible relationship style preferences.

So if a *pre-relationship-formation* requirement of monogamy is not controlling and restricting to an objectionable degree, why is it not morally acceptable? Unfortunately, Moen and Sørliie do not tackle this question head-on. Instead, they address it (mostly) indirectly within a section on the appeal to the right to set one's own terms. I will summarise this section and discuss how they might respond to Earp's challenge. As you read my summary, pay attention to how Moen and Sørliie's points go back and forth between addressing *pre-* and *post-*relationship-formation requirements with more focus on the latter.

6.2.2.1 Moen and Sørliie on the appeal to the right to set one's own terms

They describe this appeal as an "argument for the permissibility of monogamy requirements". The argument "is that one has a right to set any criterion that one wants for being willing to enter or continue a romantic relationship" (p. 347). As this description identifies, there are two criteria-setting situations here – *post-* and *pre-*relationship-formation.

Against this argument, Moen and Sørliie highlight that not all reasons for ending a relationship are equally ethically acceptable. Supporting this, they first argue that if it were acceptable to set whatever criterion one likes as a pre-condition for a relationship continuing, this would presumably apply to friendships. But they remind us of *Jack and Jane*, where we judged Jack's sudden insistence on literature exclusivity as a precondition for continuing their friendship unacceptable. So clearly, not all pre-conditions for continuing a friendship are equally ethically acceptable, and many will be unethical.

Moen and Sørliie then employ the following relationship-related counter-examples (pp. 347-348):

Salary-concerned man: “a man ends his relationship with his wife because she gets promoted at work and thereby starts to earn a higher salary than he does, something which, in his view, improperly skews the power and prestige in the relationship.”

*Salary-concerned man**: a man informs a *potential* girlfriend that if they are to have a relationship together, she cannot ever accept a job that pays a higher salary than his because he thinks this will improperly skew the power and prestige in the relationship.

And:

Invasive wife: “a woman tells her husband that she will end their relationship unless he gives her the option of listening in to all of his phone calls with his friends and family.”

They believe the requirements in each case are ethically unacceptable.

Moen and Sørliie anticipate the following response: the spouses of the *salary-concerned man* and the *invasive wife* should simply refuse the requirement. While they believe this is ideally what these spouses should do, they urge us to acknowledge that individuals can often be in a situation where it would be very costly to reject their partner’s pre-conditions for continuing the relationship. “Even if we keep potential physical threats aside, one might be financially, socially, or psychologically dependent on one’s partner in such a way that it is too risky for one to do anything else than to accept the abuse” (p. 348). So it seems clear to Moen and Sørliie that if two people in a romantic relationship are doing something together, both parties’ agreement is *necessary but insufficient* to make their actions morally acceptable.

They highlight that most of us endorse this view regarding another type of relationship – that between an employer and (a potential) employee. Indeed, we think there should be clear legal limits on what terms can be included in work contracts and limits on when and how these terms may be renegotiated. This is because the two parties have a power asymmetry, with the employer (typically) having the upper hand. Consequently, without clear limitations on initial terms and renegotiations, we are vulnerable to exploitation. For example, suppose an employer learns that their employee is in a dire situation in which the loss of employment would be terrible for them and their family. In that case, that employer could take advantage of their employee by making extreme demands (e.g. significant unpaid overtime and work during their annual leave). We would also find it objectionable if work contracts included clauses on who an employee can socialise with when not at work.

Next, Moen and Sørliie claim that many people face even starker power asymmetries in their domestic relationships. The risks and costs of displeasing their domestic partner can be worse

than those they would face if they displease their boss. Indeed, many are in a position where they can easily change employers but not change their domestic partner: they might love their domestic partner deeply, own property with them, and be raising children together, so simply ending the relationship and perhaps finding someone new to take on that role will be extremely difficult. Therefore, Moen and Sørлие believe “we need limits in domestic relationships about what is regarded as socially accepted to bargain about” (p. 348).

Finally, Moen and Sørлие explain that relationship anarchists think there are many spheres of a partner’s life that it would be unacceptable to require control over. And one critical such sphere is what they do in their relationships with others when you are not present. But that does not entail that you cannot reasonably assess your relationships with people – romantic and non-romantic – in light of what these people do when you are not around. If a friend or romantic partner engages in harassment, bullying, animal cruelty, racism, or other wrongful behaviour, this is a good reason for ending the friendship or relationship. So one can require that their (potential) partner not engage in immoral behaviours as a pre-condition for forming or continuing their relationship.

Can these caveats regarding immoral behaviours justify monogamy’s requirements? Moen and Sørлие believe they cannot because the behaviours one would be restricting their partner from engaging in – casual sex, making love, romantic intimacy, etc. – are morally permissible.

6.2.2.2 Why is a pre-relationship-formation requirement of monogamy unacceptable?

Moen & Sørлие’s points go back and forth between addressing *pre-* and *post-*relationship-formation requirements with more focus on the latter. Consider the counter-examples Moen & Sørлие give to the principle that “one has a right to set any criterion that one wants for being willing to enter or continue a romantic relationship.” Only the *salary-concerned man** is a *pre-*relationship-formation requirement. Nevertheless, to help their case, we can add:

*Jack and Jane**: They are two strangers who meet at a library and have the potential to become friends, ones who will discuss literature, among other activities. However, Jack explains he is only happy to become friends if they do not discuss literature with anyone else. He emphasises that if Jane is unhappy with that arrangement, he understands and respects her preferences. But he would not wish to be friends with her, at least not friends who discuss literature.

And:

*Invasive girlfriend**: a woman tells a *potential* boyfriend that she is only willing to form a relationship with him if she is allowed to listen in on all his phone calls with his friends and family.

Do these examples of *pre-relationship-formation* requirements compel us to deem a *pre-relationship-formation requirement of monogamy* morally unacceptable? First, let us set aside *Jack and Jane** and consider the other two. It seems Moen & Sørliie want us to judge the *salary-concerned man** and the *invasive girlfriend** to be acting wrongly and to judge a *pre-relationship-formation requirement of monogamy* likewise.

Unfortunately, these two cases contain morally problematic features that are not (prima facie) present in a *pre-relationship-formation requirement of monogamy* and, thus, are distracting. So they are not good comparisons. First, many will consider the *salary-concerned man**'s condition objectionable because it reflects sexist and/or misogynistic attitudes and produces an unequal relationship since he will have more power, control, and prestige and not be restricted in his career path in the way his girlfriend/wife would be. Second, although the *invasive girlfriend**'s condition is not obviously sexist or misandristic, the proposed arrangement is not mutual and equal – she does not offer her potential boyfriend the freedom to listen to her calls. In contrast, monogamy is not (prima facie) sexist, misogynistic/misandristic, non-mutual, or unequal, nor does it (prima facie) give one partner more power, control, and prestige over the other. And if it is guilty of being any of these things, at least in some cases, this must be demonstrated.

The *Jack and Jane** case avoids these problems. But is Jack*'s behaviour morally unacceptable? If so, why? And is it for the reasons Moen & Sørliie (seemingly) think? In the original *Jack and Jane* case, they considered Jack's behaviour morally unacceptable because it was controlling and restricting beyond what is acceptable. But it is hard to comprehend why Jack* is controlling and restricting *at all*, let alone in a manner beyond what is acceptable. Jane* can simply refuse the friendship with Jack* and get on with her life, looking for friends (to discuss literature non-exclusively with) elsewhere. Likewise, as explained earlier, a *pre-relationship-formation requirement of monogamy* does not seem at all restricting or controlling. So it is unclear why we should deem Jack*'s behaviour and a *pre-relationship-formation requirement of monogamy* morally unacceptable.

Can Moen & Sørliie's points about power asymmetries and the risks and costs of refusing conditions help rescue their case for anti-monogamism? At the very least, it is unclear if they can. Their points were regarding how people can be in a situation where (due to a power asymmetry) it is very risky and costly for them to reject a condition for *continuing* a relationship. So they only explain one way in which a *post-relationship-formation requirement of monogamy* can often be

at least morally problematic. It is hard to see how they demonstrate the moral unacceptability of *Jack***'s behaviour and a *pre*-relationship-formation requirement of monogamy: the potential friends/partners are not psychologically, financially, or socially dependent on each other.

Moen and Sørliie have two options. First, they could argue that, *on closer inspection*, a *pre*-relationship-formation requirement of monogamy (and *Jack***'s behaviour) are controlling and restrictive beyond what is acceptable. Alternatively, they could concede that a *pre*-relationship-formation requirement of monogamy (and *Jack***'s behaviour) are *not* controlling and restrictive (beyond what is acceptable) but argue that they are morally unacceptable for another related reason. Let us examine each in turn.

Perhaps the best way to make the first approach work is to demonstrate that people can be sufficiently psychologically dependent upon a *potential* relationship partner (or friend) and would face significant risks and costs for rejecting the *pre*-relationship-formation requirement (of monogamy). Consequently, making it a condition of forming a relationship is controlling and restrictive beyond what is acceptable.

So, for example, *Jack and Jane** could, during their first meeting, have a riveting hour-long conversation that also shows the potential of a wonderful friendship. Consequently, *Jane** finds it hard to refuse *Jack***'s literature-exclusivity condition for forming a friendship. Indeed, she might be someone who does not have many friends – despite wanting them – and has never met anyone who comes anywhere near close to being as good a conversationalist about literature as *Jack**. So she might think the risks and costs of declining this strange friendship are not worth it.

Similar scenarios occur in real-world dating. Sometimes people have a strong romantic interest in, or even fall in love with, someone long before any relationship is formed. So if they manage to capture their love interest's heart, they can find it hard to refuse a *pre*-relationship-formation requirement of monogamy and, indeed, other (supposedly) controlling and restrictive conditions. Additionally, people can experience an amazing connection with a potential romantic partner on a first date or a chance encounter. Some can even see great potential for a relationship after several messages via a dating app/website or even from just viewing a dating profile page. In these cases, people could find it hard to refuse various *pre*-relationship-formation requirements, including monogamy. So posing such conditions for forming a relationship can perhaps be controlling and restrictive beyond what is acceptable.

Suppose all these examples show that people can be sufficiently psychologically dependent upon a potential relationship partner (or friend) and would face significant risks and costs for rejecting the *pre*-relationship-formation requirement of monogamy. Even in this case, this would not show

that *all pre-relationship-formation* requirements of monogamy are morally problematic. There will still be many cases in which the demand for monogamy was apparent before either party developed feelings to the point where it was difficult to walk away, including when people specify in their dating profile that they are only interested in monogamy. Given that there are many cases like this, Moen & Sørliie cannot save their case for anti-monogamism by arguing that a *pre-relationship-formation* requirement of monogamy is, on closer inspection, controlling and restrictive beyond what is acceptable.

So let us examine Moen and Sørliie's second option. They could acknowledge that *Jack** and people who declare upfront that monogamy is essential for them are not *engaging in* behaviours that are controlling and restrictive beyond what is acceptable. But they can argue that their requirements are morally unacceptable for the following related reason: they are *attempting to* engage in behaviours that are controlling and restrictive beyond what is acceptable. Thus, *Jack** is guilty of *attempting to* control and restrict *Jane** beyond what is acceptable, and the single seeker of monogamy is guilty of *attempting to* control and restrict their potential relationship partner beyond what is acceptable – such points may also be made about the *invasive girlfriend** and the *salary-concerned man**.

This approach is plausible. Although we would not accuse *Jack** of controlling and restricting *Jane** beyond what is acceptable, many would still think he is subject to moral criticism. The idea that he is *attempting to* engage in such behaviour may explain why: he wants to restrict her from doing a morally permissible activity – discussing literature – with others, even when he is not around. Accordingly, the single monogamy seeker attempts to restrict their potential relationship partner from engaging in morally acceptable activities (e.g. casual sex and romantic intimacy) with others, even while they are absent.

Does this strategy answer Earp's challenge regarding the conflation between *pre-* and *post-relationships-formation requirements of* monogamy? Not quite. Earp is still correct to claim that Moen & Sørliie have not demonstrated why the former are controlling and restricting beyond what is acceptable. However, I have shown how Moen & Sørliie might argue that *pre-relationship-formation requirements of* monogamy are morally unacceptable in a related but different way to *post-relationship-formation requirements of* monogamy. So we cannot yet reject their relationship anarchist-based case for anti-monogamism.

But nor should we accept it. There is another critical matter to probe: is monogamy restricting and controlling beyond what is acceptable? (Re)consider the following cases: *Jack and Jane**, a *pre-relationship-formation requirement of* monogamy, and:

A pre-relationship-formation requirement of no alcohol: A recovering alcoholic is clear upfront to any potential relationship partner that they are only interested in a relationship in which neither ever consumes alcohol, even when they are apart. This is for the following reasons, among others. Alcohol has had a devastating impact on their life, and so seeing people drinking brings up bad memories. If there is alcohol in the home or they witness or hear about their partner enjoying alcohol, this will make it harder for them to stay sober. And they have tried very hard before to have a relationship with an alcohol drinker, but it always caused them tremendous distress.³³

Many real-world recovering alcoholics set such a condition, and consequently, many only date other recovering alcoholics. Assuming that drinking alcohol is morally acceptable, is their pre-condition for a relationship morally unacceptable? I presume most will agree with me that it is not. Of course, they are being restrictive and controlling, but *not* beyond what is acceptable. This is because they can give sufficient justification for their restriction on alcohol. In the case of Jack*, though, it is hard to think of a *realistic* set of reasons that can justify his pre-relationship-formation requirement of literature exclusivity – hence, why many would think he is vulnerable to moral criticism.

So is monogamy controlling and restricting beyond what is acceptable? If there is sufficient justification for monogamy's restrictions, it is not. As mentioned earlier, Moen & Sørлие consider various justifications for monogamy but reject them all. However, Chapter 10 demonstrates that the difficulty of managing jealousy justification succeeds and, by extension, can show that monogamy's restrictions are not restricting and controlling beyond what is acceptable. So I will pause this part of my critique of Moen & Sørлие's relationship anarchy-based case for anti-monogamism until then. But before ending the present discussion of their work, I will identify some other issues with their arguments.

6.2.3 (Problematic) implications of the relationship anarchist case for anti-monogamism

Like Chalmers and Clardy, Moen & Sørлие's relationship anarchy-based arguments do not just rule out the permissibility of monogamy, but they also rule out many/all forms of consensual nonmonogamy: these are also restricting and controlling beyond what is acceptable, placing limits on the morally acceptable practices our partner can engage in that fall outside the content and scope of our relationship with them. In fact, Moen & Sørлие go further. They suggest relationship anarchists should be critical of using the term 'consensual nonmonogamy'. The 'consensual'

³³ Earp (The Philosopher 2022: 30:24) presents a similar case.

component refers to the consent of a third party, not to the consent of the people having the sexual and/or romantic relationship. But as Moen & Sørliie see it, only the latter people's consent is required – the consent of their (other) non-participating partners is not. On this matter, they approvingly quote the relationship anarchist activist Mae Bee (2004), who writes that “in a free society we will not be asking for the consent of one person to sleep with another anymore than we would ask a father for the ‘right’ to marry his daughter.” Relatedly, they explain that relationship anarchists are and should be critical of forms of polyamory that place restrictions on with whom the partners can have additional sexual and romantic relationships. So, undoubtedly, they would also be highly critical of the sexually open relationships I include in the list of sex and love lifestyles I believe we should embrace, given that these entirely forbid extra-relationship love and, in most cases, only allow for casual sex in certain circumstances.

These radical implications of relationship anarchy render it vulnerable to at least one of the same problems *the anti-possessiveness argument* and Chalmers' and Clardy's arguments face: it has absurd conclusions. (Nearly) all happy, long-term relationships in the real world – monogamous *and open* – would be immoral. Like Clardy, Moen & Sørliie presumably accept this implication and do not consider it absurd. But another absurd implication could be raised to such a response: most people would have to choose between lifelong singledom or being unhappy in the kind of relationships Moen & Sørliie advocate due to the difficulty of managing jealousy and other issues (§5.2.2).

Of course, they could respond by arguing that at least most people can have happy, well-functioning relationship anarchist-approved relationships if they take the appropriate steps – like those they discuss (2022: 346-352) – to ensure stability, manage jealousy, and mitigate sexual health risks. However, for this counter-case to succeed, the difficulty of managing jealousy justification must be undermined, but, as Chapter 10 demonstrates, this justification stands firm against the criticisms of the monogamy challengers I discuss in this thesis.

6.3 Fighting the fire – a conclusion

This chapter has discussed the cases for anti-monogamism presented by Chalmers, Clardy, and Moen & Sørliie. Although, as we have seen, Clardy's, Moen & Sørliie's, and, by extension, Chalmers' arguments also rule out the moral permissibility of sexually open relationships. These conclusions – that monogamy and sexually open relationships are immoral – drastically contradict my main proposals. Consequently, this chapter has identified issues in all three cases. However, my critique of their works will resume in Chapter 10.

PART IV: HOW CAN MONOGAMY BE JUSTIFIED?

Part III evaluated challenges to monogamy aiming to establish (something like) anti-monogamism. However, other monogamy challengers argue for more moderate conclusions. Most prominently, Bryan R. Weaver & Fiona Woollard (2008) and Natasha McKeever (2014). They question the legitimacy of romantic partners restricting each other's access to the valuable experiences they can have in additional sexual and romantic relationships. And like Chalmers, Clardy, and Moen & Sørli, they reject various justifications for monogamy. But unlike these anti-monogamists, Weaver & Woollard and McKeever each offer a justification for monogamy they believe applies to some or many but not all couples. Partly as a consequence, they believe monogamy and consensual nonmonogamy can be good choices.

So Weaver & Woollard's and McKeever's views are similar to mine. Nevertheless, there are significant differences between all three perspectives, especially regarding *how* monogamy can be justified. I believe at least some people can appeal to the difficulty of managing jealousy, but Weaver & Woollard and McKeever reject this idea. Presumably, the only justification for monogamy they think works is their own. However, I will identify numerous issues with their justifications and explain why they require much development, elaboration, revision, and – in Weaver & Woollard's case – clarification before we can accept them.

Chapter 7 focuses on Weaver & Woollard's justification, Chapter 8 focuses on McKeever's, and Chapter 9 explores further questions regarding both. Finally, Chapter 10 presents and defends the difficulty of managing jealousy justification, explains how it answers nearly all the challenges to monogamy I have discussed, and demonstrates its (current) preferability to Weaver & Woollard's and McKeever's justifications.

Chapter 7 Weaver & Woollard on monogamy's (dis)value

§7.1 presents Weaver & Woollard's challenge to monogamy. §7.2 explains their justification. §7.3 details the main critical problems with it. And §7.4 concludes the chapter.

7.1 Weaver & Woollard on monogamy's apparent disvalue

They describe the norm of monogamy as comprising two restrictions: sex is restricted to relationships of romantic love; and the number of relationships of romantic love is restricted to one (2008: 507-508).³⁴ They assume romantic love and sex "have a certain default value" (p. 508). Additionally, they highlight the value generated by sexual and romantic relationships differs with different partners. They also assume "the love partners share entails promoting to a reasonable extent each other's access to things of value" (p. 509). Thus, it seems partners should promote, to a reasonable extent, each other's access to additional sexual and romantic relationships. However, monogamy requires a mutual promise to forgo such relationships. Consequently, Weaver and Woollard believe there needs to be an explanation of how embracing monogamy can create value that "surmounts its apparent disvalue" (p. 509). Before offering their justification, they reject the following suggestions (pp. 513-515):

- "the appropriate context in which to raise children requires monogamy"
- Monogamy is needed to protect the current relationship from being undermined by developing additional relationships
- Sex and love are the kinds of goods that are more valuable when restricted
- Variants of the idea that romantic love means not desiring others sexually or romantically

7.2 Weaver & Woollard's justification

Their justification comes in two parts: they justify restricting sex to romantic relationships; then they justify limiting the number of romantic relationships to one (pp. 515-519).

³⁴ They use the term 'erotic love' rather than 'romantic love'. However, I use 'romantic love' when discussing their work for consistency with the rest of this thesis.

7.2.1 Restricting sex to romantic relationships

Their justification for this restriction is grounded in the idea that it is natural and reasonable – but not necessary – to perceive sex as possessing “a certain kind of significance”; partners can reasonably see sex as symbolising and partly constituting their love:

[If] sex, which involves many other types of intimacy, is shared by those who love each other, it can be an integral part of the intimacy of erotic love. Sex is intensely pleasurable, and intense experiences often forge a bond between those who share them. More importantly, the intense pleasure of sex is a product of the partner’s interaction. It is pleasure found in and with the other. Thus, sex is just the sort of thing out of which emotional intimacy can be built (pp. 515-516).

But “which acts are connected to intimacy?” Weaver & Woollard explain that the “connections that are made will depend upon the conception of sex had by the spouses and whether they are able to separate sex into different categories, attaching a different type of significance to different types of sex” (p. 516). They describe three ways they deem reasonable to view sex as significant in connection to the emotional intimacy of romantic love. Firstly:

The separable view: the partners “only connect sex within the relationship to emotional intimacy” and, consequently, “they will not attach significance to other sex acts” (p. 516).

If the partners take *the separable view*, this would be consistent with a sexually open relationship (p. 516): the partners see the sex they have together in the *significant/emotionally intimate/romantic category* while seeing sex with other people in the *non-significant/without emotional intimacy/casual category*.

Another similar view Weaver & Woollard think people can reasonably hold is:

The partially separable view: the partners “only see acts which are sufficiently similar to the sex they have together as connected to emotional intimacy,” and so “they will only see these acts as significant” (p. 516).

If partners adopt this perspective, “[t]his would suggest a form of restricted openness, which limits only the significant forms of sexual activity” to romantic relationships (p. 516) – I presume passionate kissing could be an example of a restricted significant sexual activity.

For it to be reasonable to restrict *all* sex to romantic relationships, Weaver & Woollard think that the following view needs to be held:

The inseparable view: the partners “see sex in general as connected to emotional intimacy” and, thus, “they will attach significance to all sex acts” (p. 516).

In other words, for the partners, sex is “conceptually inseparable from the kind of emotional intimacy that is associated with” romantic love (p. 515).

Woollard explains why we can appeal to the inseparable view to justify the restriction of sex to loving relationships:

Once sex is seen to be significant in this way, it will be hurtful if one partner has sex with someone that he is not in love with. In having sex without love, he implicitly denies that sex has the kind of significance that his partner understood it to have. He does not see sex as lovemaking. This can undermine the partners’ understanding of previous episodes of sex within the relationship. This will be deeply hurtful to the other partner. If loveless sex would cause reasonable hurt to one or both partners, it makes sense to restrict sex to loving relationships (2010: 4-5).

Recall that Weaver & Woollard think it is *reasonable but not necessary* for partners to see sex as having a significant role in the emotional intimacy of their romantic love. Relatedly, they believe it is reasonable for partners to adopt:

The insignificant view: the partners “do not tie sex in general to emotional intimacy”, and so “they will not attach significance to all sex acts” (p. 516).

Presumably, they think this way of seeing sex is at least compatible with a sexually open relationship.

7.2.2 Restricting the number of romantic relationships to one

Weaver & Woollard’s justification for this restriction focuses on the difficulty of sustaining multiple romantic relationships simultaneously. Such relationships are demanding: one has to give their partner and the relationship a “fundamental role in shaping one’s behaviour” and invest substantial amounts of their “time, energy, and emotion” (p. 517). Simultaneously doing this for multiple partners will be impossible for many people, as the additional relationships will compete for the partners’ time, energy, and emotion. So assuming we have reason to value romantic relationships, we can recognise that many people have reason to protect them by not forming further such relationships.

Weaver & Woollard tackle an obvious objection: monogamous couples not only permit but also encourage non-romantic relationships and projects requiring substantial resources (e.g. deep friendships and voluntary work). If monogamous partners can accept their partner having such non-romantic relationships and projects, why can they not also accept their partner having additional romantic relationships? Weaver & Woollard answer this question by identifying three ethically relevant differences.

Firstly, some such non-romantic relationships and projects “involve obligations that are either unavoidable or prior to the relationship” (p. 517) (e.g. a partner’s relationship with his parents).

Secondly, other relationships and projects provide “new and different types of value...[and] aspects of a well-rounded life that could not be provided by the” romantic relationship (p. 518). So, requiring a partner to forgo such experiences would not make sense despite resource limitations. But for at least some people, one or more additional romantic relationships can provide new and different types of value and contribute to a well-rounded life. However, Weaver & Woollard want us to recognise this point because they wish to demonstrate that there can be value in monogamy *and* consensual nonmonogamy. In their view, monogamy would not usually make sense for such people. So for whom would monogamy be valuable? They claim that monogamy makes sense for people for whom additional relationships or romantic love would not fulfil any distinct need nor contribute to a well-rounded life.

The third ethically relevant difference is that non-romantic relationships and projects can often be a shared endeavour that strengthens a relationship (e.g. child-rearing or volunteering together). For many couples, the same would not be true of an additional romantic relationship.

7.3 Have Weaver & Woollard justified monogamy?

I will first identify several issues with their justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships. Then I will focus on an objection against their justification as a whole but which mainly targets their justification for restricting the number of relationships to one: that it cannot justify restricting additional romantic relationships that require *relatively little* resources.

7.3.1 Issues with the justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships

Weaver & Woollard’s (2008) paper and broad conclusions have been positively cited (e.g. Earp 2022). So have some of their specific arguments (e.g. York 2020). However, their *entire* justification has not convinced anti-monogamists like Chalmers (2019) and Moen & Sørliie (2022). McKeever (2014: 182-184; 2020: 525-527) is also unpersuaded by their justification for restricting

sex to romantic relationships. More importantly, I have not seen evidence that this part of their justification has been understood and endorsed in all its details.

This may be due to a lack of clarity in Weaver & Woollard's presentation of the justification rather than it being unworkable. Indeed, as far as I have seen, only McKeever has engaged with its details. Others may have avoided doing so due to not adequately comprehending it. More importantly, although various points of McKeever's critiques (somewhat) overlap with my upcoming one, some of her criticisms suggest she interprets their justification differently. For example, she seems to think that a couple who adopts the inseparable view would refrain from extra-relationship sex partly because "they assume that doing so would entail they loved the other person and they do not want any additional [romantic] relationships" (2014: 183). But I do not think this is part of why Weaver & Woollard believe it is reasonable for such a couple to limit all sex to romantic relationships.

With all these points in mind, let me comment on the style and spirit of my critique. I will expose critical questions and issues regarding this part of their justification. However, these are based on my understanding of it. I suspect that at least some of my – and McKeever's – criticisms do not apply to this part of Weaver & Woollard's justification as they conceive of it. Still, my – and McKeever's – criticisms are based on perfectly reasonable interpretations. So even if these criticisms miss the mark, they demonstrate this part of their justification requires significant clarification, elaboration, development, and arguably revision before we can accept it.

Indeed, I will now begin my critique by highlighting a crucial question regarding this justification: does it require both partners or just at least one to hold the inseparable view? Weaver & Woollard (2008) seem to think both partners need to hold this view – I will call this 'the two-way interpretation'. But when just Woollard presents their justification (2010; 2017), she seemingly believes only one partner needs to hold it – 'the one-way interpretation'. I will assess each interpretation in turn.

7.3.1.1 Assessing the two-way interpretation

7.3.1.1.1 What kinds of couples can hold the inseparable view?

Weaver & Woollard (2008: 516) believe romantic partners who have sex together can reasonably hold any of the following views of sex (in the relationship): the insignificant, separable, partially separable, and inseparable views. However, they do not explain what kinds of people can hold each view. But contemplating this matter will help us understand and evaluate their justification.

I will distinguish between three broad types of persons interested in a sexually active romantic relationship based on what kind(s) of sex they can enjoy:

Casual sex enjoyers: people who can *only* enjoy casual sex.

Casual and loving sex enjoyers: people who can enjoy casual and loving sex.

Lovemakers: people who can *only* enjoy loving sex.

Table 1 presents an *initial* assessment of who can hold each view.

The view(s) of sex	Who can hold it?
The insignificant view	Casual sex enjoyers
The separable view & The partially separable view	Casual and loving sex enjoyers & Lovemakers, if their partner is a casual and loving sex enjoyer
The inseparable view	Lovemakers

Table 1: Who can adopt the insignificant, (partially) separable, and inseparable views of sex? An initial assessment

Most of these assessments are straightforward. But it may be unclear why a lovemaker can hold the separable and partially separable views if their partner is a casual and loving sex enjoyer. It is because they could see the sex or particular forms of it that they have together as significant but not attach significance to the sex or other forms of it that their partner enjoys with others.

Suppose Weaver & Woollard think only lovemakers can hold the inseparable view. In that case, on the two-way interpretation, they believe a justified monogamous relationship requires that neither partner can enjoy casual sex. However, the restriction on sex to romantic relationships would be redundant. More importantly, the restriction would not require justification since it does not restrict either partner’s access to something of value to them. So if only lovemakers can hold the inseparable view, we can reject the two-way interpretation.

Of course, Weaver & Woollard probably do *not* think that only lovemakers can hold the inseparable view. But what kinds of *non-lovemakers* can hold it? Casual sex enjoyers should be instantly ruled out – if they cannot enjoy loving sex, how could they attach significance to all sex involving them or their partner? So at least some casual and loving sex enjoyers must be able to hold the inseparable view.

At this point, it will be helpful to utilise a personality trait psychologists measure called ‘sociosexuality’, which, in short, is about individual differences regarding willingness to engage in casual sex (Simpson & Gangestad 1991). We can imagine a sociosexuality scale of 1-10. 1 represents people with a *completely restricted* sociosexuality, meaning they are not at all willing to engage in casual sex – this is where lovemakers are. Meanwhile, 10 represents people with a *completely unrestricted* sociosexuality, meaning they are extremely willing to engage in casual sex with an extensive range and high quantity of people.

Let us imagine a casual and loving sex enjoyer who would score quite highly:

Pat: Pat has very much enjoyed casual sex with around two dozen people. (S)he did not consider any as potential relationship partners. Indeed, (s)he hardly knew many of them and considered a few others unlikable though still sexually desirable. Additionally, Pat desired casual sex with many more such people but did not have the opportunity to act on these desires. Presently, (s)he continues to have these desires as a single person. However, (s)he has also enjoyed the experience of loving sex in romantic relationships.

Clearly, Pat does not “see sex in general as connected to emotional intimacy” (Weaver & Woollard 2008: 516), nor does (s)he see sex as “conceptually inseparable from the kind of emotional intimacy that is associated with” romantic love (Ibid. p. 515). Instead, Pat is “a person for whom sex and love are separable” (Woollard 2010: 7).

It is conceivable that if Pat got into a romantic relationship, (s)he could come to hold the separable or partially separable view. That is, Pat can enjoy making love because, for the reasons Weaver & Woollard give (§7.2.1), (s)he sees sex as having a significant role in the emotional intimacy of their romantic love; still, (s)he can also enjoy having casual sex with others, seeing such sex in a different category. But it is hard to see how Pat could come to hold the inseparable view, given their history of desiring and enjoying casual sex. Indeed, it seems (s)he would have to undergo a substantial change in their psycho-biological makeup regarding sex due to being in a romantic relationship. And, of course, it is even harder to see how people scoring higher on the sociosexuality scale could come to hold the inseparable view.

Weaver & Woollard may agree with these points. So let us now consider the following *casual and loving sex enjoyer low on the sociosexuality scale*:

Kit: Most of the sex Kit has had has been loving sex, but (s)he has *somewhat* enjoyed less than a handful of one-night stands and does appreciate some aspects of such casual sex that cannot be experienced in loving sex (e.g. novelty, an ego-boost). These casual encounters were all during periods of singledom and when (s)he had not had sex for

quite a while. Although Kit did not see any of these casual sex partners as having strong potential to be their relationship partner, (s)he did not firmly rule any of them out either. Also, in all cases, (s)he did spend at least a few hours talking to them before deciding to have sex with them. Beyond these encounters, Kit does not often desire casual sex or consume pornography.

Kit seems a more plausible candidate for the type of casual and loving sex enjoyer who, once in a romantic relationship, could hold the inseparable view. Indeed, regarding desires and behaviours, (s)he is not too far from being a lovmaker. So coming to hold the inseparable view once in a romantic relationship would not require a *substantial* change in their psycho-biological makeup regarding sex, like the kind someone like Pat would need.

Nevertheless, I am not entirely convinced that someone like Kit can come to hold the inseparable view. Given their past of enjoying casual sex – despite how limited it was – it is not clear how (s)he can become someone for whom sex is “conceptually inseparable from the kind of emotional intimacy that is associated with” romantic love. Indeed, what makes Kit no longer “a person for whom sex and love are separable”?

As mentioned, Weaver & Woollard do not discuss which kinds of people can hold each view. Consequently, they do not explain if and how people who have enjoyed casual sex can come to hold the inseparable view. So my scepticism remains.

I will now return to and amend the original question of this sub-section: what kinds of couples (i) need justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships, and (ii) can both hold the inseparable view? The two-way interpretation of Weaver & Woollard’s justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships can only work for such a couple.

As I have shown, a couple in which both partners are lovmakers would not qualify. Still, I *may* have identified some kinds of couples that qualify:

Partner 1	Partner 2
A casual and loving sex enjoyer low on the sociosexuality scale	A casual and loving sex enjoyer low on the sociosexuality scale
A casual and loving sex enjoyer low on the sociosexuality scale	A lovmaker

Table 2: Couples who may qualify for the two-way interpretation of Weaver & Woollard’s justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships

Indeed, we have seen reasons for thinking each kind of person in these “matches” can hold the inseparable view. Plus, since at least one partner in each “match” – the partner(s) low on the sociosexuality scale – can find value in casual extra-relationship sex, restricting sex to romantic relationships requires justification.

However, since I only believe it is *plausible* that such couples can hold the inseparable view, I must reach the following conclusion: it is unclear what kinds of couples the two-way interpretation of Weaver & Woollard’s justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships can apply to.

I will note other objections one might make against the two-way interpretation. Suppose this justification can only apply to the kinds of couples I have suggested. In that case, it may well only apply to a (very) limited number of couples: it is plausible that at least one partner in most relationships will be too high on the sociosexuality scale to hold the inseparable view (Schmitt 2005). Also, we might think that there are many couples for whom monogamy makes sense, yet at least one partner is too high on the sociosexuality scale to hold the inseparable view.

I will discuss these objections further in §7.3.1.3. However, having them in mind will help when discussing the one-way interpretation and comparing it to the two-way interpretation.

7.3.1.1.2 Unattractive implications for how we regard sexual infidelity

First, recall that, on the two-way interpretation, both partners need to hold the inseparable view for the restriction on sex to romantic relationships to be justified. Also, by ‘sexual infidelity’, I mean casual extra-relationship sex without the permission of the non-participating relationship partner.

Let us start by imagining:

Casandra and Ben: they have been in an infidelity-free monogamous relationship for two years, and both held the inseparable view during this time. But then, one day, shortly into the third year of their relationship, Casandra discovers that Ben has recently enjoyed engaging in sexual infidelity in the context of a one-night stand.

Ben’s enjoyment of this casual sex seems to entail that he could conceptually separate sex from emotional intimacy and, thus, did not hold the inseparable view at the time of cheating. Instead, it seems he held and continues to hold a *non*-inseparable view: i.e. the separable, partially

separable, or insignificant view, all of which are reasonable according to Weaver & Woollard.³⁵ Additionally, it seems he was previously mistaken to hold the inseparable view – it is as though he did not realise his ability to separate sex into different categories.

I say ‘it seems’ in each case because Weaver & Woollard may think someone can hold the inseparable view while also being capable of enjoying sexual infidelity. But if so, this is unclear; they must explain why this is possible. Without this explanation, it is reasonable for us to think that Ben’s enjoyment of sexual infidelity has the implications described. Indeed, recall that when explaining why casual extra-relationship sex can be reasonably hurtful when the inseparable view is held, Woollard (2010: 4) explained the cheater “implicitly denies that sex has the kind of significance that his partner understood it to have. He does not see sex as lovemaking.” So henceforth, I will generally assume Ben’s enjoyment of sexual infidelity does have the implications I have described. And I will explore the further implications this has, starting with the following: since Ben did not hold the inseparable view while cheating, the restriction on sex to romantic relationships was not justified then; therefore, he did not violate a *justified* restriction.

Of course, Ben’s sexual infidelity could hurt Casandra. But to what extent is Casandra’s hurt *reasonable*? She may be reasonably hurt by *peripheral* issues, such as Ben not communicating his (new) non-inseparable view of sex before cheating and cheating rather than finding an alternative solution. But how hurt can she be by the casual sex itself?

The answer partly depends on whether both partners must hold the inseparable view for either to feel reasonably hurt by casual extra-relationship sex. If we do, Casandra could not reasonably feel hurt by Ben’s casual sex itself. Indeed, after putting her feelings about the peripheral issues aside, it would make sense for her to be happy for him – he has discovered a new valuable hobby. But now suppose we think that an inseparable view-holding partner in a relationship can be reasonably hurt by their partner engaging in casual extra-relationship sex, even if we do not think a restriction on such sex is justified. In that case, Casandra could feel reasonably hurt by the casual sex itself. But this reasonable hurt should conflict with at least two other considerations. Firstly, the restriction on Ben engaging in casual extra-relationship sex was unjustified when he cheated, so perhaps she should regret that restriction. And since Ben has discovered a new source of value in his life, she should feel happy for him.

³⁵McKeever (2014: 183-184; 2020: 527) makes (somewhat) similar points.

Also, I specify that Ben *enjoyed* the sexual infidelity because if a partner who engages in sexual infidelity did not enjoy it, this could be because they held the inseparable view at the time. For example, the cheating may have been an unpleasant, drunken, and entirely regretful one-night stand.

In any case, Ben's sexual infidelity still entails he does not hold the inseparable view (anymore). Consequently, his monogamous relationship with Casandra is not justified (anymore). Thus, regardless of how (reasonably) hurt Casandra is by Ben's transgression, it very much seems that something needs to change. One option is to have a sexually open relationship, requiring Casandra to shift to the (partially) separable view. Another is to break up if neither can alter their view of sex.

However, these implications are unattractive. Firstly, in a justified monogamous relationship, it should clearly be the case that it is reasonable for a partner to be hurt by the other's enjoyment of sexual infidelity. And this hurt should not conflict with other feelings, such as regret over restricting casual extra-relationship sex and happiness for the cheating partner. Also, again in a justified monogamous relationship, a partner's enjoying sexual infidelity should not entail the partners' monogamy is no longer justified and that it is or may well be preferable for them to have a sexually open relationship instead. And if sexual infidelity leads to relationship termination, it should not be because the partners could not come to hold the same view of sex.

Given all these unattractive implications the two-way interpretation has for how we should regard sexual infidelity, we should see if the one-way interpretation fares better.

7.3.1.2 Assessing the one-way interpretation

7.3.1.2.1 What kinds of couples does it apply to?

On the one-way interpretation of Weaver & Woollard's justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships, at least one partner must hold the inseparable view. Consequently, it can apply to the following matches:

Partner 1	Partner 2
A lovemaker	A casual and loving sex enjoyer regardless of their level of sociosexuality
A casual and loving sex enjoyer low on the sociosexuality scale	A casual and loving sex enjoyer regardless of their level of sociosexuality

Table 3: Couples who may qualify for the one-way interpretation of Weaver & Woollard's justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships

In each match, at least Partner 1 holds the inseparable view. And, of course, in the case of the second match, we are granting the *plausible but questionable* claim that casual and loving sex enjoyers low on the sociosexuality scale can hold this view. Consequently, just as it is unclear

what kinds of couples the *two-way* interpretation can apply to, it is also unclear what kinds of couples the one-way interpretation can apply to.

Already, the one-way interpretation may seem more appealing because we can be far more confident that there actually are some real-world couples to whom it applies. Let me explain. The two-way interpretation required that at least one partner was a casual and loving sex enjoyer low on the sociosexuality scale (see Table 2) because if both were lovemakers, restricting casual sex would be redundant and not in need of justification (§7.3.1.1.1). But, as just noted, it is questionable whether casual and loving sex enjoyers low on the sociosexuality scale can hold the inseparable view. If they cannot, the justification would not apply to *any* couples.

However, in the case of the one-way interpretation, it allows for a relationship in which just a lovemaker holds the inseparable view. And, if any group can hold the inseparable view, it is lovemakers. Additionally, many people claim to be a lovemaker (see Perry 2022), and it is very likely at least some of them will be in a relationship with a casual and loving sex enjoyer. So assuming that at least some of these paired-up lovemakers can and do hold the inseparable view, we have real-world couples to whom the one-way interpretation of Weaver & Woollard's justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships applies.

Relatedly, suppose we grant that casual and loving sex enjoyers low on the sociosexuality scale can hold the inseparable view. In that case, the one-way interpretation has another advantage over the two-way interpretation: it can arguably apply to (far) many more real-world couples, perhaps even most. Indeed, consider and compare how many real-world couples are described by the "matches" listed in Table 2 and Table 3.

7.3.1.2.2 Implications for how we should regard sexual infidelity

The one-way interpretation seems to overcome the two-way interpretation's problems for how we should regard sexual infidelity. To understand why, let us first reconsider the case of *Cassandra and Ben*, but this time, let us imagine that, even before Ben's infidelity, Cassandra held the inseparable view while Ben did not. According to the one-way interpretation, Cassandra's holding of the inseparable view is enough to justify restricting sex to romantic relationships. So regardless of how Ben views sex, his sexual infidelity violates a justified rule. Consequently, his cheating does not have the unattractive implications it did on the two-way interpretation.

Firstly, there is no question about whether Cassandra can feel reasonably hurt by Ben's casual extra-relationship sex itself. Since she holds the inseparable view, she can! Indeed, Woollard (2017) believes – and Weaver presumably agrees – that this can make it difficult for her and Ben's "sexual intimacy to express and develop love in the future and can retrospectively undermine the

significance of previous lovemaking.” Also, because “sex can play such a central role in relationships of erotic love, this can be devastating” (Woollard 2017) and “deeply hurtful” (Woollard 2010: 4). Relatedly, there is no reason for this reasonable hurt to conflict with feelings of regret over the restriction or happiness for Ben.

Furthermore, since Ben’s transgression does not render their monogamy unjustified, it does not entail that it is or may well be preferable for him and Casandra to open up their relationship sexually. And suppose his cheating leads to them breaking up. In that case, it can be for reasons such as Casandra’s reasonable hurt being too painful for the relationship to continue and the risk of Ben causing her more such reasonable hurt by future transgressions. Such reasons for ending the relationship following sexual infidelity make far more sense than the partners being unable to come to hold the same view of sex, which was the implication of the two-way interpretation.

So the one-way interpretation seems preferable to the two-way interpretation. However, it still has various unattractive implications. These become evident when considering monogamous relationships where only one partner holds the inseparable view and how the one-way interpretation regards sexual infidelity on the part of that partner.

To start, we can reimagine the *Casandra and Ben* case:

*Casandra and Ben**: again, they are in a monogamous relationship, and Casandra holds the inseparable view, whereas Ben holds a non-inseparable view. However, this time, they have always been monogamously faithful to each other. But then, quite unexpectedly, Casandra engages in sexual infidelity and enjoys it. And, of course, she realises she can conceptually separate sex from emotional intimacy, distinguishing (significant) sex within the relationship from (casual) sex outside it. Thus, she no longer holds the inseparable view.

According to the one-way interpretation, Casandra and Ben’s restriction on sex to romantic relationships was justified when Casandra held the inseparable view. But what are its implications for how we should regard Casandra’s sexual infidelity? They are very similar to those of the *two-way* interpretation regarding Ben’s sexual infidelity (§7.3.1.1.2). First, since Casandra no longer held the inseparable view when she cheated, she did not violate a *justified* restriction: the restriction on sex to romantic relationships cannot be justified if neither partner holds the inseparable view. Also, Ben can be reasonably hurt by peripheral issues about Casandra’s cheating, including the fact that she has broken a rule that, effectively, only she wanted while he complied with it (at a cost to himself); still, the casual extra-relationship sex itself cannot

reasonably hurt him since he does not hold the inseparable view. So according to the one-way interpretation, only the partner(s) who hold the inseparable view can be reasonably hurt by casual extra-relationship sex itself! Also, after putting his feelings about the peripheral issues aside, it would make sense for him – and Casandra – to feel regret over the restriction on casual extra-relationship sex. Plus, he could reasonably feel happy for Casandra's discovery of her ability to conceptually separate significant sex from casual sex and enjoy the latter. Additionally, since the restriction on sex to romantic relationships is not justified (anymore), it is or may well be preferable for them to have a sexually open relationship.

These implications for how we should regard the inseparable view-holder's sexual infidelity are unattractive partly for the same reasons that the implications of the two-way interpretation for how we should regard sexual infidelity are (see §7.3.1.1.2). But the most glaring problem is that there is a *drastic* double standard for how we should regard the inseparable view-holder's (Casandra's) versus the non-inseparable view holder's (Ben's) sexual infidelity: the latter's violates a justified rule, undermines the past and future role of sex in the relationship, causes reasonable deep hurt and devastation, etc.; meanwhile, the former's cheating does not violate a justified rule, the casual extra-relationship sex itself cannot cause reasonable hurt to their partner, the transgression strongly indicates that the relationship structure needs to change, etc. Yet, the idea that there should be different standards regarding each partner's (potential) sexual infidelity is controversial. Furthermore, this drastic double standard seemingly favours the inseparable view-holding partner's (Casandra's) interests while being unfair to the non-inseparable view-holder (Ben).

The degree of seeming unfairness increases when we consider the following. The non-inseparable view-holder (Ben) presumably does not hold the inseparable view partly because they can enjoy casual sex. Also, (in most cases) they will presumably be (much) higher on the sociosexuality scale than their inseparable view-holding partner (Casandra). Indeed, the inseparable view-holding partner (Casandra) might be, or long considered themselves, a lovemaker. So, at least in most cases, the non-inseparable view-holder (Ben) is the only one sacrificing casual sex or their sacrifice of casual sex is (much) greater. And the long-term sacrifice of casual extra-relationship sex can be (very) demanding for many people capable of enjoying it, even having adverse effects on their health and other elements of their well-being (see Chapter 1 and Chapter 2). Thus, arguably, any casual extra-relationship they (Ben) engage in *itself* should cause their inseparable view-holding partner (Casandra) *less* reasonable hurt than their partner's (Casandra's) casual extra-relationship sex should cause them (Ben), all else being equal. This is partly because the non-inseparable view holder's (Ben's) transgression is much more understandable, and the restriction on casual sex they violated is a product of their partner's inseparable view of sex, not their non-inseparable

view. Yet, not only can the non-inseparable view-holder's (Ben's) sexual infidelity cause their partner reasonable deep hurt and devastation but any casual extra-relationship sex their inseparable view-holding partner (Casandra) has itself cannot reasonably hurt them (Ben).

Of course, the one-way interpretation only has all these unattractive implications if it is the case that a partner enjoying engaging in sexual infidelity entails that they did not hold the inseparable view at the time of cheating (and subsequently). §7.3.1.1.2 provided reasons to think this is the case and noted that if Weaver & Woollard think someone can hold the inseparable view while also being capable of enjoying sexual infidelity, they need to explain how this is possible.

7.3.1.2.3 The inseparable view holder's illusion

Another issue with the one-way interpretation is that in a relationship where only one partner holds the inseparable view, it demands that the inseparable view-holding partner has an illusionary understanding of their monogamous relationship.

Recall the original *Casandra and Ben* case – where Ben cheated – and the additional point that Casandra is the only one who holds the inseparable view. Next, let us remind ourselves of why, on the one-way interpretation, Casandra can feel reasonably hurt in response to Ben's sexual infidelity. Woollard (2010: 4) writes, “[i]n having sex without love, he implicitly denies that sex has the kind of significance that his partner understood it to have.” And she elaborates on this in later work:

If one lover has casual sex, the other lover can reasonably see this as undermining the role of sex in their relationship. You might think that having casual sex shows that he does not understand sex as intimately connected to love. In having casual sex, he has undertaken what to you is a very special, significant activity, deeply connected to love, without precisely this sense of love. You can see this as implicitly denying that what you do together is connected to love... Finding out that your lover has had casual sex can make it difficult for your sexual intimacy to express and develop love in the future and can retrospectively undermine the significance of previous lovemaking. Because sex can play such a central role in relationships of erotic love, this can be devastating (Woollard 2017).

Let us assume that these implications of Ben's casual extra-relationship sex are true. Now remember that, on the one-way interpretation, the restriction on sex to romantic relationships can be justified even if one of the partners does not hold the inseparable view. Therefore, it is

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acceptable that Ben does not hold the inseparable view and, thus, does not see sex as having the same kind of significance and intimate connection to love in the same way Casandra understands it to have. So, on this interpretation, the problem with Ben's sexual infidelity is not that he *holds* a non-inseparable view of sex but that this view is *revealed* to Casandra.

A notable observation here is that Casandra need not discover that Ben has engaged in casual extra-relationship sex for it to be revealed to her that he (highly likely) does not hold this view. She can gain this knowledge if she discovers sufficient evidence that he can enjoy and desires to engage in casual extra-relationship sex. Examples of such evidence include:

- Ben attempted to engage in sexual infidelity but failed to do so though not because he actually holds the inseparable view
- Ben enjoyed casual sex before their relationship and desired more such sex
- Ben has masturbated to hardcore pornography depicting casual sex before and during their relationship
- Ben expressed interest in having a sexually open relationship
- Ben explicitly told Casandra that he holds a non-inseparable view

The only relevant difference the absence of casual extra-relationship sex makes in all these cases is that there is room to doubt whether Ben could actually go through with it. Perhaps when trying to have casual sex, he would discover that sex is now a significant activity for him, deeply connected to his love for Casandra. But this (small) possibility is hardly enough to prevent Casandra from feeling reasonably hurt in the ways Woollard describes. At the very least, Casandra would be left with the realisation that it is *very likely* that Ben has undermined the role of sex in their relationship, does not understand it as intimately connected to love, and so on. And this could cause her reasonable hurt.

If Ben should avoid engaging in sexual infidelity (partly) because this will reveal his non-inseparable view to Casandra, he should also take other necessary steps to avoid this revelation. These can include keeping his masturbation habits private, not sharing his history of casual sex, not telling her his views about sex, etc. And if Ben successfully hides his non-inseparable view from Casandra, she will not experience any of the reasonable hurt Woollard describes. Meanwhile, the restriction on sex to romantic relationships will still be justified on the one-way interpretation because she holds the inseparable view.

However, in this situation, the inseparable view-holding partner (Casandra) has an illusory understanding of their monogamous relationship. Indeed, she falsely believes she and her partner both hold the inseparable view. Worse still, the non-inseparable view-holding partner (Ben)

cannot be open and honest about their thoughts, feelings, desires, behaviours, and history regarding (casual) sex. So insofar as we believe it is desirable or necessary for partners to accurately understand their monogamy and be open and honest with each other about their sexuality, this outcome is a (critical) issue for the one-way interpretation.

In response, one might plausibly argue the following. First, it is merely desirable – not necessary – for partners to accurately understand their monogamy and be open and honest with each other about their sexuality. Thus, a situation like Casandra and Ben’s is merely undesirable. However, this does not render the restriction on sex to romantic relationships unjustified. Indeed, there can be undesirable outcomes with other justifications for monogamy people (standardly) offer. For example, a couple ultimately might be monogamous to avoid the difficulty of managing jealousy; still, at least one partner might not think about this (often), and one or both might hide their thoughts, feelings, desires, behaviours, and history regarding (casual) sex. So why should we demand that Weaver & Woollard’s justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships does not produce the undesirable situation I have described?

My response to this challenge, in short, is that the *kind* of justification Weaver & Woollard seek would not accept such an undesirable situation. I support this response in Chapter 9 when I argue that, partly for this reason, the one-way interpretation of the justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships is not the kind Weaver & Woollard seek. (I also argue the two-way interpretation plausibly is.)

7.3.1.3 A summary and preliminary verdict

Table 4 summarises the issues identified. (Conclusions that I will defend in Chapter 9 are denoted with a ‘*’.)

	Strengths	Weaknesses
The two-way interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The kind of justification Weaver & Woollard seem to seek* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unclear what kinds of couples it applies to - Potentially applies to a (very) limited number of couples - Potentially does not apply to many couples whose monogamy is very plausibly justified - Seems to have unattractive implications for how we should regard sexual infidelity
The one-way interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Much more likely to apply to real-world couples - Potentially applies to many more couples - Avoids some of the unattractive implications the two-way interpretation seems to have for how we should regard sexual infidelity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Still unclear what kinds of couples it applies to - Still seems to have unattractive implications for how we should regard sexual infidelity - Demands that the inseparable view-holding partner has an illusionary understanding of their monogamy - Not the kind of justification Weaver & Woollard seem to seek*

Table 4: A comparative summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the one-way and two-way interpretations of Weaver & Woollard's justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships

Nevertheless, we do not have sufficient reasons to reject their justification altogether. Weaver & Woollard can accept that their justification has the limitations and unattractive implications I have explained. Still, they might argue that these are not as bad as they initially seem and/or do not ultimately undermine their justification.

I will explain how they might do this regarding the two-way interpretation. First, Weaver & Woollard could acknowledge that it has the (unattractive) implications I identified for how we

should regard sexual infidelity. However, they could highlight that many, if not most, couples who both hold the inseparable view will continue doing so, and neither will engage in casual extra-relationship sex. So, for these couples, the restriction on sex to romantic relationships will always be justified as per their justification. Furthermore, Weaver & Woollard might say it is a strength of their account that if one partner no longer holds the inseparable view (as evidenced by their enjoying sexual infidelity), the restriction on sex to romantic relationships is no longer justified. Additionally, they could welcome the point that their justification potentially applies to a (very) limited number of couples. Indeed, they could very plausibly claim that, given various realities about human sexuality, a restriction on sex to romantic relationships is, indeed, only justifiable for a (small) minority of couples. And they could plausibly add that monogamy would be extra special for these couples, given how relatively few can enjoy such a justified monogamous relationship.

Given these potential responses, I do not think we can ultimately reject the two-way interpretation. And this will remain my conclusion even after my discussion in Chapter 9. However, regarding the one-way interpretation, Chapter 9 will argue that, even if it does work, it is not the kind of justification Weaver & Woollard seek.

I will now turn to another objection to their justification for monogamy, one that focuses primarily on their justification for restricting the number of relationships to one. But since I do not believe we can outright reject Weaver & Woollard's justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships when I discuss this next objection, I will assume that this first part of their justification works.

7.3.2 Romantic relationships requiring relatively little resources

Weaver & Woollard's aim is to explain why it can make sense for a couple to completely restrict each other's access to casual extra-relationship sex and additional romantic relationships. But the kinds of extra-relationship relations they discuss are:

- A. Casual extra-relationship sex
- B. Additional romantic relationships that require *substantial* resources (e.g. time, energy, and emotion), even "giving the other person, and the relationship, a fundamental role in shaping one's behaviour" (p. 517) and are thus demanding

Their justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships (§7.2.1) rules out A, and their justification for restricting the number of romantic relationships to one (§7.2.2) rules out B.

Of course, A is what they aimed to discuss, so that is unproblematic. But B does not cover the full range of additional romantic relationships because it is possible to have:

- C. Additional romantic relationships that require *relatively little* resources and do *not* involve “giving the other person, and the relationship, a fundamental role in shaping one’s behaviour” (p. 517) and are thus *not* demanding

Here are some examples of couples in which one has or wants such an additional relationship:

Scott and Rebecca: They are a couple who live in the U.K. and have been happy together for three years. Rebecca decides to volunteer in Africa for two months. During her placement, Rebecca meets Casey, a co-volunteer from Australia. They develop a mutual crush and, thus, want a short-term, romantic, emotionally intimate, and sexual relationship involving dinners, day trips, holding hands, cuddling, intimate conversations, and nights sleeping in each other’s arms, among other such activities. But it will end when she returns to the U.K.

Paul and Diana: Diana is a U.S.-based long-haul pilot. Sometimes she has a three or four-night stopover in Paris, where Rowan lives. If Rowan is free when Diana visits, they stay together at Diana’s hotel. Not only do they have sex, but they are also emotionally intimate, enjoying the same activities that Rebecca and Casey wish to do – cuddling, dinner dates, etc. Diana and Rowan do not want a long-term relationship and would not say they are *in love*. Still, they would say that they love and care for each other. But between Diana’s stopovers in Paris, they have little communication beyond Diana notifying Rowan of her next visit.

Bill and Melinda: They are married, but Bill spends a long romantic, emotionally intimate, and sexually active weekend – enjoying the same activities that Rebecca & Casey and Diana & Rowan (wish to) do – with his ex-girlfriend at her beach house once a year. Bill and his ex want these weekends together because although their relationship did not work out, they still have a mutual sexual and romantic attraction that they want to act on occasionally. Besides their annual stay, Bill and his ex spend less than five hours communicating per year via messaging, email, and (video) calls, and they do not see each other in person.³⁶

³⁶ This scenario is based on the past marriage of Bill and Melinda Gates (López 2021).

With Weaver & Woollard's description of monogamy in mind, we should ask, which component do these additional relations violate: the restriction of sex to romantic relationships or the restriction of the number of romantic relationships to one? I believe the additional relation described in each example counts as a romantic relationship and, thus, violates the latter restriction.

So, for now, let us reconsider the *core* of Weaver & Woollard's justification for restricting the number of romantic relationships to one:

To share a life with another is rewarding, but demanding. It requires giving the other person, and the relationship, a fundamental role in shaping one's behaviour. Substantial investments of time, energy, and emotion must be put into the marriage if it is to be successful. For many, it will be impossible to sustain this kind of commitment to more than one person at a time (2008: 517).

These points very plausibly explain why many couples can justifiably restrict relationships requiring *substantial* resources – i.e. Bs. However, their points do not apply to the kinds of extra-relationship relations described in the above cases – the examples of Cs. Of course, we may say that Rebecca, Diana, and Bill devote much time, energy, and effort to their additional partners. But this is only for a one-off short period or (very) occasional short periods. When considering their life with their primary partner (per year), the amount of resources they dedicate to their other relationships is relatively small – much less than they might dedicate to various non-romantic relationships and projects. And they are not giving their other partners a fundamental role in shaping their behaviour, and their relationships with them need not be demanding. Furthermore, we can easily imagine that Rebecca, Diana, and Bill have (more than) enough time, energy, and emotion for their primary relationships – and various non-romantic relationships and projects – outside of their *limited* time with their additional partners.

So Weaver & Woollard's justification for restricting the number of romantic relationships to one does not explain why we should restrict additional romantic relationships that require *relatively little* resources. But a successful justification for monogamy must explain why a restriction on such relationships is warranted since they indisputably violate monogamy. Therefore, Weaver & Woollard have not provided a successful justification for monogamy.

7.3.2.1 Some possible responses

There are some ways Weaver & Woollard might respond to this objection, but none are convincing.

7.3.2.1.1 A step on the road

Let us assume Weaver & Woollard have successfully argued that there are couples for whom it makes sense to forgo Bs to protect the relationship. In that case, they could argue that it is reasonable for these couples to restrict Cs because there is a high risk that they will ultimately be a step on the road to a B, even when that was never the intention. Thus, it makes sense for such a couple to be romantically exclusive.

But this response is unsatisfactory. Of course, we can easily believe that many Cs are at a high risk of developing into a B, giving many couples a solid reason to restrict Cs that incur this risk.

However, Weaver & Woollard would need to defend the contentious claim that *all* cases of C are at a high risk of developing into B. Because if there are instances of C with a sufficiently low risk of developing into B – let us refer to such relationships as ‘C*’ – their justification for monogamy provides no reason for avoiding it.

Whether C*s are possible is, of course, an empirical question. I believe they are, but some may be sceptical. The examples of Cs I provides earlier (i.e. Rebecca’s, Diana’s, and Bill’s) will hopefully help these sceptics to realise the possibility of C*. In addition, I would highlight that Cs that do not lead to Bs seem pretty common in polyamorous communities (Taormino 2008; Anapol 2010; Rickert & Veaux 2014; Hardy & Easton 2017). Also, some people in happy relationships have one or more affairs that go undiscovered (for a long time) because they do not take up too many resources (Perel 2017) – if the affair(s) required substantial resources, the cheated-on partner would have discovered it (sooner).

7.3.2.1.2 Romantic relationships requiring relatively little resources are rare

Weaver & Woollard could concede the possibility of C*. They could also acknowledge that their justification for monogamy fails to explain why it makes sense for partners to forgo C*. However, they could claim that opportunities for C* are rare. If they are correct, they can claim that they have demonstrated why it is reasonable for many couples to restrict each other from the vast majority of potential opportunities for extra-relationship sex and love. So, assuming such partners abide by *justified* restrictions *only*, they could, *in theory*, engage in C*. However, *in practice*, most such partners would act monogamously.

This response assumes that Weaver & Woollard have successfully demonstrated why it makes sense for some/many couples to restrict A and B. But even granting this assumption, this response is inadequate. The closest relationship arrangement to monogamy that Weaver & Woollard would have shown can be justified is:

Polyamory permitting low-resource love: two people are primary partners. Neither is permitted to engage in casual extra-relationship sex. However, they can each enjoy additional romantic relationships that require relatively little resources and have a sufficiently low risk of developing to the point of requiring substantial resources.

However, this would be insufficient for those who desire monogamy: even if it is unlikely that their partner or them will have the opportunity for C*, they would still want a mutual requirement to forgo such relationships in case the opportunity arises. And, of course, falling short of justifying monogamy would mean that Weaver & Woollard did not answer their challenge to monogamy as they intended.

Remember, my reply grants that opportunities for C*s are rare. So insofar as this claim is wrong, polyamory permitting low-resource love will be even further away from monogamy *in practice*.

7.3.2.1.3 Relations requiring relatively little resources are not romantic relationships

Another way for Weaver & Woollard to defend their justification for monogamy is to deny that C – and, by extension, C* – including all my examples, count as *romantic* relationships. Therefore, such relations do *not* violate the second restriction in monogamy – the restriction of the number of romantic relationships to one. Instead, such relations violate the first restriction in monogamy – the restriction of sexual activity to romantic relationships. So, assuming their justification for this first restriction is correct, they have provided a successful justification for restricting C.

This response seems to have an implausible implication: what I have described as C and the examples I provided (e.g. Rebecca and Casey) should be considered instances of casual sex. But these examples cannot be considered casual sex on any reasonable conception.

Nevertheless, we should not dismiss the response that romantic relationships requiring relatively little resources are not, in fact, romantic relationships. Weaver & Woollard might think or could revise their account to claim that while Cs do not count as romantic relationships, they also do not count as instances of casual sex. Instead, Cs are somewhere in-between. Indeed, Weaver & Woollard could think of them as ‘semi-casual relationships’ or ‘semi-romantic relationships’. Next, Weaver & Woollard could argue that their justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships also restricts semi-romantic/semi-casual relationships – and, thus, Cs – because they are instances of sex occurring outside the context of a romantic relationship.

Suppose Weaver & Woollard thought that their justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships ruled out not just casual sex but also semi-romantic/semi-casual relationships. In

that case, this was unclear because, at many points, they discuss how it can be reasonable for partners to see a connection between sex and *emotional intimacy* and feel hurt if their partner has sex without *emotional intimacy* (e.g. 2008: 515-517).³⁷ Meanwhile, sex within a C does involve emotional intimacy. So it follows that Weaver & Woollard's justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships does not explain why a person can be reasonably hurt if their partner has sex within a C/semi-romantic/semi-casual relationship. Thus, their justification gives no valid reason for restricting such sex.

However, Weaver & Woollard also make some statements suggesting their justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships ruled out not just casual sex but also semi-romantic/semi-casual relationships. For example, at one point, they explain that a person can be reasonably hurt if their partner has sex without "the kind of emotional intimacy *that is associated with erotic love*" (p. 515) [emphasis added]. And earlier in their paper, they explained that "[b]y 'erotic love' we simply mean the kind of *deep* emotional intimacy *found in successful marriages and other serious sexual relationships*" (2008: 508) [emphasis added]. So perhaps their justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships was intended not just to rule out casual sex but any sex without this kind of *deep* emotional intimacy. Weaver and Woollard can then claim that this includes any sex occurring within Cs since, although they involve emotional intimacy, they do not involve this kind of *deep* emotional intimacy, nor are Cs *serious* sexual relationships.

This approach would be controversial. Indeed, many people – particularly among those who practice polyamory – will object to the idea that Cs are not serious sexual relationships involving deep emotional intimacy. So, of course, there are complicated philosophical questions to address: what counts as *deep* emotional intimacy? When is a sexual relationship *serious*? And so on. But on such questions, Weaver & Woollard only explain that "[a]lthough erotic love is difficult to analyse, one can recognise paradigm cases" (p. 508). Yet, in polyamory communities, Cs like Rebecca's, Diana's, and Bill's will be considered paradigmatic cases of additional relationships of erotic love (Taormino 2008; Anapol 2010; Rickert & Veaux 2014; Hardy & Easton 2017). So if Weaver & Woollard intend for their justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships to rule out not just casual sex but also Cs/semi-romantic/semi-casual relationships, they have much conceptual work to do.

However, suppose we accept this interpretation or revised version of Weaver & Woollard's justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships *and* grant that Cs are not romantic relationships. Even in that case, a critical problem remains: people can have *sexless* romantic

³⁷ Also, Woollard (2010; 2017) talks only of this restriction forbidding casual extra-relationship sex.

relationships that require relatively little resources – i.e. ‘C without sex’. Indeed, we can imagine the additional relationships of Rebecca, Diana, and Bill without any sex but still with activities like dinner dates, day trips, holding hands, cuddling, intimate conversations, and nights sleeping in each other’s arms. Such relationships may be harder to imagine, and they might seem undesirable. But they are theoretically possible. Of course, Weaver and Woollard can plausibly argue that many/most Cs without sex are at high risk of developing into Cs with sex. But we can imagine ‘Cs with sufficiently low risk of sex’. Examples include long-distance online relationships and relationships in which the partners cannot have sex together for health reasons.

Weaver & Woollard’s justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships does not explain why Cs with sufficiently low risk of sex can reasonably be restricted. But, of course, such Cs still violate monogamy. Thus, any successful justification for monogamy should explain why it is justifiable to restrict them.

Here we have granted the (controversial) claim that Cs are not romantic relationships. And we have granted the (controversial) alternative interpretation/revised version of Weaver & Woollard’s justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships: that it restricts any sex without “the kind of deep emotional intimacy found in successful marriages and other serious sexual relationships” (p. 508). Nevertheless, we do not find any explanation in their justification for why C with sufficiently low risk of sex can reasonably be restricted. So Weaver & Woollard’s justification for monogamy is still unsuccessful even when granting these (controversial) claims.

7.3.2.2 A verdict on relationships requiring relatively little resources

A successful justification for monogamy should explain why a restriction on romantic relationships requiring relatively little resources is justified. Weaver & Woollard’s justification fails to do this. Thus, we have at least one compelling reason for concluding that they have not succeeded in explaining how monogamy can be justified.

7.4 A summary of, and some conclusions on, Weaver & Woollard

Weaver & Woollard believe monogamy requires justification, in short, because of its restrictions on the value that can be experienced in extra-relationship sex and love. After rejecting various justifications for it, they offer their own, which they summarise as follows:

[The] acceptance of the norm of monogamy makes sense under three conditions: (1) the couple responds to the value of sex within the marriage by seeing *all* sexual activity as having a special significance; (2) the spouses’ needs for erotic love are fulfilled by the relationship; and (3) the relationship is sufficiently important to justify accepting

restrictions to protect it. Condition (1) is necessary to justify the restriction of sexual activity to significant relationships of erotic love. Conditions (2) and (3) are necessary to justify restricting the spouses to a single relationship of erotic love (2008: 520).

And Weaver & Woollard believe it makes sense for partners to be in an open relationship when these conditions do not apply. So, like me, they believe both monogamy and consensual nonmonogamy can be ethical choices.

Still, their perspective on *how* monogamy can be justified contradicts mine significantly, and I believe there are significant problems with their justification. One is that, in its current form, it does not explain how partners can justify restricting each other's access to romantic relationships requiring relatively little resources. Thus, they need to develop it so that it overcomes this problem. Additionally, I have identified several issues with their justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships. However, these issues are based on my understanding of their justification, which may be incorrect due to a lack of clarity and gaps in their presentation. Thus, at least some of these criticisms may miss the mark.³⁸ However, even if my criticisms are on target, they do not give us sufficient reasons to outright reject this part of their justification. As I will further argue in Chapter 9, the two-way interpretation of it – which requires that *both* partners hold the inseparable view – is plausible. In any case, my critical analysis of their entire justification demonstrates that much clarification, elaboration, development, and arguably revision is required before we can deem it a successful justification for monogamy.

³⁸ Similar points may apply to McKeever's critiques of this part of their justification

Chapter 8 McKeever on monogamy's (in)compatibility with romantic love

§8.1 presents Natasha McKeever's challenge to monogamy. §8.2 explains her justification for a romantically exclusive relationship between two people. §8.3 evaluates it. Then §8.4 presents her justification for sexual exclusivity, which §8.5 evaluates. Finally, §8.6 concludes the chapter. As with Weaver & Woollard's justification, I expose numerous critical issues across both parts of McKeever's justification and demonstrate that much development, elaboration, and revision of her justification is required before we can accept it.

8.1 McKeever on monogamy's *prima facie* incompatibility with romantic love

McKeever (2014) argues there are reasons to consider monogamy incompatible with romantic love. Normally, our love for someone is not conditional on them being wholly restricted to certain things typically considered to have value. Yet, monogamous partners do this when forbidding each other from additional sexual and romantic relationships. She highlights that in non-romantic loving relationships (e.g. friendships), we generally do not impose total and mutual restrictions on forming other such relationships. Furthermore:

[U]sually when we love someone we want to increase the amount of value in their lives, not restrict it. Similarly...we expect a romantic relationship to be enjoyable and add value to our lives; therefore it is odd that we would accept, and even desire, such a restriction (2014: 171).³⁹

Consequently, those who desire and value monogamy must explain its compatibility with romantic love.

McKeever argues against various justifications for monogamy, including:

- Explicit arguments for *monogamism* (e.g. Kant 1969; Wreen 1986; Finnis 2008; Geach 2008; Scruton 2001)
- The policy of sexual exclusivity is good for protecting the relationship

³⁹ Here she focuses on sexual exclusivity, but my understanding is that the point would also apply to romantic exclusivity.

- Various appeals to jealousy, including something like the difficulty of managing jealousy justification

She then offers her own justification, the first part of which I shall now relay.

8.2 McKeever on the distinct value of a two-person relationship

To explain why the romantic exclusivity aspect of monogamy can be compatible with romantic love, McKeever (2014: 142-149) gives two broad reasons in favour of the distinct value of a two-person romantic relationship. First, such a relationship has many practical benefits. Second, “there is value in sharing an exclusive romantic relationship in itself, in that it affirms your unique importance” (p. 142). I will unpack each in turn.

8.2.1.1 Practical benefits

McKeever’s emphasis on the practical benefits of a two-person romantic relationship is similar to Weaver & Woollard’s focus on the difficulty of sustaining multiple romantic relationships simultaneously (§7.2.2). Indeed, McKeever thinks that:

[A]s romantic love involves sharing one’s identity with one’s beloved, it requires a lot of effort, time, emotional investment and commitment. It requires detailed attention to, and knowledge of, the beloved in order to care for them effectively and share their life (p. 143).

Consequently, when entering a romantic relationship, a person typically has to make sacrifices in other areas (e.g. social life and hobbies). And the more romantic relationships a person has, the more such sacrifices they will have to make, and at least some will likely involve the first relationship. So avoiding these sacrifices are practical benefits of a two-person relationship.

Another practical benefit is that it is easier to share one’s life with just one person. Consider, for example, a situation in which there are five romantic partners all involved together. Each could have a romantic relationship with all four other “members”. Indeed, they may all live together. Alternatively, it could be that they are all part of a “relationship network”: for example, Jack and Jill may be primary partners, but only Jack has a relationship with Alice, only Jill has a relationship with Alex, and both Jack and Jill have a relationship with Freya. In either case, there are several holiday preferences to consider, several sets of parents to take care of, several parenting goals to weigh up, etc.

In addition, McKeever thinks a two-person romantic relationship can offer the practical benefit of greater potential for intimacy:

[I]ntimacy may be lost when relationships are opened up. As Robert Gerstein [1978: 76] notes, part of what makes intimate relationships intimate is that the people within them share information they share with no-one else, some of which will be the nature of the relationship itself. Intimacy is a 'zero-sum game' in that, if Jason tells his friend Hannah everything that he tells Matilda, and does all of the same things with Hannah that he does with Matilda, his and Matilda's relationship will be less intimate than it would be if he shared things with Matilda only. It is not possible to have intimate relationships at all if you share everything with everyone and often the more secret, private and exclusive an activity or conversation is, the more intimate it is. Thus, the intimacy of non-exclusive relationships may not be as strong as the intimacy of exclusive relationships...

Gerstein makes another interesting observation though that intimacy requires total immersion in what you're doing, a feeling of 'losing yourself'. He argues that we cannot immerse ourselves in this way when we feel like we're being observed. This is because when we're being observed we cannot help but see our experience from the point of view of the observer, and thus we become detached from our actions, perceiving them but feeling independent of them [1978: 77-79]. When there are more than two people in a relationship, there will always be an observer of sorts, though they will not always be physically present. Unless all of the people in the relationship share all of their intimate experiences together, there will always be at least one person who is not directly involved in the intimate experience but who perceives it from the outside. For example, if Jason and Matilda have sex or a very intimate conversation, Jason might think that Matilda will tell one of the other members of their relationship, or he might feel obliged to share their intimate moment with the others, and consequently he might find himself less able to lose himself in their moment. Even if neither of them tells the other members of the relationship about their intimacy, even knowing that this is perhaps what they ought to do can be enough to make them feel like they are being observed (p. 145).

8.2.1.2 Value in exclusivity in itself from the affirmation of unique importance

McKeever also argues there is value in a two-person romantic relationship in itself because it can affirm the unique importance of the partners. She thinks that if your partner chooses you as someone to share an exclusive romantic relationship with – and, thus, share their life and identity with – you can reasonably feel like your "life and identity are worth something, indeed that they

are deeply significant to someone else” (p. 146). Furthermore, you are worth enough for your partner to pay the required attention to appreciate your unique value.

McKeever draws on the ideas of Christopher Bennett (2006), who suggests that your partner wants to make you uniquely important to them. Bennett also argues that being recognised is a fundamental human need and that romantic love may be the only context within which our entire life is recognised as important. In other contexts, we are only recognised as important for particular skills and contributions (e.g. being a good drummer, being empathetic). Although valuable, this “does not make us feel that our life, in all its details, is worthwhile” (McKeever 2014: 147) in the same way having someone choose us for an exclusive two-person romantic relationship can.

McKeever thinks that love from our family members cannot affirm our unique importance in this way because they did not choose us and “would have loved anyone in our position” (p. 147). Nor does she think our friends can since they only deem us good enough to be one of many people with whom to enjoy a friendship and share *certain aspects* of life – they do not choose us as someone to share their entire life and identity with. In contrast, your partner choosing you as the only person with whom they want to have a romantic relationship “suggests that you are good enough to be *the only one* to occupy this very important role” (p. 147).

8.3 Has McKeever justified romantic exclusivity?

8.3.1 Relationships requiring relatively little resources

McKeever’s justification contains many intriguing and persuasive points but faces at least one significant problem: like Weaver & Woollard’s justification, it cannot justify restricting additional romantic relationships that require relatively little resources.

Others may argue against (some of) the sources of value McKeever believes a two-person romantic relationship provides. But I will not deny that such a relationship provides them. Indeed, I happily grant that an open relationship that allows for

- B. Additional romantic relationships that require *substantial* resources (e.g. time, energy, and emotion), even “giving the other person, and the relationship, a fundamental role in shaping one’s behaviour” (Weaver & Woollard 2008: 517) and are thus demanding

will compromise these sources of value. Thus, I am strongly inclined to agree that it is reasonable for many couples to restrict such additional relationships for this reason.

However, a two-person romantic relationship is not the *only* kind in which partners can experience these sources of value. They can also be experienced in an open relationship that does not permit B but does allow for the following kind of extra-relationship relation (in addition to casual extra-relationship sex):

- C. Additional romantic relationships that require *relatively little* resources and do *not* involve “giving the other person, and the relationship, a fundamental role in shaping one’s behaviour” (Weaver & Woollard 2008: 517) and are thus *not* demanding

Consider the following polyamorous couple:

Gerald and Daisy: they are married, and neither intends to marry anyone else. They live together and will never have any non-family members live with them. And they only want to have and raise children with each other. Indeed, Gerald and Daisy plan to share their lives with each other and no one else. However, they are both allowed to engage in casual extra-relationship sex in certain circumstances and to have additional romantic relationships that require relatively little resources, including the following: short-term flings when travelling abroad independently; one or two independent date nights a month with an additional partner with minimal contact in between; and sometimes spending time together with a person with whom they both have a relationship.

At least some polyamorous couples in the real world seem to have (something like) this kind of arrangement (see Taormino 2008; Anapol 2010; Rickert & Veaux 2014; Hardy & Easton 2017).

The possibility and existence of such polyamorous couples present a significant issue for McKeever’s justification: they can often experience the same practical benefits she suggests are unique to two-person romantic relationships. First, Gerald and Daisy are not devoting substantial resources to their additional relationships. Consequently, these additional relationships would not necessarily result in them making significant sacrifices in other areas of their life, including their primary relationship with each other – at least no more than other non-romantic relationships and projects would. Second, each also enjoys the ease of sharing their life with just one person. Indeed, as they limit the development of their additional romantic relationships, they do not have to involve their additional partners in their holiday plans and parenting goals, nor do they have to visit these partners’ parents. Third, Gerald and Daisy’s polyamorous arrangement need not result in them losing any more intimacy than that which is lost by many monogamous couples’ allowance of close friendships and familial relations as well as sessions with therapists. Indeed, Gerald and Daisy could choose to share some information – including that regarding their relationship – only with each other, just as monogamous couples could. Indeed, because their

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outside romantic relationships are intentionally limited, there need not be any pressure to tell their additional partners everything they tell each other and share all the same experiences with them. And finally, since their additional partners do not share even much of their life with them – indeed, some are only around for a short time – it seems Gerald and Daisy could lose themselves in the manner intimacy may require without feeling that there will always be some kind of observer. At the very least, it is hard to understand why they would necessarily be any more observed and, thus, limited in their ability to be intimate than a monogamous couple who are intimate – though not in any sexual manner – with various friends, family members, and therapists.

In addition to these practical benefits, polyamorous couples like Gerald and Daisy could feel that their relationship style affirms their unique importance in the manner McKeever suggests a two-person romantic relationship can. The cornerstone of the argument for why the latter possesses this source of value is that each is the only one the other chooses to share their life and identity with. But this choice is the one that polyamorous couples like Gerard and Daisy have made. Indeed, they have chosen each other as the only person they wish to live with (aside from family members), marry, have children with, and share their life. Thus, they could each reasonably feel like their “life and identity are worth something, indeed that they are deeply significant to someone else” (p. 146). And by each choosing the other as the “*only one* to occupy this very important role” (p. 147), they could fulfil any basic human need in each other to have their entire life recognised as uniquely important.

To explain why monogamy’s restriction on additional romantic relationships can be compatible with romantic love, McKeever has attempted to identify various sources of value that can only be experienced in a two-person romantic relationship. If she has, it can make sense for many people to have such a relationship rather than allow for additional romantic relationships since it is in their interests to experience these sources of value rather than those that having multiple romantic partners can provide.

However, I have demonstrated that partners like Gerald and Daisy, who practice a style of polyamory that restricts additional romantic relationships requiring substantial resources, can also experience the sources of value McKeever claimed were distinct to a two-person romantic relationship. And, of course, such polyamorous couples also experience the value found in their additional relationships.

Therefore, if it is in a couple's interests to experience the sources of value that McKeever identifies – the practical benefits and value in exclusivity itself from the affirmation of unique importance – they should have the kind of polyamorous arrangement I have described since it enables them to experience these sources of value *and* the value in additional romantic relationships requiring relatively little resources. Indeed, they have no successful justification for restricting each other's access to such additional relationships.

However, a successful justification for monogamy should explain why a restriction on additional romantic relationships requiring relatively little resources is warranted. So since McKeever's justification does not do that, she has not provided a successful justification for monogamy.

8.3.2 Some possible responses

McKeever could try to respond to this objection like I suggested Weaver & Woollard could (see §7.3.2.1). Indeed, she could claim that Cs are at high risk of developing into Bs, even if that was not the initial intention. However, as I argued earlier, there can be C*s – Cs with a sufficiently low risk of developing into Bs. Of course, she could argue that opportunities for C*s are rare. So the partners seeking to enjoy the sources of value she identifies in her justification will, *in practice*, generally act monogamously regarding romantic love. Still, *in theory*, they could have additional romantic relationships requiring relatively little resources, which would be insufficient for those who desire monogamy. Also, insofar as opportunities for C*s are not rare, their relationship will be even further away from a two-person romantic relationship in practice.

However, McKeever is in a stronger position than Weaver & Woollard to deny that Cs – and, by extension, C*s – are romantic relationships. Indeed, she provides far more analysis of what romantic love is, and, in the process, she argues that what makes it distinct from friendship is that “we share our identity and our life with our romantic lover in a fuller, more committed, more well-defined way” (p. 149). I do not have the space to engage with her conceptual analysis of romantic love, nor do I need to. Indeed, we could grant that McKeever has shown that Cs are not romantic relationships. But she still needs to show why a restriction on them can be compatible with romantic love. So she would have to contend that her justification for sexual exclusivity – which §8.4 discusses – achieves this.

There are a few issues with this strategy. As §8.5 argues, there are numerous issues with McKeever's justification for sexual exclusivity. And even if it works, it arguably only applies to a (tiny) minority of couples. Moreover, even if we grant that her justification for sexual exclusivity works for many couples, various problems remain. First, as McKeever explains (p. 189), this justification will not apply to all couples because at least some people will find more value in the

freedom to engage in extra-relationship sex than in being sexually exclusive. But in the case of couples for whom romantic exclusivity is justified but sexual exclusivity is not, there is no justification for restricting Cs. The upshot is that *sexually* open relationships that allow for casual extra-relationship sex but forbid Cs – which, by my definition, is *all* sexually open relationships – cannot be justified on McKeever’s account. Yet, McKeever (presumably) agrees that (such) sexually open relationships are compatible with romantic love.

Second, there is a significant problem for those couples for whom (i) her justification for sexual exclusivity *does* work and (ii) it is in their interests to experience the sources of value that McKeever claims are unique to a two-person romantic relationship. They can restrict each other from engaging in the following kinds of additional relations: A (which, recall, is casual extra-relationship sex), B, and *sexually active* C. But they cannot restrict C without sex – or, at least, C with sufficiently low risk of sex. As §7.3.2.1.3 explained, such relationships might seem undesirable. Still, they are possible, some people seem to have them, and – most importantly – they violate monogamy, meaning that any successful justification for monogamy should explain why it is justifiable to restrict them. So since neither part of McKeever’s justification explains why restricting them is justifiable, she has not justified monogamy.

In response, McKeever could argue that Cs without sex are, in fact, merely friendships. And since monogamy does not forbid the partners from having additional friendships, a successful justification for monogamy does not need to show why restricting Cs without sex is justified.

There are a few problems with this. Firstly, if Cs without sex are merely friendships, then Cs with sex are just a case of friends-with-benefits – a casual sexual relationship. Yet, recall these examples of Cs (detailed in §7.3.2):

Rebecca and Casey: the 2-month fling in Africa.

Diana and Rowan: who sometimes enjoy short stays together when Diana’s work brings her to Paris, where Rowan lives.

Bill and his ex-girlfriend: who stay at the latter’s beach house once a year but do not see each other in person and communicate little in between.

As discussed in §7.3.2.1.3, these could not be described as instances of casual sex. And if an open relationship permitted such relations, we would consider it polyamorous, not a sexually open relationship.

Also, let us imagine – again – these cases *without* sex but still with dinner dates, holding hands, cuddling, intimate conversations, and nights sleeping in each other’s arms, among other activities

associated with romantic relationships. We would *not* consider such cases of C without sex merely friendships. Perhaps we might think they are not romantic relationships either. Instead, we may deem them semi-romantic/semi-casual relationships. In any case, we would consider them a violation of monogamy. Indeed, this is why people in a monogamous relationship can be hurt by their partner having an affair, even if their partner refrained from having sex. Thus, the response that Cs without sex are merely friendships does not work. So I maintain that McKeever has not provided a successful justification for monogamy.

8.4 McKeever on how sexual exclusivity can add value to a relationship

McKeever (2014: 185-188) describes several sources of value she believes sexual exclusivity can add to a relationship. She seemingly believes most of these can *only* be experienced by being sexually exclusive, whereas, with some others, sharing sex exclusively is a particularly good way to experience them. These sources of value are as follows:

- The desired amount of sexual care and attention
- Demarcating a relationship from others
- Affirming shared identity
- The assurance of sexual incomparability
- A purely couple-created sexual world
- Uniqueness
- Greater intimacy within in-relationship sex

Rather than detailing them all here and then evaluating the entire justification, §8.5 will elaborate on and critically examine each source of value in turn.

Beforehand, I should re-emphasise that McKeever does not believe her justification for sexual exclusivity applies to all partners. Indeed, she notes that although sexual exclusivity “can add value to a relationship” – by providing at least some of the above sources of value – “it can also remove an important source of value from people’s lives and so whether it makes sense to adopt a policy of [sexual exclusivity] will depend on the personalities, values, interests, and situations of the lovers” (p. 189). The source of value she is talking about is “sexual freedom” (p. 189) – the freedom to engage in extra-relationship sex.

8.5 An evaluation of McKeever’s justification for sexual exclusivity

When we examine each of the sources of value McKeever identifies, we find critical problems. Mainly, some can also be experienced in a sexually open relationship; meanwhile, the others are

best or only (except in rare cases) experienced in a successfully monogamous relationship in which the partners were virgins before the relationship (and have never vividly experienced sexually explicit content), which has some unattractive implications for McKeever's account.

8.5.1 Must extra-relationship sex compromise in-relationship sex?

McKeever claims a source of value that at least some couples may gain from sexual exclusivity is more care and effort from each partner for in-relationship sex:

For some couples, sex will be more pleasurable the more exclusive it is, perhaps because they will make more effort sexually with each other...[And] if a couple have sex exclusively, their sex may involve greater...care...[because] if they have sex only with each other then they might pay each other the kind of detailed attention required to care for each other sexually (2014: 186).

But there is a limit to how much effort and care the partners want from each other for their sex life together. No reasonable person would wish for their partner to devote *most* of their time and energy to enhancing the in-relationship sex they have. So let us call this source of value 'the desired amount of sexual care and attention'.

For it to be a *distinct* benefit of sexual exclusivity for some couples, it would need to be the case that they could not experience it if they had a sexually open relationship. Of course, it might be true that some people *would* neglect their sex life with their partner against their wishes if they had the freedom to have casual sex with others. But this would just highlight an ethical failing on their part.

These points raise the question: why would the freedom to engage in extra-relationship sex necessarily prevent a couple from devoting the desired amount of care and effort to in-relationship sex? Indeed, there are various activities that we think partners can do with others outside the relationship without compromising their ability to do it together with the desired amount of effort and care. They simply have to ensure they do not spend too much time and energy doing that activity with others. Examples include playing video games (Chalmers 2022: 1016) and providing emotional support. It is hard to see why the same is not the case for sex.

In response, McKeever could remind us that she has only claimed the desired amount of sexual care and attention "perhaps"/"might" be a distinct benefit of sexual exclusivity for "some couples" (p. 186). But what kinds of couples would this be? McKeever does not explain.

Harry Chalmers (2022: 1015-1016) helps lead us to an answer. He believes it is hard to see why sexual exclusivity might help couples to make more effort with each other sexually “unless we assume an implausible model in which sexual effort is seen as a strictly zero-sum resource, such that any sexual effort one gives to anyone else entails reduced sexual effort with one’s partner” (p. 1015). Although Chalmers does not attempt to conceive of a kind of relationship that fits this model, I think couples with little time and energy for sex could plausibly be such a kind. If so, we might think the desired amount of sexual care and attention is a source of value such couples can only gain from sexual exclusivity. Consider, for example:

Bill and Hillary: due to their extremely busy careers, they have little time and energy for sex. It is important to them that they devote sufficient effort and care to their sex life together, but they struggle to have the time and energy to do so. Consequently, if Bill spends some of his time and energy having sex with Monica – or anyone else – this will further prevent him from devoting sufficient effort and care to his sex life with Hillary.

It seems the policy of sexual exclusivity will enable Bill and Hillary to devote sufficient effort and care to their sex life together because it will prevent the time and energy needed to do so from being diverted to extra-relationship sex partners. However, we should not claim this is a *distinct* benefit of sexual exclusivity for them and couples like them. Bill and Hillary could have a sexually open relationship but also require that they devote the desired amount of effort and care to in-relationship sex. Of course, given their hectic schedule, this requirement might mean that, *in practice*, during various periods – which could last for years – they do not engage in extra-relationship sex because it will compromise their ability to devote sufficient effort and care to their sex life together. Nevertheless, *in theory*, Bill and Hillary can engage in extra-relationship sex, but (among other conditions) it has to be limited to instances that will not compromise their in-relationship sex.

This move may seem dubious. But many couples probably have such policies (implicitly) regarding other activities that they want to experience to a certain extent with each other before engaging in it with anyone else. Consider, for example:

Frank and Francine: it is crucial to them that they have at least three weeks of holidays abroad alone together annually. Unfortunately, they cannot find the time and money to achieve this because they are financially struggling farmers who must work most of the year. Still, they do their best. But since they fall short of meeting their three-week target, they do not have holidays abroad independently of each other, even though they desire to. For example, Frank would like to go on a ski holiday, but Francine does not.

It might seem to others and, indeed, to Frank and Francine that they have an ‘abroad holiday exclusivity policy’. However, if they won £10 million and could, consequently, retire, they would sometimes holiday abroad independently of each other. So they do not have an abroad holiday exclusivity policy. Instead, they have a rule that they should have at least three weeks of holidays abroad alone together in a year before either of them holidays abroad with anyone else.

So, to conclude, McKeever cannot claim that a greater amount – or the desired amount – of care and effort for in-relationship sex is a distinct source of value to sexual exclusivity for any couple, even those with little time and energy for sex. Couples can have a sexually open relationship without necessarily compromising on the desired amount of care and effort for in-relationship sex.

8.5.2 Demarcating a relationship from others and affirming a shared identity

In different ways, McKeever claims that being sexually exclusive can help couples distinguish their relationship from other non-romantic relationships and, relatedly, to affirm their shared identity. However, McKeever correctly does not suggest that sexually open couples cannot or, at least, struggle to experience these sources of value. Indeed, she notes there are other activities partners can share exclusively to achieve these aims (e.g. holding hands when walking down the road and sleeping together). And, of course, sexually open couples (generally) do share other such activities exclusively. Consequently, their relationships are clearly demarcated from other relationships, and their shared identity is affirmed. So these sources of value cannot only be experienced in a sexually exclusive relationship.

Still, McKeever thinks sex is another particularly good and obvious candidate of an activity to share exclusively to experience these sources of value “because of its strong connection with romantic love and intimacy” (p. 187). There are several points to make on this.

Firstly, there are other activities partners can share exclusively that also have a strong connection to (their) romantic love and intimacy. Examples include raising children together, holding hands while walking, sharing a bed, and greeting each other with a kiss on the lips. Even shared interests – such as going to the theatre, watching a particular TV series, thrill-seeking activities, etc. – can have a strong connection to a couple’s romantic love, perhaps because it could be the reason they initially met and connected, or it could just be something they both thoroughly enjoy doing together.

Also, even when an activity strongly connects to romantic love and intimacy, it makes sense not to share them exclusively when one or both partners can experience value in doing it with others. Good examples are discussing non-relationship problems and, relatedly, giving and receiving emotional support. Likewise, suppose one or both partners can experience value in sex with others. In that case, it is not an obvious choice of an activity to share exclusively to help demarcate the relationship from others and to affirm their shared identity. Indeed, if anything, it is obvious that the couple should not share this activity exclusively.

These points are reinforced when we consider the following observation. In the case of other non-sexual activities that many couples share exclusively (like the examples above), they either cannot find *any* value in doing them with others or, at least, the value they could experience is so negligible that neither has even contemplated doing it, let alone thought about an exclusivity policy for that activity. Indeed, the fact that they share them exclusively is often merely the consequence of their desires rather than any implicit or explicit restrictions. Indeed, such restrictions would be redundant. So it is hard to understand why couples should not just share such activities exclusively – rather than also being sexually exclusive – to help distinguish their relationship from others and affirm their shared identity.

Thus, demarcating a relationship from other non-romantic relationships and affirming shared identity should not be considered sources of value that only sexual exclusivity can provide. Nor is sex an obvious candidate of an activity to share exclusively to help achieve these goals when one or both partners can find value in extra-relationship sex.

8.5.3 Does McKeever only justify (extreme) traditional monogamy?

The remaining sources of value McKeever claims are distinctive to monogamy are as follows: the assurance of sexual incomparability; a purely couple-created sexual world; uniqueness; and greater intimacy within in-relationship sex. I will soon critically examine each. But, to aid my critique, I must first distinguish between three kinds of monogamy. Firstly:

Modern monogamy: the relationship arrangement in which two partners commit, implicitly or explicitly, to sexual and romantic exclusivity and live up to that commitment. However, it is (implicitly) known and accepted that at least one of the partners has done at least one of the following: had previous romantic sex partner(s); had previous casual sex partner(s); had previous transactional sex partner(s); vividly

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experienced sexually explicit content before the relationship; vividly experienced sexually explicit content during the relationship.

‘Sexually explicit content’ in this context refers to content that *could* give a person a vivid image of what one or more other people are like in sex. Examples include hardcore pornography, detailed erotic fiction, and even a detailed verbal account of a sexual experience. But they do not include many cases of softcore pornography nor the kind of sex scenes typical in mainstream movies and television series.

If a person has *vividly* experienced sexually explicit content, it means that they have read, seen, and/or heard (about) it to the extent that they have an image of what one or more others are like in sex that is vivid enough to compare it to their partner. So if they experience sexually explicit content in a way that is very brief and/or quickly and easily forgettable – for example, accidentally seeing hardcore pornography for a few seconds – this would *not* count as *vividly* experiencing it.

Nowadays, it is (most) common for monogamous people to practice modern monogamy.

However, people can instead practice:

Extreme traditional monogamy: a sexually active relationship in which two partners who have not had any previous sexual partners nor ever vividly experienced sexually explicit content commit, implicitly or explicitly, to sexual and romantic exclusivity and live up to that commitment.

As I shall soon explain, it is very plausible that at least some people practice extreme traditional monogamy. More practice the following less strict version of monogamy that places no requirements on vividly experiencing sexually explicit content:

Moderate traditional monogamy: a sexually active relationship in which two partners who have not had any previous sexual partners commit, implicitly or explicitly, to sexual and romantic exclusivity and live up to that commitment.

(I will use the term ‘traditional monogamy’ to refer to *both* extreme and moderate traditional monogamy.)

Having distinguished these three different kinds of monogamy, I can now turn to the remaining sources of value McKeever claims are distinctive to sexually exclusive relationships. In each case, I will argue that they are best or only (except in rare cases) experienced in moderate and extreme traditional monogamy or just the latter. Then, in §8.5.3.5, I will explore the implications of these findings for McKeever.

8.5.3.1 The assurance of sexual incomparability

McKeevers claims that one of the distinctly valuable aspects of sexual exclusivity is:

The assurance of sexual incomparability: the partners can be assured that they cannot be compared to others sexually.

Indeed, she thinks that for some couples, their sex life together will be more pleasurable because they feel more confident and relaxed knowing they are not being compared to others.

Additionally, she believes their sex may involve greater vulnerability because they are more comfortable being vulnerable with each other due to the assurance that they are not being compared to others (p. 186). In contrast, a sexually open couple can be compared sexually to each other's extra-relationship sex partners.

Chalmers criticises these points and Kyle York (2020: 544-545) for citing them to defend monogamy. However, he challenges:

The assurance of sexual and romantic incomparability: the partners can be assured that they cannot be compared to others sexually or romantically.

He dismisses it on the basis that:

[Unless] it is your partner's first relationship, there's always the prospect of being compared to his past partners. For that matter, even if it is your partner's first relationship, there's the prospect of being compared to what he imagines other partners would be like (2022: 1015).

Since I am focused on critiquing McKeever's justification for *sexual* exclusivity, I will only consider Chalmers' two points applied to *sexual* incomparability.

As mentioned, nowadays, it is (most) common for monogamous people to practice *modern* monogamy. Thus, in many monogamous relationships, at least one partner can compare their partner to their past lover(s) and people in sexually explicit content. So Chalmers is correct to highlight that monogamy does not guarantee sexual incomparability. However, he is wrong to imply that no monogamous couples can experience it. Indeed, this assurance is a distinctly valuable aspect of *extreme traditional* monogamy.

The main group that experiences extreme traditional monogamy are:

Successful seekers of extreme traditional monogamy: a monogamously married couple in their first marriage who, due to their religious and/or ethical beliefs, have always

refrained from vividly experiencing sexually explicit content and sex outside the context of a loving, monogamous marriage.

Chalmers might argue that successful seekers of extreme traditional monogamy are non-existent or rare. But their number worldwide is arguably not insignificant, given the proportion of the global population whose religion and/or society encourages or even demands extreme traditional monogamy. Consider, for example, that Indonesia, a Muslim-majority country with over 280 million citizens, has laws against non-marital sex and pornography (Gelling 2008; Wee 2022). Given these points, we could *not confidently* criticise McKeever for identifying a source of value that is distinct only to a *rare* kind of monogamous relationship.

Chalmers might object by claiming that even successful seekers of extreme traditional monogamy cannot enjoy the assurance of sexual incomparability since their partner can still compare them sexually to how they *imagine* others. However, this is unconvincing. It is hard to see how a person could have an image of what others are like in sex that is vivid enough to compare to their partner unless they have vividly experienced sexually explicit content. Indeed, suppose you were to have sex with a virgin who had never consumed hardcore pornography, never had detailed conversations about what others are like in sex, never read graphic erotic fiction, etc. In that case, you would not think they could compare you to others sexually, at least not to the extent that would lessen how confident and relaxed you felt in sex with them. So Chalmers is still wrong to suggest that the assurance of sexual incomparability cannot be experienced by any or, at least, a rare few monogamous couples.

Therefore, McKeever has identified an important source of value – the assurance of sexual incomparability. However, she is wrong to claim that it is a distinctive feature of monogamy. Instead, it is a source of value that can only be experienced in extreme traditional monogamy.

8.5.3.2 A purely couple-created sexual world

Recall that McKeever writes:

[Sexual exclusivity] provides the lovers with a space that belongs to them, together, and to them only. Their sexual world becomes a world with its own norms, history, rules and morals, which only they inhabit. Moreover, it is a world that they have created. This is valuable in itself, as a way of celebrating the uniqueness of the relationship...(2014: 186).

If Charlie and Jaime are a sexually exclusive couple, their sexual world does indeed have its own norms, history, rules, and morals. But if either has had past lovers or vividly experienced sexually

explicit content, they will probably not experience *a purely couple-created sexual world*. Charlie could have learned various enjoyable sexual positions, techniques, etc., with or, indeed, from one or more past partners and then introduced them into the sexual relationship with Jaime. Additionally, Charlie could have learned about such sexual activities from hardcore pornography and other sexually explicit content. Consequently, Charlie and Jaime's sexual world has been partly created by the former's ex-lover(s) and vivid experience of sexually explicit content.

But even if Charlie and Jaime are not each other's first sexual partners and have both vividly experienced sexually explicit content, it does not necessarily follow that their sexual world is not one they have created on their own. After all, their past experiences of sex and sexually explicit content could have been limited and/or poor in quality. Consequently, nothing from these experiences has contributed to creating their sexual world. Therefore, a purely couple-created sexual world is not a distinctive feature of extreme traditional monogamy. It can also be experienced in modern monogamy and moderate traditional monogamy. Still, it will arguably be rare for people who practice modern monogamy and moderate traditional monogamy to experience this source of value.

8.5.3.3 Uniqueness

McKeever appeals to uniqueness a few times in her justification for sexual exclusivity. Here are some examples:

[A purely couple-created sexual world] is valuable in itself, as a way of celebrating the uniqueness of the relationship...(p. 186).

[T]here can be something intelligible in the decision to share sex exclusively as a way to affirm the uniqueness of the relationship (p. 186).

[I]f the relationship is distinctly valuable, it might be important for the lovers to do something that demonstrates that they recognise its uniqueness (p. 187).

So if partners share sex exclusively, this can contribute to (celebrating/affirming/recognising) the uniqueness and, thus, the value of their relationship. And extra-relationship sex could undermine the uniqueness and, thus, the value of their relationship.

To evaluate this suggestion, we should first recognise that activities unique to a relationship are (typically) either *permanently* or *presently* unique. Permanently unique activities are ones the partners have not shared with anyone else before and do not intend to ever share with anyone else in the future. Examples can include inside jokes and dueting on a particular karaoke song. In contrast, presently unique activities are ones that the partners have only done together during

their relationship but which they have done with others in the past (typically past relationship partners) and would do with others in the future if the relationship ends (typically future relationship partners). Examples include kissing and celebrating Valentine's Day. Permanently unique activities are evidently much more unique than presently unique activities. Indeed, we might even claim that permanently unique activities are the only *truly* unique kind.

Now suppose one or both partners in a monogamous relationship has vividly experienced sexually explicit content before or during the relationship. In that case, I do *not* see how this would prevent in-relationship sex from being permanently unique – they have not shared the experience of sex with anyone else. However, if one or both partners in a monogamous relationship has had sex with others in the past, sex within the relationship cannot be permanently unique.

So, in modern monogamy, sex is only *presently* unique. I am not claiming this present uniqueness has *no* value. Although I would note that the more past lovers the partners have had, the harder it is to see sexual exclusivity as contributing to the uniqueness and, thus, the value of their relationship. Still, sex can only be *permanently* unique – the more valuable or, perhaps, only *true* kind of uniqueness – in a monogamous relationship where neither partner has had any previous sexual partners. So sexual exclusivity's contribution to the uniqueness and, thus, the value of a relationship is *best* within traditional monogamy.

8.5.3.4 Greater intimacy within in-relationship sex

McKeever claims that “since intimacy usually requires sharing information and experiences that you share with no-one or very few people, sex will be more intimate the more exclusive it is” (p. 186). So, in short, *greater intimacy within in-relationship sex* is supposedly a distinctive feature of monogamy.

Does *modern* monogamy undermine this intimacy? I cannot see how one or both partners vividly experiencing sexually explicit content would have this effect since they are not *sharing* sexual information or experiences with anyone else. However, the past sexual partner(s) aspects of modern monogamy can present an issue for McKeever. Her claims about intimacy have the following implication: sex will be less intimate the more past lovers the partners have had because there will be more people they have shared sexual information and experiences with. Also, suppose a monogamous partner has *happily* had one or more *casual* or *transactional* sexual experiences with people who, at least at the time, were strangers, mere acquaintances, or someone they have only met in person that day. For this partner, sex is something they can happily share with people they hardly know. So it would be strange to think that sex is a highly

intimate activity for them, let alone that monogamy provides them greater intimacy within in-relationship sex.

But suppose a couple have each had *very few* past sex partners with people they knew well. In that case, this will not be a problem for McKeever as she believes intimacy can involve sharing information and experiences that you only share with “very few people”. Although, she presumably believes it would still be *more* intimate if the couple had zero past sexual partners, given that “sex will be more intimate the more exclusive it is” (p. 186). Therefore, according to McKeever’s reasoning, sex can be *most* intimate within traditional monogamy, so the value of greater intimacy within in-relationship sex is *best* experienced in such relationships.

8.5.3.5 The traditional benefits and their (problematic) implications

8.5.3.5.1 A recap of McKeever’s task

In a significant proportion of two-person relationships, the partners adopt the policy of sexual exclusivity even though at least one can experience value in extra-relationship sex. This initially seems odd since, usually, we wish to promote, to a reasonable extent, our partner’s access to experiences they can find value in – not wholly restrict it. Despite rejecting many (standard) justifications for this restriction, McKeever wishes to show that sexual exclusivity can be justifiable for many such couples.

Her strategy is to identify several sources of value sexual exclusivity can add to a relationship. She seemingly believes most of these can *only* be experienced by being sexually exclusive, whereas, with some others, sharing sex exclusively is a particularly good way to experience them. At least some of these sources of value are optional – partners need not experience them all. But, presumably, McKeever thinks they need to experience enough of them so that sexual exclusivity adds more value to their lives than sexual freedom would.

§8.5.1 and §8.5.2 demonstrated that the following sources of value do not withstand critical scrutiny: the desired amount of sexual care and attention, demarcating a relationship from others, and affirming shared identity. So the survival of McKeever’s justification depends on the remaining four sources of value I have discussed in this section (§8.5.3).

8.5.3.5.2 The ‘traditional benefits’

Fortunately for McKeever, we do not have any (obvious) reason to dismiss these four remaining sources of value. However:

- The assurance of sexual incomparability can *only* be experienced within *extreme* traditional monogamy.
- A purely couple-created sexual world can *only, except in rare cases*, be experienced within *extreme* traditional monogamy
- Uniqueness is *best* experienced within traditional monogamy
- Greater intimacy within in-relationship sex is *best* experienced within traditional monogamy

Consequently, I will refer to these sources of value collectively as ‘the traditional benefits’.

8.5.3.5.3 (Extreme) traditional monogamy or (conservative) modern monogamy?

A monogamous couple *needs* to experience these traditional benefits to the extent that their sexual exclusivity adds more value to their lives than sexual freedom would. Additionally, a couple should *want* their sexual exclusivity to add as much value as possible to their lives, not merely (somewhat) more than sexual freedom would.

Therefore, it seems McKeever should advocate the pursuit of extreme traditional monogamy for ‘monogamy seekers’, that is, people who want to have a monogamous relationship, at least someday. If a couple successfully pursues extreme traditional monogamy, they can experience *all four* traditional benefits and experience uniqueness and greater intimacy within in-relationship sex to the *optimal* degree.

But if McKeever must endorse extreme traditional monogamy for monogamy seekers, this would have various interesting implications, though arguably ones that are problematic for her (2014) project. This is due to the problems with pursuing extreme traditional monogamy, which I shall now describe. Most of these also apply to moderate traditional monogamy. Therefore, I will discuss the problems with *traditional monogamy* – which, recall, covers both versions – while noting when a problem only applies to the extreme version.

First, for many people, pursuing traditional monogamy would likely result in them being celibate for many years during the period of their life in which their sex drive is highest and/or they are at their most sexually attractive. This is because it can take a person many years of late adolescence and early adulthood to be confident they have found “the one” and to be ready for marriage. So during the period in their life when, arguably, they most desire sex and could be having the most satisfying sex, they are forgoing this part of life. And the lack of sex during these years will probably negatively impact their well-being considerably, even severely (§2.1; §2.2). Furthermore,

for at least some people, this period of celibacy could extend into their late twenties, thirties, or even later, prolonging its negative impact.

In addition, having sex with multiple partners can also help people to learn about sex. Indeed, although there may be value in a purely couple-created sexual world, there is also much to be learned from having sex with numerous people in one's life since different people will often bring different things to the table. Worse still, since pursuers of *extreme* traditional monogamy will also refrain from vividly experiencing sexually explicit content, they cannot enhance the pleasure of masturbation with the help of such content, nor can they enhance their sex life by learning about sex from it.

Furthermore, pursuing traditional monogamy may well be counterproductive to achieving a happy, successful, lifelong, monogamous relationship – the monogamous ideal – for many people. Firstly, we can reasonably hypothesise that many young couples seeking traditional monogamy rush into marriage – before having sufficient time to assess whether they are a good fit – because of the desperation to start having sex; consequently, their marriage will likely not work out.

Also, there is a common view that many people need to sow their wild oats before settling down into a monogamous relationship. The idea is that if a relatively promiscuously-inclined person has sex with many different people in their youth before having a serious relationship, they get that behaviour out of their system. Consequently, any subsequent attempt to achieve the monogamous ideal will not be compromised by strong desires to sleep around. And if they do not sow their wild oats, any attempt to achieve the monogamous ideal will most likely fail. So if sowing wild oats does enable some people to achieve the monogamous ideal, for them, pursuing traditional monogamy will be counter-productive to fulfilling this aim. And the more people the sowing wild oats strategy can work for, the more people there will be who will most likely fail to achieve the monogamous ideal if they pursue traditional monogamy.

Insofar as pursuing traditional monogamy is counterproductive to achieving the monogamous ideal, this is a significant problem for the idea that monogamy seekers should pursue traditional monogamy. Arguably the (implicit) aim for any committed, ethical monogamous relationship is that it is lifelong, happy, and infidelity-free. Also, in the cases of sexually active traditional monogamous marriages that end, the partners are no longer virgins, so they can never enjoy traditional monogamy again.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ On other harms the sexual repression required to pursue traditional monogamy arguably causes, see Earp & Savulescu (2020: 27-28), discussed in §1.2.

If McKeever's account forces her to endorse pursuing (extreme) traditional monogamy for monogamy seekers, it is in trouble. Given the risks and costs involved in pursuing (extreme) traditional monogamy, for many monogamy seekers, arguably most – or even the vast majority – it is not worth it. Indeed, the value they *may* one day gain from sexual exclusivity in an (extreme) traditional monogamous relationship does not outweigh the risks and costs of pursuing it. Consequently, it may well be that only a (tiny) minority of people will consider pursuing (extreme) traditional monogamy worthwhile *and* be successful in having a happy, successful, long-term – ideally lifelong – (extreme) traditional monogamous relationship. Thus, McKeever's justification for monogamy would only apply to a (tiny) minority of couples in the long term. Yet I imagine she will agree with the following view that I expect would be very popular outside the anti-monogamist crowd: many people who are *not* successful seekers of (extreme) traditional monogamy can have a relationship that is *justifiably* sexually exclusive.

However, McKeever could plausibly argue that for many, if not most, monogamy seekers, the risks and costs of pursuing traditional monogamy, especially extreme traditional monogamy, outweigh its traditional benefits. Initially, it seems such monogamy seekers should pursue modern monogamy instead. But can a modern monogamous couple experience the traditional benefits to the extent that their sexual exclusivity adds more value to their lives than sexual freedom would, thus justifying it?

A couple's ability to experience the traditional benefits is (significantly) compromised if they pursue modern monogamy: they *cannot* experience the assurance of sexual incomparability; only in *rare* cases can they experience a purely couple-created sexual world; and they can only experience uniqueness and greater intimacy within in-relationship sex to a *suboptimal* degree. Also, the more extensive their sexual history is, especially regarding pleasurable experiences of casual and transactional sex, the more their ability to experience uniqueness and greater intimacy within in-relationship sex is compromised. Indeed, there is plausibly a point at which a person's sexual history – at least of pleasurable casual and/or transactional sex – is so extensive that it *completely* undermines their ability to experience these traditional benefits.

Still, McKeever could advocate the following alternative for monogamy seekers that attempts to strike a balance between (i) traditional monogamy and (ii) modern monogamy that allows for an extensive sexual history: *conservative modern monogamy*. People who practice it allow themselves to have multiple sexual partners in their life – romantic and perhaps casual – and vividly experience sexually explicit content. Still, they try to limit their number of sexual partners – especially casual ones – and perhaps vivid experiences of sexually explicit content as much as they

can. They might do this by restricting sex – or, at least, its most intimate forms (e.g. penile-vaginal intercourse) – to romantic relationships that they think have a good chance of achieving the monogamous ideal. Additionally, they *might* allow themselves to have casual sex very occasionally in specific circumstances. For example, when it has been a long time since they had sex and when the casual partner is one they are very familiar with.

Insofar as seekers of conservative modern monogamy limit their sexual history in such ways, in any sexually exclusive relationship they have *with another seeker of conservative modern monogamy*, they could enjoy a *greater* degree of uniqueness and greater intimacy within in-relationship sex, albeit not the *optimal* degree that can be experienced within traditional monogamy. Also, in rare cases, they may experience *a purely couple-created world*. Still, if they limit their number of past sexual partners and vivid experiences of sexually explicit content, they will limit the contribution of others to creating their sexual world. So they might experience value in having a sexual world *mainly or to a significant degree* created by them. Similarly, such a couple will have limited the number of other people to whom they can compare each other sexually – at least, they might have limited their “body count” even if they do not limit their vivid experiences of sexually explicit content. So they might experience value from the fact that there are relatively few people or, at least, past sexual partners to whom they can be compared sexually.

I am sceptical about whether the value experienced in these *compromised* traditional benefits can outweigh the value of sexual freedom for many modern monogamous couples, if any. If one or both partners can experience the intense pleasures of extra-relationship sex with multiple partners over many years, even decades, would the compromised traditional benefits I have just described add more value to their lives, all else being equal? Suppose McKeever wishes to defend a revised and reduced version of her justification for sexual exclusivity that allows for conservative modern monogamy. In that case, she needs to explain how these compromised traditional benefits can add more value to the lives of a couple than sexual freedom.

Still, my scepticism may result from biased intuitions regarding the value of these compromised traditional benefits versus sexual freedom. Couples who would find more value in the former may exist. However, I am only prepared to conclude that it is *plausible* that at least some conservative modern monogamous couples could experience the traditional benefits to the extent that their sexual exclusivity adds more value to their lives than sexual freedom would, thus justifying it.

Another reason for this conclusion is that it is unclear when the traditional benefits have been so compromised that the value they generate is less than the value that can be experienced in sexual freedom. There are many questions to ask. At what point is your or your partner’s “body count” too high? How many past *casual* sex partners can you have had before sex can no longer be

considered highly intimate for you? What if you have only had one sexual partner before, but they were much more sexually attractive than your current partner, making your current partner deeply insecure rather than having relatively little to worry about regarding sexual comparability? And so on.

It is plausible that the correct answers to such questions would render many, if not most, monogamy seekers incapable of having a justified monogamous relationship on the reduced version of McKeever's account I have described. This could be seen as a strength – perhaps it is (most) commonly the case that people seeking monogamy should not be doing so.

However, there may be many people who we would very plausibly think can have a justified monogamous relationship, yet they probably cannot according to this account because, even though they have always pursued conservative modern monogamy, over time and as a consequence of several failed relationships, their sexual history has accumulated to a sufficiently extensive degree. For example, it seems that a couple of 40-year-old monogamy seekers who, between them, have had fifteen past sexual partners, all ex-relationship partners, cannot experience the traditional benefits to the degree required to have a justified monogamous relationship, regardless of how well-suited they are for it and how happy it would make them.

So conservative modern monogamy seekers must avoid passing the threshold at which their sexual history is so extensive that the extent to which they can experience the traditional benefits in any monogamous relationship is so compromised that the value sexual exclusivity can add to their relationship is less than the value they can gain from sexual freedom. Once they have passed this threshold – which might be due to bad luck in their love life – they can no longer have a justified monogamous relationship. Accordingly, it seems they should then pursue an alternative, such as a sexually open relationship, instead. Of course, the lower this threshold is, the fewer people there will be who can have a justified monogamous relationship. For example, if having four past loving sex partners and/or two casual partners is enough to pass this threshold, this would render sexual exclusivity unjustifiable for many people, including many for whom monogamy is plausibly justifiable.

8.5.3.6 A verdict

My critique features various unanswered questions, including the following: to which couples can McKeever's justification for sexual exclusivity apply? Does it only apply to successful seekers of (extreme) traditional monogamy, or can it also apply to modern monogamous couples? If it can apply to the latter group, how limited must their sexual history and vivid experiences of sexually explicit content be to qualify for a justified monogamous relationship? But these unanswered

questions are not a problem for my critique – they are a problem for McKeever’s justification. Before we can fully accept this justification, it requires development, elaboration, and revision, not just in light of these questions but also due to the other problems I identified earlier. Until then, we should conclude the following: a revised version of McKeever’s justification for sexual exclusivity plausibly works, but it arguably only applies to a (tiny) minority, excluding many couples for whom sexual exclusivity is very plausibly justified.

8.6 A summary of, and some conclusions on, McKeever

McKeever (2014) believes there are reasons to consider monogamy incompatible with romantic love: usually, we wish to promote, to a reasonable extent, our partner’s access to experiences they can find value in, not wholly restrict it; yet, monogamy wholly restricts the valuable experiences that can be had in sex and romantic love with others. Consequently, she believes those who desire and value monogamy must explain its compatibility with romantic love.

After rejecting various justifications for monogamy, McKeever offers her own. First, she accounts for the distinct value of a two-person romantic relationship by arguing that it has certain practical benefits and value in itself because it affirms the partners’ unique importance. Second, she argues that sexual exclusivity can add value to a relationship, mainly by identifying various sources of value that supposedly can only be experienced in a sexually exclusive relationship.

However, I have exposed various critical issues with McKeever’s justification. First, in its current form, it does not explain how a restriction on additional romantic relationships requiring *relatively little* resources can be compatible with romantic love: couples who practice a style of polyamory that restricts additional romantic relationships requiring *substantial* resources can also experience the sources of value McKeever claimed were distinct to a two-person romantic relationship while additionally experiencing the value in additional romantic relationships requiring *relatively little* resources. So development and revision of her justification are required to demonstrate how monogamy’s restriction on additional romantic relationships requiring relatively little resources is justified.

I also identified numerous problems with McKeever’s justification for sexual exclusivity and demonstrated that much development, elaboration, and revision of this part of her justification is required. Until then, we should conclude that a revised version of McKeever’s justification for sexual exclusivity plausibly works; however, it arguably only applies to a (tiny) minority, excluding many couples for whom sexual exclusivity is very plausibly justified. And given *all* the critical issues I have discussed, we cannot yet deem McKeever’s justification for monogamy successful.

Chapter 9 Outstanding questions regarding Weaver & Woollard and McKeever

This chapter sets aside the question of whether Weaver & Woollard's and McKeever's justifications succeed and explores two meta-issues regarding their works. §9.1 argues they are insufficiently clear on what *kind* of justification they seek. It also distinguishes between three kinds of justifications that are (implicitly) differentiated in their and others' works – monogamist, negative, and positive justifications. I argue that, despite the lack of clarity, we should assume that Weaver & Woollard are only interested in a positive justification, whereas McKeever is open to all three kinds. Next, §9.2 demonstrates that while McKeever has provided a positive justification, whether Weaver & Woollard have is complicated. Finally, §9.3 concludes the chapter.

9.1 What kind of justification do they seek?

§7.1 and §8.1 *fairly* summarised Weaver & Woollard's and McKeever's challenges, respectively: my summaries were based on their main presentations and stuck close to or quoted their wording. However, their respective works use various terms when discussing their challenge to and justification for monogamy. Consequently, their challenge can be posed in several ways. The following is a concise statement of their challenge but with nine different endings:

Usually, loving someone entails wanting to promote, to a reasonable extent, their access to valuable experiences, not restricting it, so given monogamy's total restrictions on extra-relationship sex and love:

1. What "justification" is there for monogamy? (very common across the authors' respective works)
2. How can monogamy "make sense"? (Weaver & Woollard 2008: 506)
3. How can monogamy be "legitimate"? (Ibid. 507)
4. What "reason" (Ibid. 506)/"decisive reason" (Ibid. 513)/"good reason" (McKeever 2014: 190) is there for monogamy?
5. How is monogamy "compatible with romantic love"? (McKeever 2014: 2)
6. How can there be "value in" monogamy? (Ibid. 197)
7. What is the "distinct value" of a monogamous relationship? (Ibid. 197)
8. How can monogamy generate value that surmounts its apparent disvalue? (Weaver & Woollard 2008: 509)

9. How can monogamy “add more value...than it detracts”? (McKeever 2014: 172 when discussing the *sexual* exclusivity component of monogamy)

Presumably, Weaver & Woollard and McKeever think their variants share the same meaning since they do not claim to present multiple challenges. But someone unfamiliar with their works can reasonably think these questions do not all have the same meaning partly because various proposed justifications seem a candidate answer to some but not all of these questions. Consider the difficulty of managing jealousy justification (p. 106). It is seemingly a candidate answer to questions 1-4: it attempts to justify, make sense of, legitimise, and show why there is (good/decisive) reason for monogamy for at least some couples. Additionally, it arguably shows why monogamy is compatible with love, answering question 5: two partners could say that because they love each other, they wish to avoid causing each other undesirable, intense, and painful feelings of jealousy that will ultimately lead to the breakdown of their relationship.

However, whether this justification would appropriately answer questions 6-9 is unclear. One might say they value their monogamy because it protects them from jealousy and, thus, enables them to have a happy, long-term relationship. Additionally, they could say that this generated value is greater than the value lost (i.e. the freedom to experience extra-relationship sex and love). However, we may reasonably think that these questions are asking us to identify something (intrinsically) valuable that can *only* be experienced in a monogamous relationship and which, for at least some people, can outweigh the value experienced in open relationships. In this case, protection from jealousy is arguably not an appropriate answer because, among other reasons, at least some people practice an open relationship without suffering jealousy (§11.2).

But whether a jealousy-related answer is appropriate for questions 6-9 depends on how Weaver & Woollard and McKeever understand these value-related concepts, which they do not clearly explain. Consequently, understanding which kind of justification they seek is not straightforward. Of the two, I believe Weaver & Woollard provide more indication, so I will begin by examining their relevant comments.

Towards the end of their paper, it is apparent that a jealousy-related justification for monogamy is not the kind they seek: they state that “[t]he acceptance of monogamy is disvaluable if spouses choose to be monogamous due to jealousy, insecurity, or the desire to control each other” (2008: 521). So what kind do they seek? At one point, they explain that their work focuses on understanding why partners *value* their monogamy (2008: 512), which they – controversially – think most do: “[m]ost see their endorsement of the norm of monogamy as something that is itself good rather than a lamentable consequence of human frailty” (2008: 518). Presumably, the (supposed) hard-to-manage nature of jealousy would count as an example of human frailty.

These points help explain what kind of justification they seek. Indeed, in combining them with a survey of their, McKeever's, and other philosophers' works (e.g. Chalmers 2019; 2022; York 2020; Clardy 2020; 2023; Moen & Sørliie 2022), we can distinguish between three broad types.

9.1.1 Monogamist, negative, and positive justifications for monogamy

9.1.1.1 Monogamist justifications

These are arguments for monogamism. They include natural moral law arguments (e.g. Finnis 2008; Geach 2008), Kantian arguments (e.g. Kant 1969; Wreen 1986), and many other kinds of arguments (e.g. Scruton 1986; see also Clardy 2023: 47-100).

'Monogamist justifications' is not the optimal term since, if extra-relationship sex and love are immoral, it sounds strange to suggest partners need to *justify* restricting each other from engaging in them. However, I will use the term here since it coheres with the broader discussion in the literature regarding the question, what justification, if any, is there for monogamy?

It would not be romantic nor reassuring if at least one partner explained their choice to be monogamous with a monogamist justification. And one could reasonably feel upset if they discovered their partner gave a monogamist justification. Indeed, it would hardly be a romantic moment if Ben explained to their partner Jan that he practices monogamy because he sees it as a moral obligation. Furthermore, it would not be reassuring: it suggests that Ben endures rather than embraces monogamy and might cheat in times of moral weakness. Finally, a couple would hardly wish to share their monogamist justification for being monogamous with their friends and family. Imagine how it will sound if, during their wedding ceremony, a couple declare that they promise to forsake all others because they believe monogamy is the only morally acceptable relationship style.

9.1.1.2 Negative justifications

Such justifications attempt to make sense of, legitimise, and show why there is (good/decisive) reason for monogamy for at least some couples. Perhaps the main way they can do so is by identifying the risks and costs that extra-relationship sex and love incur (due to human nature(s)) that outweigh their value/benefits. So examples of negative justifications include those relating to jealousy, child welfare, practicality, and sexual health (see Chalmers 2019; 2022; York 2020; Clardy 2020; 2023).

A negative justification may (seemingly) present monogamy as “a necessary evil” (Weaver & Woollard 2008: 519) or ‘the lesser evil’. Additionally, monogamy could be seen as “something to be endured” and perhaps as a “lamentable consequence of human frailty” (Ibid. 519-520). Less provocatively, monogamy may be considered unideal on such a justification because it implies that, ideally, the partners would have an open relationship. Indeed, suppose the justification identifies risks and costs that extra-relationship sex and love incur (e.g. jealousy) that outweigh their value/benefits. In that case, the implication is that if these risks and costs could be mitigated (e.g. drugs that entirely alleviate jealousy), the couple would have an open relationship.

Describing such justifications as ‘negative’ is appropriate partly because the following claims apply for the same reasons they do for monogamist justifications: it would not be romantic nor reassuring if at least one partner explained their choice to be monogamous in such a manner; one could reasonably feel upset if they discovered that their partner appealed to a negative justification; and a couple would hardly wish to share their negative justification publicly.

9.1.1.3 Positive justifications

Positive justifications acknowledge that monogamy requires the partners mutually give up access to two sources of value: extra-relationship sex and love. However, they attempt to explain why despite this, monogamy is (distinctly) valuable, good in itself, a practice to embrace, ideal, “worth celebrating”, and even “marvellous” (Woollard 2017) for at least some couples.

Perhaps the main way positive justifications can do this comes in two parts. First, they identify one or more valuable things that can *only* be experienced in a monogamous relationship (even if not all people are capable of experiencing it). Secondly, it explains that, for at least some couples, these feature(s) of monogamy generate(s) more value than the freedom to engage in extra-relationship sex and love could. It is crucial to note that when we consider the value of this freedom in this context, we are *not* factoring in any risks and costs that it may incur. Thus, for such couples, even if (after complete mitigation) there were no risks or costs to extra-relationship sex and love, they would still choose monogamy because it provides something of more value for them.

Consequently, positive justifications are describable as romantic and reassuring. Indeed, suppose Ben embraces and values the monogamous aspect of his relationship and considers it good in itself, ideal, worth celebrating, and marvellous, perhaps because he finds something distinctly valuable within it that is far more valuable to him than the freedom to have additional sexual and romantic partners, even if all the risks and costs could be mitigated. In that case, Jan could

reasonably consider this romantic. She could also find it reassuring: Ben's perspective on monogamy suggests he is unlikely to cheat because this would mean he experiences what to him is the lower value nonmonogamy provides rather than the greater value he finds in monogamy. So Jan and, indeed, anyone in a monogamous relationship can be happy to hear their partner explaining their choice to be monogamous by appealing to a positive justification. And a monogamous couple could be proud to share their positive justification publicly.

9.1.2 Inconsistent searchers

I can now explain another reason why Weaver & Woollard and McKeever are insufficiently clear on what *kind* of justification they seek – their searches are inconsistent.

Suppose Weaver & Woollard and McKeever are open to a monogamist, negative, or positive justification. In that case, they should aim to evaluate the most prominent monogamist, negative, and positive justifications for monogamy. Alternatively, if they are *only* seeking one of these kinds, they should *only* aim to evaluate the most prominent justifications of that kind. Likewise, if they are *only* open to two of these kinds, they should *only* aim to evaluate the most prominent justifications of these two kinds.

Although some of Weaver & Woollard's comments suggest they are only interested in a positive justification, in the following passage, they evaluate and reject at least one justification that is monogamist or negative, implying that they are *not* only interested in a positive justification:

Some argue that the appropriate context in which to raise children requires monogamy. However we reject this for two reasons. We are not aware of adequate evidence either that the nuclear family is in fact the optimal context for childrearing or that non-monogamy endangers partners' ability to fulfil their parental obligations. These are largely empirical matters. But even if it turns out that we are wrong, this rationale is restricted to relationships likely to produce offspring *and* to those portions of partners' sexual life in which they are either involved or likely to become involved with childrearing (2008: 513).

So suppose there was strong evidence that the nuclear family is the optimal context for childrearing or that parents in an open relationship cannot fulfil their parental obligations. In that case, it seems that, according to Weaver & Woollard, we would have a successful justification for monogamy for couples (likely to become) involved in childrearing, though one that cannot be described as a positive justification. Indeed, it would be strange to deem a couple's monogamy (distinctly) valuable, marvellous, and worth celebrating if it was just for their children's sake. But

suppose Weaver & Woollard are only interested in a positive justification for monogamy. In that case, they should explain that this child welfare-related justification is not the kind they seek, just as they clarify that they are not interested in a jealousy-related justification.

McKeever (2014) evaluates and rejects monogamist and negative justifications for monogamy (§8.1), indicating these are among the kinds of justifications she seeks. Consistent with this, she critiques at length but ultimately rejects various jealousy-related justifications for *sexual* exclusivity, partly because she recognises that many monogamous people would appeal to jealousy to explain this component of their monogamy (pp. 178-182). However, many monogamous people would also give a jealousy-related reason for why their relationship is *romantically* exclusive (Conley et al. 2012). Yet McKeever does not critique any jealousy-related justification for romantic exclusivity, giving the *conflicting* impression that she is *not* interested in monogamist or negative justifications for romantic exclusivity.

9.1.3 A summary of the problems and my verdicts

Neither Weaver & Woollard nor McKeever are sufficiently clear on what kind of justification for monogamy they seek. However, *most* of Weaver & Woollard's claims and comments are consistent with the interpretation that they are only interested in a positive justification. So I will assume this interpretation henceforth. And although, as I will argue later, McKeever provides a positive justification, she critiques at length and rejects various monogamist and negative justifications. So henceforth, I will assume that her challenge to monogamy could be answered by a monogamist, negative, or positive justification.

Since Weaver & Woollard only seek a positive justification, their work cannot be undermined by demonstrating that a negative justification for monogamy succeeds. So, when I demonstrate the success of the difficulty of managing jealousy justification in Chapter 10, I cannot claim that I have successfully answered their challenge to monogamy, as I will do regarding Chalmers', Clardy's, Moen & Sørli's, and McKeever's challenges.

9.2 What kind of justification do Weaver & Woollard and McKeever offer?

9.2.1 A version of Weaver & Woollard's justification is plausibly positive

The first part of their justification attempted to explain the reasonableness of restricting sex to romantic relationships (§7.2.1). Their justification is grounded in the idea that due to the nature of sexual activities, it is natural and reasonable to perceive them as possessing “a certain kind of significance”: sex can both symbolise and partly constitute the partners’ love (2008: 515). Still, for it to be reasonable for partners to restrict *all* sexual activity to romantic relationships, Weaver & Woollard think the following view must be held:

The inseparable view: the partners “see sex in general as connected to emotional intimacy” and, thus, “they will attach significance to all sex acts” (p. 516).

And, as Woollard explains:

Once sex is seen to be significant in this way, it will be hurtful if one partner has sex with someone that he is not in love with. In having sex without love, he implicitly denies that sex has the kind of significance that his partner understood it to have. He does not see sex as lovemaking. This can undermine the partners’ understanding of previous episodes of sex within the relationship. This will be deeply hurtful to the other partner. If loveless sex would cause reasonable hurt to one or both partners, it makes sense to restrict sex to loving relationships (2010: 4-5).

Weaver & Woollard (2008: 520) indirectly give reasons for thinking their justification for restricting casual extra-relationship sex is a positive one, which Woollard (2017) better relays when addressing the challenge that this component of monogamy “might not sound very marvelous” if it is necessary for avoiding reasonable hurt:

[T]here seems to me to be something valuable about the wide conception of the special activity of sex. Yes, you might think that it is more sophisticated to distinguish (significant) sex within the relationship from (casual) sex outside it. But, the wider conception involves seeing a certain activity as so deeply imbued with significance, as so much an expression of love, that this significance spreads to the same activity with other people. There seems to me to be something valuable in that.

This sounds plausible. But, as explained earlier (§7.3.1), there are two interpretations of this part of their justification:

The two-way interpretation: both partners must hold the inseparable view.

The one-way interpretation: at least one partner must hold the inseparable view.

The explanation of why the justification for restricting casual extra-relationship sex is a positive justification only plausibly applies to the two-way interpretation. As I indicated earlier (§7.3.1), the latter cannot constitute the positive kind of justification for monogamy that Weaver & Woollard seek. This is due to at least two problems that arise when only one partner (Casandra) holds the inseparable view while their partner (Ben) holds a non-inseparable view.

First, §7.3.1.2.3 demonstrated that Casandra needs to have an illusionary understanding of her monogamous relationship: she must falsely believe that Ben also holds the inseparable view. Consequently, Ben must avoid revealing his non-inseparable view to Casandra by not engaging in sexual infidelity, keeping his masturbation habits private, not sharing his history of casual sex, not expressing his views about sex, etc. Given the resulting undesirable and morally problematic lack of openness, honesty, and understanding in their monogamous relationship, their restriction on sex to romantic relationships cannot be described as (distinctly) valuable, good in itself, a practice to embrace, ideal, worth celebrating, and even marvellous. So such a justification is not the positive kind that Weaver & Woollard seek.

Secondly, it will (often) be the case that while the monogamous relationship suits the inseparable view-holding partner's (Casandra's) attitudes and dispositions regarding sex, the non-inseparable view-holder (Ben) has to compromise on his. He might only connect sex within the relationship to emotional intimacy (the separable view) or only connect sexual acts which are sufficiently similar to the sex he has with Casandra (the partially separable view). Alternatively, he might not tie sex in general to emotional intimacy (the insignificant view). Furthermore, he may be naturally inclined towards having casual sex with multiple, even many (varied), partners. Consequently, we can reasonably get the image of a person for whom the restriction on casual extra-relationship sex is a sacrifice, a necessary evil even, one they begrudgingly accept to appease their partner. It would be strange to consider such monogamous relationships (distinctly) valuable, good in itself, a practice to embrace, ideal, worth celebrating, and marvellous. Thus, we should not consider a justification that allows them a positive justification – another reason why the one-way interpretation is not the kind of justification Weaver & Woollard seek.

So only the two-way interpretation of Weaver & Woollard's justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships is plausibly a positive justification. But is the second part of their justification for monogamy – restricting the number of romantic relationships to one (§7.2.2) – a

positive one? Here is a short version of it – covering the relevant points – as a couple could present it:

- (a) “We would find maintaining multiple romantic relationships simultaneously very challenging: romantic relationships require a substantial investment of time, energy, and emotion, and both of us would struggle to have enough such resources available for two or more concurrent partners. Furthermore, our relationship satisfies all our *needs* regarding romantic love, and it is so important to each of us that we think it is worth making sacrifices to protect it. So romantic exclusivity makes sense for us rather than dealing with the difficulty of sustaining multiple relationships simultaneously.”

Woollard (2017) addresses the charge that this may not sound marvellous when she writes:

[T]here seems to me to be something very valuable in the recognition that the relationship is so important that one is prepared to give up additional goods to protect it – and perhaps even more so in the simple declaration of faith: you can give me all that I need in this area.

This sounds plausible. But now consider the following short version of the difficulty of managing jealousy justification that has been tailored solely to romantic exclusivity and with the qualification that the couple’s *needs* for romantic love are met:

- (b) “We would find maintaining multiple romantic relationships simultaneously very challenging: both of us are prone to experiencing undesirable, intense, painful feelings of jealousy if the other has an additional romantic relationship, and we would have to manage these feelings to have a happy relationship, which would be very difficult if not impossible. Furthermore, our relationship satisfies all our *needs* regarding romantic love, and it is so important to each of us that we think it is worth making sacrifices to protect it. So romantic exclusivity makes sense for us rather than dealing with the difficulty of managing the jealousy that would arise with having multiple partners.”

Many will consider (a) and (b) (equally) good justifications for romantic exclusivity and add that many couples could appeal to both (among other reasons). Yet, an implication of Weaver & Woollard’s various claims is that there is a significant difference between the two. (a) is a positive justification, so romantic exclusivity justified by it is valuable, good in itself, worth celebrating, marvellous, etc. Meanwhile, (b) is a negative justification, so romantic exclusivity justified by it is disvaluable, a lamentable consequence of human frailty, seems like a necessary evil, etc. This is because they have argued for (a) and claimed that “[t]he acceptance of monogamy is disvaluable

if spouses choose to be monogamous due to jealousy” (2008: 521). But why should we accept such different judgements about (a) and (b)?

I see no reason not to regard (a) and (b) as the same kind of justification. But whether we regard them as both positive or negative, Weaver & Woollard face a critical issue. If we deem (a) and (b) negative justifications, they have not provided a positive justification. And if we deem (a) and (b) positive justifications, they have provided a positive justification. Still, it is merely additional to a jealousy-related one that many would provide – including a variant of the one I defend in Chapter 10. Plus, Weaver & Woollard would have to revise their implicit claim that a jealousy-related justification for monogamy cannot be the kind they seek.

In any case, given all these points, I can only conclude that Weaver & Woollard’s justification for monogamy is *plausibly* a positive justification only if they adopt the two-way interpretation for the justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships.

9.2.2 McKeever offers a positive justification

Unlike Weaver & Woollard, McKeever does not seem only interested in a positive justification. However, ironically, her justification is more clearly a positive one. Recall that positive justifications attempt to explain why monogamy, despite its restrictions, is (distinctly) valuable, good in itself, etc., and perhaps the main way they can do this is by (i) identifying one or more valuable things that can *only* be experienced in a monogamous relationship and (ii) explaining that, for at least some couples, these feature(s) of monogamy generate(s) more value than the freedom to engage in extra-relationship sex and love could (§9.1.1.3).

The two parts of McKeever’s justification aim to do that: she identifies practical benefits she believes can *only* be experienced in a two-person romantic relationship and argues there is value in such a relationship in itself because it can affirm the unique importance of the partners (§8.2); and she identifies several sources of value that she believes can *only* be experienced in a sexually exclusive relationship or, at least, can be experienced in a particularly good way in such a relationship (§8.4). So McKeever has offered a positive justification.

9.3 Further conclusions on Weaver & Woollard and McKeever

This chapter has set aside the question of whether and to what extent Weaver & Woollard’s and McKeever’s justifications for monogamy work and argued for the following. These philosophers are insufficiently clear on what *kind* of justification for monogamy they seek but, despite the lack of clarity, we should conclude that Weaver & Woollard are only interested in a positive

justification for monogamy, whereas McKeever is open to a monogamist, negative or positive justification for monogamy. However, while McKeever has provided a positive justification, whether Weaver & Woollard have is a more complicated matter. Indeed, I can only conclude that their justification for monogamy is *plausibly* a positive justification only if they adopt the two-way interpretation for the justification for restricting sex to romantic relationships.

Chapter 10 The difficulty of managing jealousy justification

§10.1 explains how ‘jealousy’ and ‘sexual jealousy’ differ and (re)explains the three broad views on the reasonableness of each response. §10.2 presents the justification, and §10.3 describes the support the evolutionary account of jealousy provides. §10.4 explains how this justification answers most of the challenges to monogamy I have examined in this thesis. §10.5 details how other monogamy challengers have attempted to reject (something like) the difficulty of managing jealousy justification, and §10.6 defends it against their criticisms. Finally, §10.7 responds to various remaining questions regarding this justification before §10.8 concludes the chapter.

10.1 Jealousy, sexual jealousy, and the reasonableness of each

Let me (re)introduce the following definitions:

Sexual jealousy: a set of emotionally painful responses to (the idea of) someone you love romantically engaging in *sexual relations* with someone else.

And:

Jealousy: a set of emotionally painful responses to (the idea of) someone you love romantically engaging in *sexual and/or romantic relations* with someone else.

I have (most) often discussed *sexual* jealousy because one of my main focuses is the ethics of *sexually* open relationships. Since these arrangements are romantically exclusive but sexually non-exclusive, only sexual jealousy should be a potential issue, at least in theory.

But most of the challenges to monogamy I have discussed critically questioned sexual *and* romantic exclusivity. Furthermore, many proposed open relationships that allow for multiple sexual *and* romantic partners as the only ethical or, at least, (prima facie) ethically superior alternative relationship style. Consequently, we need to discuss jealousy, not just sexual jealousy, in assessing these challenges.

Now recall:

1. *The positive view*: Sexual jealousy over one’s partner engaging in extra-relationship sex is *always reasonable*. Consequently, at the very least, we have (prima facie) moral reasons

to (i) not try to manage or overcome such sexual jealousy but rather (ii) restrict *all* extra-relationship sex.

2. *The negative view*: Sexual jealousy over one's partner engaging in extra-relationship sex is *always unreasonable*. Consequently, at the very least, we have (prima facie) moral reasons to (i) try to manage and, ideally, overcome sexual jealousy and (ii) try not to restrict extra-relationship sex but, instead, aim for more sexual openness in our relationships.
3. *The mixed view*: Sexual jealousy over one's partner engaging in extra-relationship sex can be reasonable or unreasonable, depending on the circumstances. Consequently, at the very least, we have (prima facie) moral reasons to (i) not try to manage or overcome *reasonable* sexual jealousy but rather (ii) restrict the extra-relationship sex that triggers it. Also, again at the very least, we have (prima facie) moral reasons to (i) try to manage and, ideally, overcome *unreasonable* sexual jealousy and (ii) try not to restrict the extra-relationship sex that triggers it but, instead, have more openness to such sex.

Part II argued for *the mixed view* on the grounds that sexual jealousy is *often but not always* a reasonable response to the threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown) and/or attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex.

Now we should accordingly distinguish between three broad perspectives on the reasonableness of *jealousy over extra-relationship sex and love* and their implications for the ethics of monogamy and *open* relationships. So, in short, on *the positive view*, jealousy over extra-relationship sex and love is always reasonable; on *the negative view*, such jealousy is always unreasonable; and on *the mixed view*, it is reasonable or unreasonable depending on the circumstances. Monogamy challengers would hold a *negative* or *mixed view*.

10.2 The difficulty of managing jealousy justification

The difficulty of managing jealousy justification: To (partly) explain why they desire monogamy rather than an open relationship, some or many people can appeal to the difficulty of managing jealousy. They wish to avoid undesirable, intense, and painful feelings of jealousy in their relationship(s): a relationship consumed with such feelings will be highly unpleasant and will likely end. Such people can reason that to have a happy, successful, open relationship, they and their partner(s) will have to overcome or, at least, manage their jealousy to a sufficient extent. Indeed, the relationship will be unhappy if at least one partner is regularly experiencing undesirable, intense, and painful feelings of jealousy because the other has additional sexual and/or romantic

relationships. However, they believe it is (very) difficult, perhaps too difficult, to overcome or manage their jealousy to this extent. So, instead, they desire monogamy because they think it is more effective for avoiding such jealousy. Plus, they can avoid the difficulties of overcoming or, at least, managing jealousy.

This justification can work if either the *negative* or *mixed* view is correct.⁴¹ Although I endorse *the mixed view*, I will often assume *the negative view* when assessing how monogamy challengers can and do respond to this justification since this will simplify matters. But before looking at criticisms of this justification, I will provide more support for it.

10.3 Support from the evolutionary account of jealousy

Why is jealousy (very) difficult, perhaps even too difficult, to overcome or manage to the extent required to have a happy, successful, open relationship? The evolutionary account of jealousy is very informative on this matter. So I will recap it here.

According to the mainstream view in evolutionary psychology (§1.3), humans are generally built to form pair bonds. However, at least many men and women are also evolutionarily inclined towards seeking extra-relationship sex and/or love, at least in certain circumstances. But in male-female pair bonds, a partner engaging in extra-relationship sex and/or love with someone of the *opposite sex* risks significant harm to their partner. Males face the issue of *paternal uncertainty*. If their female partner has sex with another male, she may become pregnant with his offspring. And if so, not only will he have missed the opportunity to reproduce, but he may also waste much effort and resources over many years rearing another male's offspring. Females face the issue that their male partner may switch to a new pair bond or perhaps attempt to maintain multiple pair bonds simultaneously. Consequently, he will likely divert some, most, or even all his time, attention, protection, efforts, commitment, and other resources away to the rival female(s) and their children. For our female ancestors, such actions by their male partner would threaten their and their offspring's survival.

To help protect against these harms, evolution selected for jealousy. But due to the different risks our male and female ancestors faced, there are sex differences in what triggers jealousy. Male jealousy is particularly responsive to cues of their female partner's extra-relationship sex, whereas female jealousy is more responsive to cues of their male partner's extra-relationship love.

⁴¹ If *the positive view* of jealousy is correct, we would not need to appeal to the difficulty of managing jealousy to justify monogamy.

As jealousy was vital for our ancestors' reproductive success, and, for our female ancestors, their survival too, it can be very intense, powerful, automatic, hard to manage, and often not responsive to reason. Indeed, jealousy consists of various emotions, including anger, rage, sadness, hurt, humiliation, grief, betrayal, agony, hopelessness, anxiety, and extreme distress. People can fester in jealousy, obsessively having jealous thoughts and feelings, which often results in them being unable to work, sleep properly, and enjoy activities they usually do. Jealousy can also motivate vigilance behaviours, such as watching a partner's interactions at social events, following them when they are out, and inspecting their private messages and emails. Furthermore, it can lead to verbal abuse, threats, violence, and even murder against a partner and/or rival.

Evolutionary psychologists believe the evidence for the evolutionary account is compelling (see Buss 2019: 317-325; Edlund & Sagarin 2017; Appendix A). Consequently, monogamy challengers must engage with the difficulty of managing jealousy justification and the support this account provides.

10.4 How this justification answers other challenges to monogamy

If the difficulty of managing jealousy justification works, it answers or undermines most of the challenges to monogamy I have discussed. First, we cannot appeal to the harmful unnaturalness of monogamy to argue for (sexually) open relationship alternatives for most or all people, like in the way Russell and McMurtry do (§5.1). Indeed, we have to contend with the harmful unnaturalness of consensual nonmonogamy. Also, much may be said to favour Russell's belief that it is morally preferable to manage jealousy to enable more sexual openness. Still, some or even many couples could claim that it would be very hard, if not impossible, and the benefits would not outweigh the risks and costs of trying to do so.

Second, the anti-possessiveness argument for anti-monogamism fails (§5.2). Of course, jealousy and monogamy may often be (partially) motivated by possessive attitudes, and when so, it should be subject to moral criticism. However, people can experience jealousy in response to their partner being with another, not because they see them as their possession but because it is an automatic reaction built into human nature. Furthermore, the difficulty of managing this jealousy can and does legitimately motivate monogamy.

Third, we saw that Chalmers, Clardy, and Moen & Sørli presented arguments for anti-monogamism (Chapter 6). But they considered appeals to jealousy as candidate defences of monogamy. Still, they argued that these defences were unsuccessful. So, presumably, if I can

demonstrate that the difficulty of managing jealousy justification is successful, these anti-monogamists would have to concede that monogamy is morally permissible.

Finally, since McKeever is open to accepting a negative justification for monogamy (§9.1) – the difficulty of managing jealousy justification can also answer her challenge to monogamy (§8.1). Consequently, her (highly) problematic justification for monogamy is unnecessary.

The only challenge to monogamy I have discussed that the difficulty of managing jealousy justification does not answer is Weaver & Woollard's (§7.1) since they are looking for a *positive* justification for monogamy, which this justification is not (§9.1).

10.5 Other monogamy challengers on the difficulty of managing jealousy

Various monogamy challengers have responded (indirectly) to (something like) the difficulty of managing jealousy justification (e.g. Jenkins 2017: 171-173; de Sousa 2017; Brunning 2020; Moen & Sørliie 2022: 349-350; Clardy 2023: 61-68). Unfortunately, I cannot discuss all of them due to space considerations. Instead, I will focus on the arguments of Natasha McKeever (2015: 6-7) and Harry Chalmers (2019: 235-240; 2022: 1026-1032) for the following reasons. First, they are contemporary monogamy-challenging philosophers whose work I have engaged with. Also, between their works, they cover most of the responses I have encountered to the idea that jealousy is too hard to manage, both from philosophers and non-philosophers. Relatedly, others often explicitly use their arguments or express similar ones (e.g. Moen & Sørliie 2022: 349-350; Clardy 2023: 61-68). Thus, McKeever's and Chalmers' responses to the difficulty of managing jealousy justification are arguably a large representative sample of all the responses philosophers and others have provided. So if their responses do not undermine this justification, we can be confident it works. Additionally, after reading my critique of McKeever's and Chalmers' responses to this justification, the reader will hopefully be able to anticipate how I would respond to other monogamy challengers whose responses I did not have space to discuss.

10.5.1 McKeever

McKeever does not hold *the negative view*. Instead, on her account, jealousy can often be reasonable. For example, suppose a couple's monogamy is justified per her justification. In that case, if one of the partners were to engage in extra-relationship sex and/or love, it would be reasonable for the other partner to feel jealous. More importantly, though, there could be couples whose *romantic* exclusivity is justified on her account but not their *sexual* exclusivity. My understanding is that, in such cases, she believes the partners could still reasonably feel jealousy over extra-relationship sex that poses a significant risk of extra-relationship love (and consequent

relationship breakdown). But McKeever, like me, argues that not all extra-relationship sex presents such risks – let us call such sex ‘love-risk-free extra-relationship sex’. Accordingly, if a couple’s *sexual* exclusivity is not justified per her justification, they would not be justified in restricting each other from love-risk-free extra-relationship sex (on all these points, see Chapter 8 and McKeever 2014; 2015). So suppose, for example, a man’s girlfriend wanted to be a groupie for her favourite rockstar for an hour, and McKeever’s justification for sexual exclusivity did not apply to this couple. In that case, it would be unreasonable for him to feel sexually jealous, and he would have no justification for restricting his girlfriend from having this experience.

McKeever recognises that some think many couples could appeal to the difficulty of managing jealousy to justify their *sexual* exclusivity. Indeed, she explains that some argue that sexual jealousy is “inescapable, just a brute response to certain situations” (2015: 6), briefly outlining the evolutionary account of jealousy in doing so. However, she rejects this description (p. 8) and, therefore, concludes we cannot cite sexual jealousy as justification for *sexual* exclusivity for the following reasons (pp. 6-7):

- Triggers for, and the intensity of, jealousy differs between cultures, suggesting that “social norms are at least partly responsible for jealousy”
- Not everyone possesses jealousy to the same degree, nor are we stuck with it
- Jealousy’s supposed brute nature does not entail that we should be uncritical of it, just as critical attitudes towards, and efforts to minimise, harmful and unreasonable behaviours (e.g. rape and homophobia), are still valid even if these behaviours are products of evolved predispositions
- Sexual jealousy likely “has such great force, at least in part, because of the hegemonic norm of [sexual exclusivity]”
- “[M]any polyamorists try to master jealousy by cultivating compersion”, which is the state of deriving pleasure from seeing or knowing your partner is with someone else
- There are “various strategies for dealing with jealousy, such as disempowering it by refusing to act on it, and simply talking through your jealous feelings with your partner openly and honestly”

10.5.2 Chalmers

Chalmers (2019: 235-240) addresses the idea that monogamy is justified because it protects us from the pains of jealousy we experience in response to our partner being with another. In response, Chalmers first contends we should question why we experience jealousy since it “truly is odd.” Is it not (more) right, sensible, mature, and perhaps loving to be happy for, and share in

the joy of, our partner when they “find joy in someone else”? He believes the “answer...can only be that we feel jealousy precisely because we are less rational and less mature than we could be”. Indeed, he thinks we would respond positively to our partner being with another were it not for “certain unreasonable fears and preconceptions” (all quotes from p. 235), the main ones being:

- The fear of losing our partner to another
- The assumption of dissatisfaction with us or the relationship if our partner is, or wishes to be, with another

Having clarified this, he believes we can assess the best solution for jealousy. He argues that monogamy is not the (optimal) solution for jealousy. Indeed, he believes that if we want to overcome jealousy, it is better to abandon monogamy. He highlights that monogamy fails to preclude jealousy because jealousy is common in monogamous relationships. Furthermore, he argues that monogamy capitulates to jealousy:

[R]ather than confronting the underlying needs or problems that jealousy indicates, monogamy is instead simply a way of avoiding behaviours that trigger jealous feelings, even at the cost of restricting the partners’ freedom and well-being (p. 236).

He also explains how monogamy perpetuates jealousy. By restricting your partner from being with others, it is more natural to worry about losing them – if they desire to be with someone else, the only way they can do it without cheating is to end the relationship. This also adds pressure to be better than other potential partners and be enough for your partner by fulfilling all their needs.

In addition to abandoning monogamy, Chalmers thinks jealousy should be confronted directly by realising how irrational jealousy is. In particular, we should challenge those “unreasonable fears and false preconceptions” (p. 237). First, the assumption of dissatisfaction should be corrected by realising that we do not form relationships to “correct for a deficiency...like filling an empty receptacle” (p. 238). On such a view:

If you do your job well, there is nothing left to be filled, nothing that your partner could possibly gain from having another partner. Thus, if your partner does become interested in someone else, it must be because of some deficiency in your partner’s life that you’ve failed to offset, some portion of the receptacle that you’ve failed to fill (p. 238).

Instead, romantic relationships, like friendships, “are a source of value”: one such relationship can be fine even if other ones can provide additional sources of value (p. 238)

Second, we should reason our way out of the fear of losing our partner to another. Chalmers raises the question:

If our relationship is mutually fulfilling, shouldn't we trust our partner not to leave us for someone else? (p. 238).

If we have abandoned monogamy, it appears we should trust our partner not to leave us for another. If our partner wishes to be with another, they do not have to break up with us.

Of course, sometimes it will be impossible for our partner to maintain both relationships (e.g. when the other partner lives far away), and they may have to end the relationship. Chalmers concedes that monogamy seems to offer better protection against such an outcome as there is less chance of our partner discovering the new partner. However, he argues we should not wish for our partner to be ignorant of better options. Instead, however much pain it will potentially cause us, we should welcome the prospect that they may leave us for someone with whom they are happier.

To have such a response in these circumstances, Chalmers believes we need to *develop emotional independence*: that is, we should strive to be comfortable, satisfied, and secure within ourselves, thereby not making our happiness dependent upon our partner being with us.

In summarising and closing his first discussion of jealousy, he writes:

Abandoning monogamy, recognising the irrationality of jealousy, and cultivating emotional independence are together a foundation for overcoming jealousy. Of course, they do not guarantee that one will never feel jealous at all. Many nonmonogamous relationships involve occasional moments of jealousy. But then, many nonmonogamous relationships have likewise been the site of partners' discovering powerful ways of coping with and working through their jealousy. Such experiences suggest that jealousy is not something to which partners in a nonmonogamous relationship must resign themselves. Rather, when partners in a non-monogamous relationship find themselves feeling jealous, they can simply accept it as a challenge to be managed constructively, much like other challenges that arise in relationships (p. 240).

Nevertheless, in later work, Chalmers claims the idea that some people need monogamy to avoid jealousy because "try as they might, overcoming jealousy simply may not be feasible" is "the most plausible attempt at justifying monogamy" (2022: 1026). However, he argues that even if we assume that jealousy has moral weight – which he is resistant to doing, given that he regards it as

immature and irrational (2019; 2022) – for monogamy to be justified, the following three conditions must be satisfied:

1. EXTREMITY: The jealousy is extreme.
2. NON-MONOGAMY INEFFECTIVE: No feasible options apart from monogamy—such as changes to one’s own thinking, communication, or personal lifestyle—would, together or by themselves, reduce the jealousy to a manageable level.
3. MONOGAMY EFFECTIVE: Monogamy, whether by itself or in conjunction with certain habits in one’s own thinking, communication, and personal lifestyle, would reduce the jealousy to a manageable level (2022: 1029).

He elaborates:

EXTREMITY is needed because a mild-to-moderate jealousy simply wouldn’t be bad enough a prospect to justify monogamous restrictions, given how weighty a justification monogamous restrictions need. If the jealousy were merely mild to moderate—the kind of feeling that presents itself as an occasional pang, say, or a sometimes-low mood, but which leaves one still generally able to function well—then the person or couple should simply find ways to cope with it (assuming that they cannot overcome it completely). The kind of jealousy necessary to justify monogamy is that which consumes someone’s life, leaving him obsessive and unable to function...

I include...[the NON-MONOGAMY INEFFECTIVE] condition because, were a person able to reduce her jealousy to a manageable level purely by making reasonable changes to her thinking, communication, and personal lifestyle...then she could simply do that...

The reason for [the MONOGAMY EFFECTIVE] condition is clear: If someone suffered from extreme jealousy in his relationships regardless of whether his relationships were monogamous, that would hardly count in favor of monogamy for him (pp. 1029-1031).

Following this, he contends that if a given case of jealousy fulfils the first two conditions, it is not very likely to fulfil the third because “[m]onogamy, in forcing your partner to choose between you and others, fosters a sense of competition in relationships—and competition is gunpowder to the fire of jealousy.” Indeed, he thinks, “it seems highly unlikely that there are many, if any, cases that meet all three conditions”. Furthermore, he adds that even if there are some rare such cases, this would “leave the spirit of the anti-monogamy view intact” because “any sane version of the anti-monogamy view will already allow that there are possible cases in which monogamy is morally permissible; like most moral claims, it was never intended to extend to all possible cases.”

Supporting this, he asks us to “consider a case in which powerful aliens will blow up earth unless you choose to be monogamous” (all quotes from p. 1031).

10.6 Responding to other monogamy challengers on the difficulty of managing jealousy

McKeever and Chalmers have provided numerous intriguing points on jealousy. But they fail to undermine the difficulty of managing jealousy justification. I will discuss two broad problems their critiques face: *the insufficient evidence problem* and *the cost-(risk-)benefit analysis problem*.

10.6.1 The insufficient evidence problem

To reject the difficulty of managing jealousy justification, Chalmers – per his own reasoning – must demonstrate that *nearly everyone (aside from those whose jealousy is too extreme to handle any kind of relationship) can manage jealousy to the extent required to have a happy, successful, open relationship, one that is relatively unrestrictive* (for reasons discussed in §6.1.2). Indeed, if more than a rare few couples cannot do so and could, consequently, justify their monogamy by appealing to the difficulty of managing jealousy, their monogamy would be morally permissible. And the more such couples there are, the more “the spirit of the anti-monogamy view” is compromised.

Meanwhile, it seems McKeever *at least* needs to establish that *(nearly) everyone can manage their sexual jealousy over love-risk-free extra-relationship sex to the extent required to have a happy, successful, sexually open relationship*. Indeed, suppose some couples cannot. In that case, these couples could justify their *sexual* exclusivity by appealing to the difficulty of managing jealousy justification. Consequently, McKeever would be wrong to suggest that the sexual exclusivity of these couples would be unjustified unless her justification applies to them.

Now suppose we believe that jealousy is intensely painful, powerful, automatic, hard to manage, unresponsive to reason, and deeply rooted in human nature, as the evolutionary account suggests. In this case, McKeever’s and Chalmers’ arguments fail to establish these respective claims.

Chalmers offers his theory of jealousy without even mentioning the evolutionary perspective. Yet, if the evolutionary account is correct, it has critical implications for his case. Thus, at least some engagement with it, preferably criticism, is required. Furthermore, contradicting the evolutionary account, he treats jealousy as something that can be (largely) alleviated through reason. In particular, we need to reason ourselves out of the following:

- The fear of losing our partner to another
- The assumption of dissatisfaction with us or the relationship if our partner is, or wishes to be, with another

However, although these fears and assumptions likely feature in jealousy for many, they are often not the only or even leading cause. For example, for probably most men, jealousy can be triggered just by (the idea of) their female partner having sex with another man. According to the evolutionary account, this is an automatic response, not something they have learned socially or acquired through misguided reasoning. Therefore, it is not something that men can (easily) overcome through reason.

Also, even if – as both McKeever and Chalmers suggest – social norms (e.g. monogamy) and mistaken thinking are partly responsible for jealousy, and we manage to overcome them, the more “biological” aspect of jealousy remains. Furthermore, although some people may be less jealous than others (after using strategies), this does not mean the more jealous people can necessarily become sufficiently less jealous too: consider this claim with other traits such as impatience, aggression, arrogance, and fear of heights.

I suspect McKeever’s and Chalmers’ points would not persuade many who have experienced intense jealousy that they can now manage it to the extent McKeever and Chalmers need to demonstrate that they can. To help see why let us consider a comparison of jealousy and desires for extra-relationship sex with McKeever’s main points in mind. Many people struggle with long-term monogamy due to strong desires for extra-relationship sex (see Part I). Such people will not be convinced they can manage their nonmonogamous sexual desires enough to achieve the monogamous ideal by reading the following:

- Triggers for, and the intensity of, desires for extra-relationship sex differs between cultures, suggesting that social norms are at least partly responsible for them
- Not everyone desires extra-relationship sex to the same degree, nor are we stuck with these desires
- The supposed brute nature of desires for extra-relationship sex does not entail that we should be uncritical of them, just as critical attitudes towards and efforts to minimise harmful and unreasonable behaviours (e.g. rape and homophobia) are still valid even if these behaviours are products of evolved predispositions
- Desires for extra-relationship sex likely have such great force, at least in part, because of the social pressure to have multiple sexual partners
- Many monogamists strive to manage desires for extra-relationship sex by developing the disposition of only having sexual desires for one’s monogamous partner

- There are various strategies for dealing with desires for extra-relationship sex, such as disempowering them by refusing to act on them and simply talking through these desires with your partner openly and honestly

Finally, let us turn to the three conditions Chalmers believes must be met for monogamy to be justified – (1) extremity, (2) non-monogamy ineffective, and (3) monogamy effective. I consider these conditions (very) plausible. Indeed, I echo such points in §11.2. However, Chalmers is mistaken to think all three conditions are *rarely* met. Firstly, research on the evolutionary account of jealousy gives us strong reasons to believe that jealousy *is* “extreme” rather than “merely mild or moderate” for many/most people (§10.3). Secondly, due to the reasons just given – and the evidence I will present in §11.2 – it is very likely that many people *would not* find non-monogamy effective for managing their jealousy. Indeed, many fail to have a happy open relationship because they cannot manage their jealousy (Buss 2000). And third, it is plausible that many couples who meet both these conditions *would* find monogamy effective in managing their jealousy. Chalmers seems to assume that such people would struggle with jealousy in monogamous relationships because of the “sense of competition”. However, there are plausibly many such couples who might have at least some desires for extra-relationship sex and/or love but who are romantically and sexually satisfied, even happy, in their monogamous relationship, are consequently highly unlikely to cheat and, thus, do not experience jealousy over any competing rivals (see §1.3.2). Additionally, at least some couples who meet conditions (1) and (2) might also find monogamy effective for managing jealousy because one or both partners cheats sufficiently discreetly to avoid any jealousy being triggered – though, of course, this (unpopular) point raises many further ethical questions.

So Chalmers needs to provide more evidence that nearly everyone (aside from those whose jealousy is too extreme to manage any kind of relationship) can manage jealousy to the extent required to have a happy, successful, open relationship, one that is relatively unrestrictive. Likewise, McKeever needs to give us more reasons to believe that (nearly) everyone can manage their sexual jealousy over love-risk-free extra-relationship sex to the extent required to have a happy, successful, sexually open relationship.

10.6.2 The cost-(risk-)benefit analysis problem

But let us imagine that Chalmers and McKeever – and, indeed, other such monogamy challengers – can overcome the insufficient evidence problem. Even in this case, their challenges to monogamy still face *the cost-benefit problem*: couples need to assess whether the benefits they

could potentially gain from the freedom to have additional sexual and/or romantic partners would outweigh the costs involved in managing their jealousy.

Let me unpack this. In response to Chalmers' and McKeever's challenges (§6.1.1 and §8.1, respectively), we could acknowledge that additional sexual and/or romantic relations would be a *benefit* of having an open relationship, at least for many people – or, to put it in their terms, such relationships would be important human goods (Chalmers) or sources of value (McKeever). However, we can point out that, for many couples, managing jealousy to have a happy, successful, (sexually) open relationship would involve substantial *costs* in the form of time, effort, and distress. Indeed, notice how many of McKeever's and Chalmers' points correctly suggest this: they use terms like “cultivating”, “try to master”, “dealing with”, “coping with”, and “working through”. We could also describe the costs involved in managing jealousy as sources of disvalue, and we might reasonably think that it is an important human good to avoid such costs. Having established these points, we can plausibly claim that, for many couples, the costs do not outweigh the benefits. Instead, the partners could devote their time towards other activities they find valuable and even consider important human goods (e.g. sports, friendships, and philosophy).

To help understand this, imagine the following monogamous couple:

Frankie and Jessie: For several years, they have been satisfied with only having sexual and romantic relations with each other, and there is no reason to think this will change. Indeed, neither of them are losing sexual interest in the other. However, at least one desires extra-relationship sex (and a brief romantic fling with someone new). However, these desires are pretty fleeting and not particularly strong – they are certainly not terribly frustrated by not acting on them. They may also not have much opportunity to act on these desires.

Let us grant that if Frankie and Jessie devote much time and effort to managing jealousy, they could have a happy, successful, open relationship. But would it be worth it? They – and real couples like them – can reasonably decide it is not and thus remain monogamous. However, Chalmers would have to believe they should take on these costs and would be acting immorally if they did not. And if McKeever's justification for monogamy does not apply to them, McKeever would have to think that their monogamy was unjustified. It seems she would also have to agree that such couples should devote time and effort to managing their jealousy.

Recall that all this is granting that everyone can manage unreasonable feelings of jealousy to the extent Chalmers and McKeever (need to) claim. In reality, attempts to manage jealousy will likely be ineffective for many partners. If such couples open up their relationship, they may well bring in

jealousy their relationship cannot withstand. So, in addition to the costs mentioned above, there are significant *risks*. Therefore, in reality, challenges to monogamy like Chalmers' and McKeever's face *the cost-risk-benefit analysis problem*: couples need to assess whether the benefits they could potentially gain from the freedom to have additional sexual and/or romantic partners would outweigh the risks and costs involved in managing their jealousy.

So suppose Frankie and Jessie – and couples like them – think it is probable that their efforts to manage jealousy will not work and, consequently, their relationship might end if they open it up. In that case, it makes sense for them to remain monogamous. Yet Chalmers would have to disagree, and it seems that McKeever would also if her justification does not apply to them.

The cost-benefit and the cost-risk-benefit analysis problems expose that Chalmers' and McKeever's challenges to monogamy have implausible implications. And I cannot see points in their work that may be used to rescue their challenges against these issues. Thus, it seems Chalmers and McKeever – and, indeed, many other monogamy challengers – do not and cannot refute *the difficulty of managing jealousy justification*. But before settling on these conclusions, I will address the key (critical) questions about my case that I have received.

10.7 Has the fire been extinguished?

Many have questioned whether the difficulty of managing jealousy justification is appealing for monogamous couples. Indeed, it seems to justify monogamy negatively, making it sound like the lesser evil rather than a positive, valuable choice we can embrace and celebrate (see Chalmers 2022: 1032). So perhaps a justification for monogamy like Weaver & Woollard's (2008) or McKeever's (2014) is preferable.

I do not deny that it would be *preferable* for monogamous couples to explain their monogamy by citing the kind of positive justification Weaver & Woollard and McKeever attempt to give.

However, my aim is not to identify the most appealing or even just an appealing justification for monogamy. Instead, it is simply to identify justification – preferably a standard, straightforward one – that establishes monogamy as a reasonable choice for many people, especially given the problems I have identified with the (positive) justifications of Weaver & Woollard and McKeever.

Moving on to a more critical issue: many have objected to (something like) the following implicit idea in the difficulty of managing jealousy justification: we can appeal to our unreasonable, hard-to-manage feelings to justify imposing restrictions on other people's behaviour (e.g. McKeever 2015: 6-7; Chalmers 2022: 1026-1028; Moen & Sørliie 2022: 349-350). Consider:

Unreasonable Ulrich: He would suffer intense, long-term psychological pain in response to (i) seeing a gay couple in public expressing their love (e.g. holding hands and kissing each other) and (ii) his girlfriend having any friends apart from him. Ulrich thinks his feelings are entirely unreasonable and wishes he did not have them. Yet, he finds it very difficult, if not impossible, to manage them.

Some think my reasoning implies that Ulrich would be justified in demanding that gay people not express their love in front of him and restricting his girlfriend from having additional friends. But these implications are unattractive, suggesting an issue with my reasoning. However, a crucial implicit element of the difficulty of managing justification is that it is about people consensually entering into a relationship, establishing its rules, and having the freedom to leave it.

So in the case of gay couples in public, Ulrich could not justify demanding that they hide their love from him – they have not consensually entered into any relationship with him. Instead, he would have to work hard to overcome his homophobia; if he cannot, he would have to avoid areas where there might be gay couples.

But Ulrich could make it clear to a potential girlfriend that, if they are to have a relationship, it would have to be a *friendship-restricting relationship* – in which he would also forgo having other friends. According to my reasoning, if she consents, this would be justified. However, this “bullet” is easy to bite. Ulrich will probably always be single because it is highly improbable that he will ever find a woman who will agree to a *friendship-restricting relationship*. Moreover, even if he could, it is doubtful that it would last long. Relatedly, sometimes real people end their relationship because their partner was *too* jealous and restricted their lives *too* much.

But what if Ulrich could find a partner who also suffers terribly when their partner has other friends and, thus, desires a friendship-restricting relationship? Fortunately, such people seem rare. Also, they would arguably have better lives by staying single and having multiple friends. Nevertheless, if there are people like Ulrich who would be happiest in a friendship-restricting relationship, they should not be condemned to a life of not having such a relationship. It would be morally acceptable for them to form friendship-restricting relationships. Indeed, there could be a dating website for them, like findyourexclusivefriend.com. Of course, this is similar to how many people use dating websites on which they can specify that they are looking for a monogamous relationship (partly) because they wish to avoid the difficulty of managing jealousy.

We should also recognise that we often accept people appealing to their unreasonable but hard-to-manage feelings to justify imposing other kinds of restrictions on their partner. Indeed, many people have phobias and obsessive-compulsive behaviours that will affect any partner they have.

Consequently, they are often upfront with any potential relationship partner about it. Consider, for example, someone with a terrible fear of flying who has given up on trying to overcome this fear after dedicating much time and effort over many years. It would be acceptable for them to inform a potential partner that they will not get on a plane, so their holiday options as a couple would be considerably restricted. And, if their partner is okay with that, it would be morally permissible for the terribly nervous flyer to continue refusing to fly.⁴²

The final critical question I will address is whether the difficulty of managing jealousy justification enables people to justify monogamy too easily. Of course, I am someone who challenges monogamy, who identifies at length its risks and cost, and who believes we should embrace a plurality of sex and love lifestyles. Thus, I do not wish to see people quickly conclude that they should pursue a monogamous relationship because of the difficulty of managing jealousy. Instead, I believe couples should carefully consider questions like: Are they likely to achieve the monogamous ideal? Is monogamy optimal for them? What benefits can they gain from extra-relationship sex and love? What jealousy management strategies, if any, might work for them? Are they capable of managing their jealousy to the extent required to have a happy, successful, open relationship? Would the risks and costs involved in managing jealousy be worth the benefits they can gain from a consensually nonmonogamous relationship? This is why I only believe that *some or even many* couples can appeal to the difficulty of managing jealousy to justify their monogamy – not all! Furthermore, I will soon discuss strategies for managing sexual jealousy that can enable some or even many couples to have a happy, successful, lifelong, sexually open relationship (§11.2).

10.8 Conclusion

I have presented the difficulty of managing jealousy justification and defended it against various objections. Since the difficulty of managing jealousy justification works, it answers or undermines most of the challenges to monogamy I have discussed. Thus, the fire that monogamy came under from these challenges has been extinguished – and yes, I am aware of the mixed metaphor.

Of course, in this part of the thesis, I have discussed two other justifications for monogamy – Weaver & Woollard's and McKeever's. I did not outright reject these justifications. Still, I identified numerous critical issues they face. And I demonstrated that even if they can work, much development, elaboration, revision, and – in Weaver & Woollard's case – clarification is necessary. Until then, we should prefer the difficulty of managing jealousy justification.

⁴² Relatedly, recall *the pre-relationship-formation requirement of no alcohol* case (p. 130).

PART V: THE REAL-WORLD VIEW

This last part revives one of the main themes of Parts I and II: defending my main proposals against those who argue for (something like) monogamism and monogamous idealism.

Specifically, it examines the real-world view.

Chapter 11 Assessing the real-world view

Many people endorse:

The real-world view: although sexually open relationships are not inherently (or *in principle*) unethical, and while they are theoretically appealing for many, such relationships are (in the vast majority of cases) too ethically problematic *in practice*; thus, successful monogamy, despite its restrictions, is the relationship style (the vast majority of) people should pursue.

People often state it more colloquially: e.g. “I have nothing against such relationships in theory, but I don’t think they work – at least, few couples can manage them. You can’t have your cake and eat it. Monogamy may not be perfect, but it’s better than the alternatives!”

This view is supported by the claim that sexually open relationships face severe practical issues, which, especially when combined, make them too ethically problematic in practice, at least for the vast majority of people. I addressed one of these issues in §3.2 – the threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown). Here I will focus on the other two most prominent: the difficulty of managing sexual jealousy and the risks posed to child welfare.⁴³

Numerous academics and professionals have expressed opinions about (sexually) open relationships consistent with, or at least sympathetic to, (part of) the real-world view. Here are some examples:

The abysmal failure of most “open marriages” that became popular in the late 1960s and early 1970s is stark testament to the failure of experiments to expunge jealousy from the lives of lovers. Few marriages can endure third-party intruders.

– David Buss (2000: 221)

⁴³ There are other challenges that I do not have the space to address, including the risk of unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. Fortunately, others have provided excellent work that (indirectly) defends open relationships against such objections (e.g. Taormino 2008; Anderson 2012; Conley et al. 2013; Hardy & Easton 2017; Chalmers 2019; Moen & Sørliie 2022).

[C]ouples should know that feelings of jealousy are often more powerful, more difficult to eliminate, and more destructive of good relationships than we realize. That is why, in the real world, open relationships are not as easy as they would be if our emotions were under more rational control.

– Peter Singer (The Daily Princetonian 2006)

[N]orms do not nullify human instincts, or the pain caused by a philandering spouse. Romantic jealousy...is arguably as much a part of our nature as the impulse to cheat is. Yet from the perspective of child welfare...jealousy is much easier to harmonize with other values. This is because it keeps the parents' attention focused on each other, and on their childrearing obligations, and raises the cost of giving in to sexual temptation. Indeed, extra-marital sex often leads to extra-marital love...and hence the formation of a strong bond that could take time and energy directly away from existing offspring.

– Brian Earp, Anders Sandberg, and Julian Savulescu (2012: 572)

[O]pen relationships, polyamory, [and] other forms of nonmonogamy...as a medium to long-term strategy, they're completely untenable because human beings, as far as I'm concerned, are fundamentally pair-bonding...I've never seen that work under any circumstances whatsoever, and I think people get hurt badly. It's also a bad medium to long-term strategy because pair-bonding is...the only stable mode of being that we know for the long-run, and that's especially the case when you bring children into the equation...[People who believe such things are often] just unconscientious, and they don't want to take any responsibility, and they want to live in this wish-fulfilment fantasy where everybody can have all the sex they want all the time, and it's always wonderful, and no one gets hurt, and it's like "sorry, that just doesn't work in the real world."

– Jordan Peterson (Jordan B Peterson 2017)

Many relationship therapists probably agree with these statements since they generally resist consensual nonmonogamy (see Anderson 2012: 90-92; Crowe & Ridley 2000; Barker & Langdrige 2010).

However, various monogamy challengers think that the difficulty of managing sexual jealousy, the threat of extra-relationship love, and the risks to child welfare are surmountable problems for everyone. Thus, they outright reject the real-world view. Others may concede that *some* people cannot overcome these challenges, but they believe most or even the vast majority can.

Thus, there is a spectrum of views on the workability of (sexually) open relationships, which I call 'the real-world view spectrum'. See Figure 1.

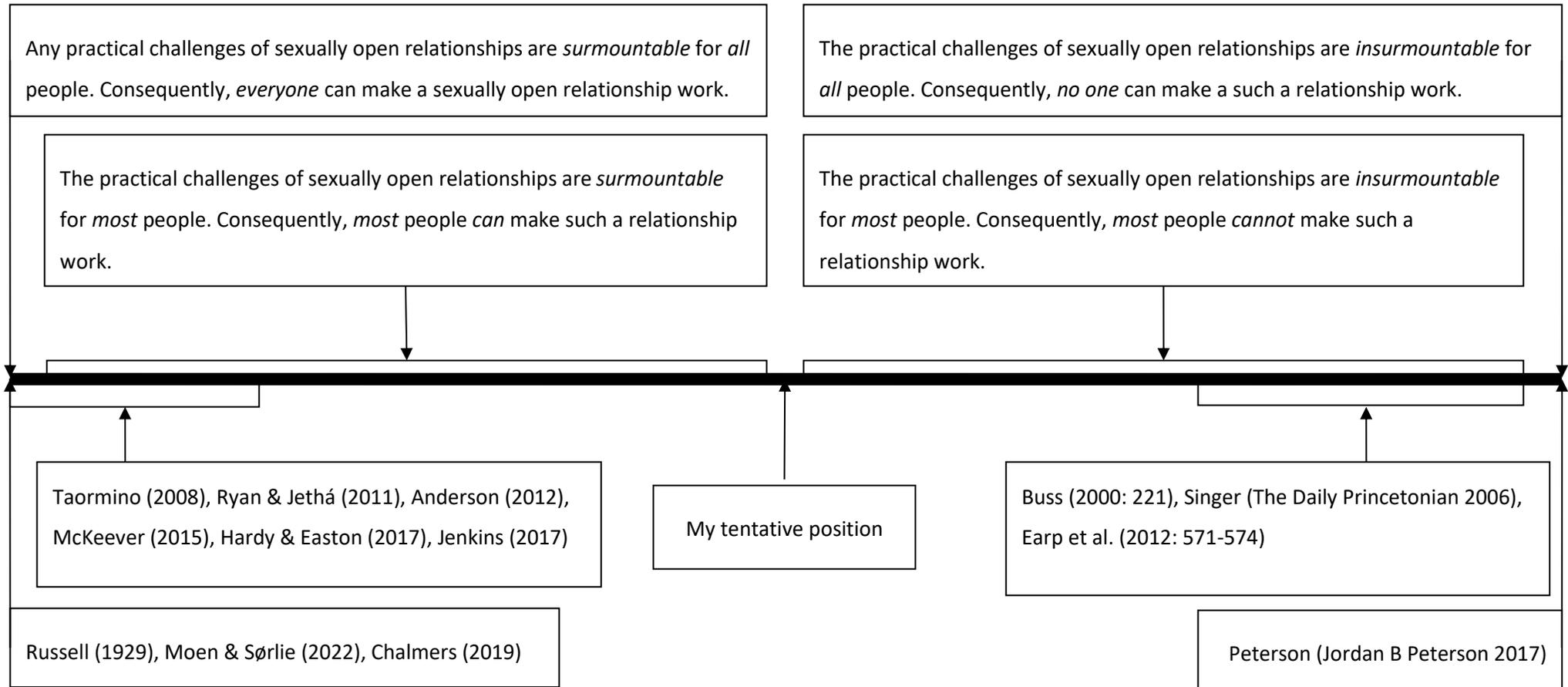


Figure 1: The real-world view spectrum

I have plotted some philosophers, scientists, and consensual nonmonogamy educators on this spectrum. Since this spectrum is my original method for explaining this debate, these commentators have not explicitly stated where they are positioned on it. So the positions I have given them are *estimates*.

I will argue that, given all the current evidence, we should neither accept the real-world view nor take a position towards the left end of the spectrum. I am more optimistic about the practical workability of sexually open relationships than people who hold the real-world view.

Nevertheless, I think there is at least one challenge such relationships present that is too hard for many people to manage: the difficulty of managing sexual jealousy. Therefore, I argue for a tentatively central position on the real-world view spectrum. We should neither be too optimistic nor pessimistic about the practical workability of sexually open relationships. There is much evidence that many people can make them work. However, there are also good reasons for believing they are not viable options for many others.

§11.2 addresses the difficulty of managing sexual jealousy, §11.3 discusses the risks to child welfare, and §11.4 concludes the chapter. But, first, §11.1 identifies four common errors in reasoning people make on the ethics of monogamy and sexually open relationships, particularly in discussions about the real-world view.⁴⁴

11.1 Common errors in reasoning

1. To compare monogamy *in theory* with sexually open relationships *in practice*.

Regarding the requirement of sexual exclusivity, *in theory*, monogamy is supposed to work (something like) as follows: the partners will always be sexually satisfied, cheating will not occur, and the partners and their relationship will be happy. If monogamy works like this, the difficulty of managing sexual jealousy, the threat of extra-relationship love, and the risks posed to child welfare will not be problems for the relationship. Meanwhile, when many people consider sexually open relationships, they appropriately think about how these arrangements work *in practice*. Consequently, the challenges just mentioned come to mind.

⁴⁴ Appendix C explains why the degree to which the real-world view is correct has various interesting and important implications for matters in sex and relationship ethics beyond the scope of this thesis.

However, if one considers these challenges and compares monogamy *in theory* with sexually open relationships *in practice*, the former will always be preferable. But, as I explained in Part I and will reiterate in this chapter, monogamy often does not work out how it is supposed to in theory. Consequently, sexual jealousy, extra-relationship love, and risks to child welfare are also often problems for long-term monogamous relationships.

Of course, when considering these matters, we should also resist contemplating some theoretical model of how sexually open relationships will work. Instead, when considering these challenges, we should examine how both relationship styles *in practice* can encounter and manage them.

Many people avoid this first error in reasoning. Instead, however, they make a less severe but still consequential mistake:

2. To be *overly optimistic* regarding the prospects of monogamy and *overly pessimistic* about the prospects of sexually open relationships.

For example, when considering monogamy, they may recognise it has risks and costs, but they do not consider them to their full extent. Typical examples of this are people who accept that sexual activity and satisfaction generally decline in long-term monogamous relationships. Still, they only consider this a gradual loss of a particular kind of pleasure. They overlook that, for many people, such a declining sex life significantly adversely affects their health and other elements of their well-being and, consequently, their relationship.⁴⁵

Likewise, when contemplating sexually open relationships, they might immediately think that if a person engaged in any kind of extra-relationship sex, their partner would inevitably experience intensely painful sexual jealousy. But, as we have and will continue to see, people vary in how prone they are to sexual jealousy and what kinds of extra-relationship sex, if any, triggers it.

So when comparing monogamy and sexually open relationships on any matter, we should consider how both work *in practice* (avoiding the first error in reasoning) and do so in a *balanced* manner.

3. To focus on the *short-term* rather than the *long-term* prospects of monogamy and sexually open relationships.

⁴⁵ I believe Louise Perry (2022) makes such mistakes.

When partners start a sexually open relationship, they typically have to address various challenges immediately. For example, they may need to negotiate the rules and boundaries of the relationship and develop strategies for managing sexual jealousy. This will generally be much more difficult in the short term than simply remaining monogamous. Indeed, in arguably most monogamous relationships, the partners will not have to experience the following such problems *in the short term*: experiencing sexual jealousy in response to their partner having extra-relationship sex, dealing with the threat of extra-relationship love, and minimising the risks their relationship style poses to their children (often because they do not have any yet). The same is true for (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and/or (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction and the problems they can cause.

But, as I have and will continue to demonstrate, these issues arise in many *long-term* monogamous relationships. Meanwhile, challenges such as managing sexual jealousy and the threat of extra-relationship love in sexually open relationships can become more straightforward in the long term. Therefore, when comparing monogamy and sexually open relationships on these and other matters, we should consider both in the short-term and long-term.

The final common error in reasoning is:

4. To automatically endorse successful monogamy when rejecting sexually open relationships, and vice versa.

When people believe that a sexually open relationship would incur insurmountable challenges – whether for them, for a given couple, or most or (nearly) all people – they think the right course of action is to pursue successful monogamy. Likewise, when people perceive insurmountable issues with successful monogamy, they conclude that (sexually) open relationships must be the answer. Indeed, John McMurtry and Bertrand Russell seem to do this (§5.1). However, just because one relationship style will not work – whether for a given couple or most or (nearly) all people – it does not mean the other will. The truth may be that neither relationship style is feasible.

11.2 The difficulty of managing sexual jealousy

Chapter 10 contributed to my task in this section, which is to demonstrate why, when just considering the difficulty of managing *sexual* jealousy, the evidence leads us to my tentatively central position on the real-world view spectrum. This contribution consisted of reasons why we cannot accept the position at the *left* end of the spectrum. So, here, I will mainly provide evidence

for why we should reject the position *at* the right end of this spectrum and why we cannot yet accept a position *towards* this end. This evidence will primarily consist of strategies for managing sexual jealousy.

But, first, I should remind the reader that I endorse *the mixed view* (§3.1.2). And I hold this view because I believe sexual jealousy is *often but not always* a reasonable response to the threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown) and/or attraction-motivated extra-relationship sex (Part II). So although I will be describing strategies for managing sexual jealousy, I only believe there can be moral reasons to use them when sexual jealousy is unreasonable.

11.2.1 Of reason and rules

Similar to many other monogamy challengers and educators on open relationships (e.g. Taormino 2008; Hardy & Easton 2017; Chalmers 2019), I believe a critical strategy for managing sexual jealousy is to reason oneself out of misguided thinking about extra-relationship sex, mainly the following belief: *all* extra-relationship sex involves a significant threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown) and/or is motivated by dissatisfaction with one's partner's non-reasonably-enhanceable sexual attractiveness and the desire to have sex with someone more sexually attractive. There can be many instances of extra-relationship sex that are not problematic in these ways (Part II).

Furthermore, rules can be established in a sexually open relationship to help prevent the partners from engaging in extra-relationship sex that is problematic in one or both of these respects. On that note, a common mistake is assuming that in sexually open relationships, the partners can have extra-relationship sex with little or no restrictions on when, where, how often, and with whom. Some couples may enjoy such *very sexually open relationships* (relatively) free from sexual jealousy. However, as previously mentioned, many sexually open relationship arrangements involve significant restrictions on extra-relationship sex. I will describe several examples from the literature on consensual nonmonogamy (e.g. Taormino 2008; Hardy & Easton 2017).

For possibly most sexually open partners, extra-relationship sex is something they do together. Many do this by going to swingers' events. Others might just have threesomes, perhaps with friends, sex workers, or people they have met on a night out or on an adult website. By both being present, the partners can help to ensure that neither engages in extra-relationship sex that can reasonably evoke sexual jealousy. Indeed, such contexts allow the partners to veto any people they do not want their partner to have sex with. Also, such sexually open relationships enable

partners to ensure that neither is having (significantly) more extra-relationship sex than the other – if such inequity would (reasonably) bother them, that is.

But, of course, other sexually open partners may not need to know who their partner is having sex with, perhaps as long as the rules minimise the risk of ethically problematic extra-relationship sex. Indeed, they may prefer discretion. For example, some permit their partner to have occasional one-time hook-ups with people they will never see again, perhaps while they are in another country. In cases where only one partner is interested in extra-relationship sex, they may be permitted just to have short sessions with different sex workers rather than seeking casual partners with whom they would likely spend more time. Couples who prefer such discretion might additionally utilise a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy.

11.2.2 Male sexual jealousy and pleasurable sperm competition

The sexual jealousy management strategies I have described thus far are designed to assure a person that their partner’s extra-relationship sex is casual and not something they can be reasonably hurt by for reasons relating to sexual attractiveness. For many people – let us call them ‘Group 1’ – such strategies will be sufficient because what would typically bother them about their partner having extra-relationship sex is these conditions not being met. However, for many other people – let us call them ‘Group 2’ – these assurances might help reduce their sexual jealousy. But it would fall (far) short of eliminating it because it can just be triggered simply by knowing their partner is having extra-relationship sex (with someone of the opposite sex).

Evolutionary theory strongly suggests that Group 1 mostly consists of women while Group 2 mostly consists of men. This is because male jealousy is particularly responsive to cues of their female partner having sex with another male, whereas female jealousy is particularly responsive to cues of their male partner having an emotional relationship with another female (§1.3.1.4; Appendix A).

Consequently, one can plausibly argue that the sexual jealousy management strategies I have described thus far may often work in situations such as the following. First, when the partners are two gay men. And second, opposite-sex couples where the woman either does not engage in extra-relationship sex or only does so with other women. In these cases, a man does not have to manage his sexual jealousy over his girlfriend/wife having sex with another male. But for sexually open relationships in which a man would have to manage such jealousy, the use of rules and reason will probably be insufficient.

Of course, most potential sexually open relationships would arguably require a man to manage his sexual jealousy over his girlfriend/wife having sex with other men. Consequently, many probably think the challenge of managing sexual jealousy is insurmountable for most couples. So they adopt a position towards the right end of the real-world view spectrum.

It is reasonable to think that sexually open relationships in which a man has to deal with his girlfriend/wife having sex with other men are unworkable in the long term due to the power of male sexual jealousy. However, there is evidence that some men are in happy, successful, long-term, sexually open relationships in which their girlfriend/wife has sex with other men.

Furthermore, there is evidence that many or most such men experience sexual arousal and/or (sexual) pleasure in seeing their wife/girlfriend having sex with another man (see Gould 1999: especially 204-214; Fernandes 2009; Ley 2011).

Such men seem to defy evolutionary theory. However, research on human sperm competition may explain why this phenomenon is a product of, rather than evidence against, the evolutionary-rooted nature of male sexual jealousy. Many evolutionary psychologists agree that humans have an evolutionary history of sperm competition, which occurs when the sperm of more than one male simultaneously inhabit a female's reproductive tract because she has had sex with multiple males within a short timeframe. Much of the evidence for human sperm competition comes from examining how men react to perceived threats of sperm competition, which include the following (Pham & Shackelford 2014):

- Extended periods apart from their partner (as she may have had sex with, or been raped by, one or more other males)
- Their partner spending time independently with other males who are potential rivals
- Having a partner who is highly physically attractive and, thus, will receive more sexual interest from other men
- Having suspicion or knowledge of their female partner's infidelity

Studies have found that in response to such threats of sperm competition, men are more likely to:

- Have an increased interest in sex with their partner (Shackelford et al. 2002; Shackelford et al. 2007; Starratt, McKibbin, & Shackelford 2013; Pham & Shackelford 2014), which leads to more frequent sex with their partner (Pham et al. 2014; Kaighobadi & Shackelford 2008)
- Use coercion and force to have sex with their partner (Frieze, 1983; Finkelhor & Yllo 1985; Russell 1982; Gage & Hutchinson 2006; Goetz & Shackelford 2006; Starratt et al. 2008; Camilleri & Quinsey 2009)

- Ejaculate a greater volume of sperm during sex with their partner (Baker & Bellis 1993; Kilgallon & Simmons 2005).
- Engage in deeper and more vigorous penile thrusting during penile-vaginal intercourse (Gallup et al. 2003; Goetz et al. 2005)

These behaviours enable men to crowd out rival sperm in their partner's reproductive tract and, in the case of penile thrusting, remove the sperm of other men. Of course, this increases their chances of winning the sperm competition.

What does all this have to do with men in sexually open relationships who can manage their sexual jealousy over their girlfriend/wife having sex with other men? Researchers on the cuckoldry/hotwife lifestyle (e.g. Ley 2011: 246-250) and swinging (e.g. Gould 1999: 204-214; Fernandes 2009) have discussed the possibility that men in such relationships may be experiencing what I call 'pleasurable sperm competition'.

These men often know that their girlfriend/wife has had sex with one or more other men. Consequently, they perceive a threat of sperm competition. But these men are not overcome with painful sexual jealousy: they do not fly into a jealous rage against their partner and the other man or men, nor do they feel other painful emotions (e.g. hurt, sadness, anxiety), at least not intensely. However, they still respond to the perceived threat of sperm competition in the ways mentioned above and gain sexual pleasure. Indeed, when men ejaculate a greater volume of sperm, they (tend to) have a more intense and pleasurable orgasm (Gould 1999: 204-214; Llanes, Ballester, & Elías-Calle 2014). Also, if they have more interest in sex with their partner and have more sex with her, they will experience *more* sexual pleasure, including *more* intense orgasms with high-volume ejaculations. Furthermore, they – and, indeed, their partner – may enjoy more rough sex involving deeper and more vigorous penile thrusting – though, of course, I am not endorsing the use of coercion and force.

The idea that these men are experiencing pleasurable sperm competition coheres with the following findings: swinging men report having more intense orgasms with a higher volume of sperm in their ejaculates during sex with their partner after seeing her having sex with another man; many swinging couples claim that swinging has enhanced their sex life together; and many swingers reporting having more frequent and pleasurable sex shortly after attending a swinging event (Gould 1999; Fernandes 2009). So the 'pleasurable sperm competition theory' may well explain how some men are in happy, successful, long-term, sexually open relationships in which their girlfriend/wife has sex with other men. Indeed, it is the most plausible explanation I can find.

However, although *some* men can experience pleasurable sperm competition rather than painful sexual jealousy in response to their girlfriend/wife having sex with other men in a context like swinging, this does not entail that *all* heterosexual and bisexual men can. Indeed, it is quite possible how a man would react in such a scenario is more automatic rather than something that can be developed. Many men might be capable of experiencing pleasurable sperm competition, while many others are not. But of course, until many more men try such sexually open relationships – with research tracking the outcomes – we will not have any idea what proportion of men can manage their sexual jealousy over their girlfriend/wife having sex with other men.

Consequently, anti-monogamists and other such monogamy challengers should not believe that all men can (easily) manage their sexual jealousy over their wife/girlfriend having sex with other men. But we should not conversely assume that most, if not (nearly) all, men are incapable of managing such sexual jealousy. Unfortunately, we do not currently have any reasonable estimate of the proportions. This is one of the main reasons I tentatively adopt a central position on the real-world view spectrum.

11.2.3 Sexual jealousy within monogamous relationships

Many monogamists and proponents of the real-world view might concede that there are strategies for managing jealousy. But they may still judge monogamy (vastly) superior to sexually open relationships for avoiding sexual jealousy. This will likely, if not almost certainly, be the case for some or many couples, as I will soon explain. But to conclude that this is the case for (*nearly*) *all* or even just *most* couples is a mistake, one that is often made (partially) due to committing one or more of the following errors in reasoning (§11.1):

1. To compare monogamy *in theory* with sexually open relationships *in practice*.
2. To be *overly optimistic* regarding the prospects of monogamy and *overly pessimistic* about the prospects of sexually open relationships.
3. To focus on the *short-term* rather than the *long-term* prospects of monogamy and sexually open relationships.

In the short-term, sexual jealousy may not be an issue in many monogamous relationships. This is because the partners are sexually satisfied, neither has any strong desire for extra-relationship sex, neither is cheating, and the partners and their relationship are happy. In theory, monogamy is supposed to continue being like this in the long term – even if, eventually, the partners are sexually satisfied with a sexless relationship.

However, we must avoid the above errors in reasoning. We should consider how monogamous relationships work in practice in the long term, and we should be realistic rather than overly optimistic about their prospects. The information I provided in this thesis, especially Part I, enables us to do this.

First, we can plausibly believe that many couples do enjoy (something like) the monogamous relationship just described, achieving the monogamous ideal with little or no sexual jealousy. Also, we can plausibly believe that for many such couples, if they were to open up their relationship sexually, this would bring in sexual jealousy that is hard, if not impossible, for them to manage.

However, in many other monogamous relationships, at least one of the partners will struggle significantly with long-term sexual exclusivity, and, as a result, sexual jealousy is often a problem. Let us consider such a monogamous couple:

Gerry and Jude: Gerry struggles with long-term sexual exclusivity. Unless Gerry hides this struggle very well – perhaps by cheating very discreetly – Jude will likely experience sexual jealousy for the following reasons. First, Jude could experience sexual jealousy in reaction to discovering Gerry’s desires for extra-relationship sex. Progressing from this, Jude could feel sexual jealousy due to reasonably fearing that Gerry will cheat. Finally, there is a good chance that Jude will discover that Gerry has cheated. In this case, Jude would experience terrible sexual jealousy.

Presumably, many couples can relate to Gerry and Jude’s relationship: one partner experiences sexual jealousy because the other struggles with sexual exclusivity.

But what if the Judes in these relationships were to allow their Gerrys to have extra-relationship sex and use strategies to manage their sexual jealousy? Many such Judes would likely experience (far) more sexual jealousy – arguably, they should not have any relationship with their Gerry. However, many other such Judes would plausibly experience far less or even (eventually) no sexual jealousy.

Of course, many other monogamous couples could relate to Gerry and Jude more if Jude also struggled with long-term sexual exclusivity and, consequently, Gerry also experienced sexual jealousy. Like before, it is plausible that many such couples would experience (far) more sexual jealousy if they were to try a sexually open relationship like swinging – again, arguably, they should not be together. However, it is also plausible that many such couples would experience less or even (eventually) no sexual jealousy.

11.2.4 A further look at the research

Research on the experience and management of sexual jealousy in sexually open relationships (compared to monogamous ones) is relatively limited. Nevertheless, various findings lead us away from the position at the right end of the real-world view spectrum – the idea that sexually open relationships *never* work because of insurmountable challenges like jealousy. A similar assessment has been made by the social psychologist Terri Conley and her colleagues (2012: 130):

Although only a few studies have examined jealousy in [consensually nonmonogamous] relationships, their results indicate that jealousy is more manageable in these relationships than in monogamous relationships (Bringle & Buunk, 1991; de Visser & McDonald, 2007) and is experienced less noxiously (Ritchie & Barker, 2006). Despite the common belief that monogamy is a way to prevent feelings of jealousy [Conley et al. 2013], research has shown that levels of jealousy were actually lower for those in [consensually nonmonogamous] relationships than in a monogamous sample (Jenks, 1985; Pines & Aronson, 1981, as cited in Pines & Aronson, 1983). Among swingers, experiences of jealousy typically occur early in a couple’s foray into swinging but diminish over time (de Visser & McDonald, 2007). Moreover, research by Ritchie and Barker (2006) found that polyamorous communities have developed new words to describe both the positive and negative aspects of potential (or actual) jealousy. For instance, those in polyamorous relationships sometimes derive pleasure from a partner having other partners (“compersion”). Feelings of discomfort or uncertainty about a partner’s sexual activity with others (being “wobbly” or “shaky”) are akin to what others may describe as jealousy but appear to be milder and less traumatic for the individual experiencing the emotion. Thus, although some people believe that monogamy inhibits jealousy (Conley, Moors, et al., 2012a), jealousy may actually be less severe, more manageable, or even non-existent among individuals in [consensually nonmonogamous] relationships.⁴⁶

I will add a few more points to this helpful summary, focusing on swingers. In many countries, a minority of couples – probably less than 15% and perhaps of a similar size to, if not larger than, the gay population – are swingers. Furthermore, swinging sub-cultures have persisted in numerous countries – including European countries and the United States – for at least several

⁴⁶ Of course, some of this research also or only looked at romantically non-exclusive open relationships. However, the findings are still relevant since such forms of consensual nonmonogamy would seem to require *more* jealousy management than relationships that are just sexually open.

decades.⁴⁷ So it seems that they work for many couples who try it. Also, interestingly, swingers vary considerably on a range of characteristics, including political views, religious views, physical attractiveness, socio-economic status, age, and race. And most importantly, research has found the following: swingers report equal or higher relationship/marital satisfaction than monogamous couples; many swinging relationships have lasted for many years and even multiple decades and are expected to be lifelong (though the practice of swinging may cease in older age); and many swingers claim that swinging has enhanced their relationship/marriage (on all these points about swingers, see Gould 1999; Fernandes 2009; Kimberly & McGinley 2019).

But, of course, one can easily find many examples of couples who have opened up their relationship sexually but either returned to monogamy or broke up because of sexual jealousy. Such cases can be found in the studies and general literature on consensual nonmonogamy (which I have been referencing throughout most of this thesis). So although the research I have summarised here should lead us away from the position at the right end of the real-world view spectrum, it does not warrant us adopting a position at or towards the left end of the real-world view spectrum. This is why we should adopt a tentatively central position.

11.2.5 My conclusion on the difficulty of managing sexual jealousy

Many people believe that managing sexual jealousy is a practical challenge for sexually open relationships that is insurmountable for the vast majority if not all. Consequently, they endorse the real-world view. Meanwhile, various monogamy challenges believe that most, if not (nearly) all, people can manage sexual jealousy to the extent required to make a sexually open relationship work. Thus, they adopt a position towards or at the left end of the real-world view spectrum.

Against proponents of the real-world view, I have shown good reasons for believing that many people can manage their sexual jealousy to the extent required to make a sexually open relationship work. However, contra the monogamy challengers, I have also evidenced that many people could not do so. Unfortunately, given the lack of research and the fact that most people have probably not tried to manage their sexual jealousy, it is difficult to estimate what proportion of people could make a sexually open relationship work.

Thus, I have demonstrated that an examination of the challenge of managing sexual jealousy should lead us to a *tentatively* central position on the real-world view spectrum.

⁴⁷ However, swinging may have become less popular in the 80s and perhaps 90s in response to the AIDs crisis (Anderson 2012: 100-103).

11.3 The risks posed to child welfare

Sexually open relationships are widely thought to pose significant risks to child welfare (e.g. Jordan B Peterson 2017; Heying & Weinstein 2021).⁴⁸ This ‘children objection’ only applies to partners who (intend to) have children. But many couples meet this description, so it is a crucial issue.

11.3.1 An extension of the sexual jealousy and extra-relationship love challenges

The children objection is often an *extension* of the two other main issues cited to support the real-world view: the difficulty of managing sexual jealousy and the threat of extra-relationship love. People think (the vast majority of) (potential) sexually open parents will have an unhappy relationship that will most likely end because it is consumed with jealousy and/or because one or both parents falls in love with someone else. And they believe these outcomes will undoubtedly have a (severely) harmful impact on the children in most, if not (nearly) all, cases (e.g. Earp et al. 2012: 572).

I will grant that if sexually open parents were to be unhappy (and get divorced) for these reasons, this would usually significantly harm their child or children. Additionally, I have argued that the difficulty of managing jealousy and/or the threat of extra-relationship love are insurmountable challenges for at least some couples (Chapter 10, §11.2, and §3.2). Thus, I think these concerns should be taken seriously. Indeed, when there is a significant risk that a sexually open relationship would not work for a parenting couple, this is a compelling moral reason for them not to attempt one.⁴⁹

However, I have also shown strong evidence for believing that at least some couples can manage these challenges enabling them to have a happy, successful, sexually open relationship that will likely be lifelong. Furthermore, I have highlighted that, for many such couples, a sexually open arrangement can be more conducive to minimising these risks and costs than monogamy. So when the children objection is an extension of these other two objections, it does not apply to these couples. But, in any case, it would be *preferable* for a couple to have a sexually open

⁴⁸ I am using the term ‘child’ to refer to a person under the age of 18.

⁴⁹ This does not necessarily mean they should be successfully monogamous instead. Sadly, there are situations when discreetly and respectfully conducted sexual infidelity may be the lesser evil. For example, when the marriage has been sexless for a long time because one partner no longer wants sex, but that partner is unwilling even to discuss the prospect of a sexually open relationship so the other partner can meet their sexual needs (see Savage 2013: 19-40).

relationship and check they can make it work for an extended period (e.g. a year) *before* having children.

11.3.2 Other risks sexually open relationships pose to children

However, concerns about child welfare are not limited to those potentially produced by sexual jealousy and extra-relationship love. Even if parents have a happy, successful, long-term, sexually open relationship that will most likely be lifelong, their arrangement may still pose other harms to their child(ren)'s well-being, ones that the monogamous ideal avoids.

First, we may plausibly believe that most children would dislike the idea of their parents having casual sex with others outside their relationship. Indeed, they may describe how they feel about it in terms such as 'repulsive', 'disgusting', 'sickening', 'horrifying', and 'disturbing'. Some people may argue that these feelings on the part of children provide strong, if not decisive, moral reasons against parents having a sexually open relationship.

However, many, if not most, children have such feelings about their parents having sex together within a monogamous relationship. Arguably, they would not find it *as bad* as their parents having extra-relationship sex. Still, if their negative attitudes towards it were sufficiently strong, then, accordingly, we should also believe there is a significant, if not decisive, moral consideration against monogamous parents having sex.

But, of course, this conclusion is absurd. Indeed, we can very plausibly argue that, for many parents, if they ceased their sex life, this would have significant adverse effects on their well-being and relationship, which, in turn, would negatively impact their children. So instead, responsible, sexually active monogamous parents generally aim to keep their sex life private from their children. Sexually open parents can and should do likewise.

However, critics of 'sexually open parenting' could plausibly claim it is much harder for parents to hide a sexually open relationship from their children than to keep a successfully monogamous sex life private. But before addressing this point, I will introduce another related risk to child welfare that the monogamous ideal avoids but which even happy, successful, sexually open relationships present.

Suppose a child's parents have a sexually open relationship. In that case, there is a risk that other children they know will discover this and, consequently, bully them about it. Many may believe this risk (also) presents a compelling, if not decisive, moral reason against sexually open parenting.

One reply to this line of argument highlights that such concerns have been and are still raised against same-sex couples having children. However, if – as I believe – there is nothing wrong with same-sex couples having children, the right approach is not to disallow it because other children will stigmatise it. Nor should we demand that same-sex parents keep their relationship hidden from their child(ren)'s peers. Instead, we should educate children that same-sex parenting is perfectly acceptable and punish them when they bully children with two mums or dads. Indeed, this is the approach taken in the U.K. and other socially liberal countries.

Monogamy challengers may argue we should apply these lessons to sexually open parents: we should educate children, in an age-appropriate manner, that at least some parents practice an ethical alternative relationship style to monogamy and that they should not stigmatise the children of such parents; and as we improve the attitudes of children, sexually open parents, like same-sex couples, should have children without the need to hide their relationship (style). Of course, insofar as this perspective is correct and such a campaign could be effective, the defence of sexually open parenting is strengthened.

But many may object that such efforts – however righteous – would not, at least in the foreseeable future, sufficiently minimise the bullying of children known to have sexually open parents, especially boys whose mums are known to engage in casual extra-relationship sex with men. And they may additionally argue that until the risks and costs of such bullying are sufficiently mitigated, (the vast majority of) sexually open parents have strong, if not decisive, moral reasons to keep their sex life private from their children and others who may bully their children over it – just as monogamous parents should.

Although I agree with the above-described efforts to improve children's attitudes towards sexually open parents and their children, I also broadly agree with these counter-claims. To explain why requires a lengthy empirical case for why efforts to sufficiently minimise the bullying of children known to have sexually open parents are unlikely to succeed in the foreseeable future, as well as a complex discussion regarding parental duties. Unfortunately, I do not have space to address these issues here. But fortunately, I do not need to. If these counter-claims are true, they threaten my defence of sexually open parenting. So, instead of defending them, I can grant them for the sake of argument but demonstrate that sexually open parenting is still defensible.

But first, I should explain why these counter-claims threaten my defence of sexually open parenting. It is because, as already indicated, many may argue that there is a high risk that sexually open parents will fail to keep their sex life private from their children and those who will bully their children over it. However, there are ways sexually open parents can keep their sex life private. Arguably the primary method is to limit extra-relationship sex to socially and preferably

also geographically far-removed contexts. For example, parents may only attend swinging parties in a distant town/city where they are unlikely to meet anyone they know and where, perhaps, everyone wears a seductive mask. In addition, it would be prudent not to inform people connected to their children's friends (e.g. other parents at their school).

Proponents of the real-world view could accept these strategies can significantly reduce the risk of sexually open parents having their sex life exposed. However, they can plausibly argue that the risk is still higher than for monogamous parents. I will not deny this empirical claim. Instead, I will soon demonstrate that these risks must be weighed against the risks and costs posed to children if their parents pursue the monogamous ideal instead of a happy, successful, lifelong, sexually open relationship.

11.3.3 The adverse effects of monogamy on children

Unfortunately, I cannot find any *direct* research on the impact of sexually open parenting on children's welfare. However, the research I have presented on managing jealousy and the threat of extra-relationship love does provide *indirect* research.

For at least some couples, we can reasonably predict that such a relationship will have a (severely) harmful impact on their children because they could not make it work. Meanwhile, for at least some other couples, they would be able to make such a relationship a success, thereby minimising, if not wholly avoiding, any harm to their children.

We arguably have a *lot* more indirect research on the impact of 'monogamous parenting' on children's well-being, which I presented in Part I. And based on this research, we should adopt the following perspective.

First, at least some people are (relatively) naturally monogamous/monogamously inclined and, consequently, well-suited for achieving the monogamous ideal. Also, it is often the case that two such people form a monogamous relationship together and later become parents. And we can very plausibly believe that their happy, successful, long-term, monogamous relationship will be (highly) conducive to promoting the welfare of their child(ren).

However, in many other monogamous relationships, at least one partner will struggle significantly with lifelong monogamy, especially the sexual exclusivity element. Consequently, the relationship will (very) likely experience one or more of the following: adverse effects on the health and other elements of the well-being of the partner(s) who struggle(s) with monogamy; significant relationship issues; infidelity; and relationship breakdown. But these risks and costs are (most) often faced significantly *later* in the relationship, perhaps after several years or more. Of course,

many such monogamous couples become parents before this point while their relationship is still happy and (mostly) successfully monogamous.

The upshot of these common circumstances should be evident to all: when these monogamous couples start experiencing these problems to a significant degree, it often does not only affect them but also has considerable adverse effects on the welfare of their child(ren). Let us unpack this with *some* examples.

First, for many parents – arguably especially dads – a long-term (mostly) successfully monogamous sex life may well contribute substantially to them experiencing issues such as the following: obesity, symptoms of depression, irritability, stress, general unhappiness, cognitive decline, dementia, stroke, heart disease, cardiac arrest, cancer, and relatively early death. Of course, such problems and general sexual dissatisfaction can lead to significant conflicts in the relationship of many parents. Indeed, one or both parents may harbour significant anger and resentment towards the other, manifesting in bickering, arguments, and numerous forms of mistreatment. Sadly, their relationship may eventually become unhappy overall. Additionally, many monogamous parents cheat, and their transgressions are often discovered, causing devastation in the relationship. Finally, many monogamous parents divorce because they have experienced such problems. And with all these issues, when monogamous parents experience them, their children typically suffer too, often to a terrible degree.

Unfortunately, many do not recognise the adverse effects monogamous parenting often has on children, and so they deem it to be obviously superior to sexually open parenting. They probably reach this judgement because they commit one or more of the following errors in reasoning:

1. To compare monogamy *in theory* with sexually open relationships *in practice*.
2. To be *overly optimistic* regarding the prospects of monogamy and *overly pessimistic* about the prospects of sexually open relationships.
3. To focus on the *short-term* rather than the *long-term* prospects of monogamy and sexually open relationships.

The lessons to be learned from this are that we should consider how both monogamy and sexually open relationships work in practice and in the long term. And we should try to be as realistic as possible regarding their prospects. When we apply these lessons, we come to the following perspective.

11.3.4 Monogamous versus sexually open parenting – a conclusion

We should be concerned about the risks sexually open parenting can pose to child welfare. For *at least some* couples, we can reasonably predict that such a relationship will have a (severely) harmful impact on their children. This is because opening up their relationship sexually would likely lead to extra-relationship love and hard-to-manage sexual jealousy, which would cause the parents to suffer significantly and probably end their relationship. These outcomes, in turn, would harm their children, which provides a compelling moral reason for them not to attempt such an arrangement. However, there is much reason and evidence to believe that some or many couples can probably handle the challenges of managing sexual jealousy and avoiding extra-relationship love. Consequently, they can likely have a happy, successful, sexually open relationship that has good potential to be lifelong. Given all these points, when considering the child objection just as an extension of these other challenges, we should tentatively adopt a central position on the real-world view spectrum.

However, sexually open parenting presents other risks to child welfare, even when the parents have a happy, successful, long-term, sexually open relationship that will most likely be lifelong. First, their children could discover their sexual openness and be very upset. Additionally, their child(ren)'s peers could discover their sexually open relationship and bully their child(ren) over it. However, as discussed, there are methods for significantly reducing these risks that such parents can and should use.

Nevertheless, when considering these risks and, indeed, the risks and costs of managing sexual jealousy and the threat of extra-relationship love, one might think that, for the sake of their children, all parents should pursue the monogamous ideal instead of a sexually open relationship. But this attitude is mistaken. Monogamous parenting also often presents significant risks and costs to child welfare. And for many parents, these risks and costs would be far more severe than those posed by them having a sexually open relationship.

Consider, for example, a marriage in which the wife no longer wants sex, but the husband does because sexual activity and satisfaction are crucial to his health and other elements of his well-being. What is likely to cause more harm to their children: the father discreetly paying for sexual services (because that does not trigger his wife's jealousy) or him suffering multiple decades of involuntary celibacy? Clearly, the latter would be worse. Indeed, the former will probably have no adverse effects on their children.

So even when considering these other risks of sexually open parenting – children (and their peers) discovering their parents’ sexual openness – I see no reason to move away from my tentatively central position on the real-world view spectrum.

Ultimately, we should recognise that there are risks and costs to both monogamous and sexually open parenting – as well as benefits. But, more importantly, we must understand that a cost-risk-benefit analysis of each of these “parenting styles” will produce different results for different couples. For many parents, pursuing the monogamous ideal will be optimal for them and their children. Meanwhile, for many other parents, it would be better for them and their children if they had a sexually open relationship.

11.4 A verdict on the real-world view

This chapter has demonstrated why we cannot accept the real-world view. Given the evidence, we should tentatively adopt a central position on the real-world view spectrum (Figure 1, p. 220). We have good reasons to believe that many (potential) couples can manage the challenges that sexually open relationships present and, thus, make such an arrangement work. However, there are also good reasons for thinking that many other (potential) couples could not handle such challenges, especially managing sexual jealousy. Thus, these couples could not have a happy, successful, sexually open relationship that is long-term, let alone lifelong.

However, we should not commit the following common error in reasoning:

4. To automatically endorse successful monogamy when rejecting sexually open relationships, and vice versa.

Although many (potential) couples could probably not make a sexually open relationship work, we should not automatically conclude that they should be *successfully* monogamous instead. This is because it is highly unlikely that they could achieve the monogamous ideal. There are two other alternatives to successful monogamy that may be ethically preferable: cheating or not having a long-term relationship. But this point raises many further questions, which I sadly do not have the space to address.

Conclusion – Rethinking sex and love in the 21st Century

This thesis has challenged the prevailing beliefs and practices regarding monogamy and its alternatives. It has argued against monogamism, monogamous idealism, and related views and helped build the case for the following opposing proposals. We need to embrace, in a non-hierarchical manner, a plurality of sex and love lifestyles, including many different forms of sexually open relationships, various ways of living the single life, and monogamy. We should also have widespread awareness of the benefits, risks, and costs of all these lifestyles and recognise that no one size fits all. Consequently, individuals and partners can make informed choices with a range of options about how they wish to live.

Part I began building the case for these proposals, mainly by explaining how and why monogamy and pursuing the monogamous ideal are so problematic for many people with respect to well-being. I examined how an understanding of human nature(s) combined with a normative framework that emphasises well-being can support my main proposals rather than (views like) monogamism or monogamous idealism. Then I detailed the significant risks and costs to well-being that many people (would) face, to varying degrees, in long-term monogamous relationships and why consequently, it is highly unlikely that they will/would achieve the monogamous ideal.

Part II mainly assessed two perspectives on *sexual* jealousy that, if correct, could help form an argument for monogamism. First, the view that sexual jealousy is a reasonable response to the threat of extra-relationship love (and consequent relationship breakdown). Second, the view that sexual jealousy is a reasonable response to your partner expressing dissatisfaction with your non-reasonably-enhanceable sexual attractiveness and the desire to have sex with someone more sexually attractive. I argued that these perspectives highlight that extra-relationship sex can *often* be ethically problematic, at the very least, and reasonably evoke sexual jealousy. And when this is the case, we have moral reasons, at the very least, to restrict the relevant extra-relationship sex. However, I also argued that these perspectives on sexual jealousy do not give us sufficient reasons to believe any of the following: that sexual jealousy is *always* a reasonable response to extra-relationship sex; that *all* instances of extra-relationship sex are at least ethically problematic; and that we have moral reasons, at the very least, to restrict *all* extra-relationship sex in *all* relationships. Thus, these perspectives on sexual jealousy do not help to establish monogamism.

The next two parts mostly critiqued the works of other monogamy-challenging philosophers who argue for conclusions on the ethics of monogamy and (sexually) open relationships that are bolder than mine and which contradict my main proposals. Part III demonstrated why we should reject the cases for (views like) *anti-monogamism*. And Part IV mostly critiqued the works of Bryan

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R. Weaver & Fiona Woollard and Natasha McKeever, who, like me, believe that monogamy can be justified for at least some couples but have opposing perspectives on *how* it can be. Part IV also defended the difficulty of managing jealousy justification, explained how it answers nearly all the challenges to monogamy I discussed, and argued for the (current) preferability of this justification over Weaver & Woollard's and McKeever's, which require much development, elaboration, revision (and clarification) before we can accept them.

Finally, Part V addressed *the real-world view*. I concluded with a more optimistic perspective on the workability of sexually open relationships than this view's proponents. Nevertheless, I also argued that certain challenges such relationships present are too hard for many people to manage. Thus, I tentatively concluded with a more central position between the real-world view and the idea that most, if not all, partners can make a sexually open relationship work.

But, of course, I hope my research will not cease with this verdict. Indeed, I plan for this thesis to be the first part of a more comprehensive project covering additional matters such as the ethics of sexual infidelity, life without long-term relationships – and how people living such a life can intentionally have and raise children ethically (e.g. 'friends with kids') – sex work, and future sex technology (e.g. sex robots and virtual reality sex). And I believe this thesis has laid down the groundwork for exploring these crucial issues.

Appendix A Evidence for the evolutionary account of jealousy

The evolutionary account of jealousy has great theoretical appeal. For example, consider the idea that our male ancestors did *not* experience sexual jealousy but, instead, felt neutral or even positive about their female partner having sex with other males. Such men would have little reproductive success since it is very likely that other men will be impregnating their partner. If they do not have any children who go on to reproduce themselves, the genetic basis for their non-jealous personality would not be passed on.

Of course, proponents of the evolutionary account do not merely rely on its theoretical appeal. Many compelling lines of evidence support it, including that from other animals. If jealousy was adaptive in human evolution partly due to our tendency to pair-bond, then we can expect to observe jealousy-related behaviours among many other pair-bonding species. This is what we do observe! Mountain bluebirds (Barash & Lipton 2001: 106), pugs (Thomas 1993: 46-49), coppery titi monkeys (Maninger et al. 2017), and many other pair-bonding species are prone to being jealous over their partner.

The history books also provide substantial support for the evolutionary account. Throughout the ages, societies have judged male and female adultery differently. Women were expected to be sexually faithful to their husband. Indeed, if they had sex with another man, they could be subjected to severe condemnation, divorce, and even death. Men, on the other hand, were generally permitted to have sex with other women. Only other men's wives were off bounds, presumably to avoid provoking their husbands' sexual jealousy. Even when men were also encouraged to be sexually exclusive, their infidelity was more easily forgiven (Coontz 2005).

These historically persistent norms are what we would expect to find if the evolutionary account of jealousy is correct. A wife's extra-marital sexual liaison would cause far more harm than if her husband acted likewise. When a wife has extra-marital sex, she may get pregnant with another man's child, not to mention eliciting her husband's sexual jealousy. When a husband has extra-marital sex, this could just mean that he is in the company of a prostitute for half an hour.

Although many women in our history may not have liked the idea of their husbands frequenting brothels, from an evolutionary viewpoint, such pure casual sex was not threatening for our female ancestors. Consequently, women's jealousy in response to such extra-marital sex would be relatively less intense, if not non-existent, especially if she did not love her husband, which was

typical for wives historically. Thus, the differences in harms caused by male versus female adultery have arguably produced different societal standards governing them.

Also, suppose that the evolutionary account is *incorrect* and, instead, jealousy is the product of socialisation. In that case, we would expect to find at least some historical and present-day societies in which most people did not feel jealous over those with whom they were in love. Unsurprisingly, we cannot see sufficient evidence for such cultures in the history books or the works of contemporary anthropologists. Instead, over three decades of experimental research has found that both men and women are equally prone to jealousy in every society studied, including the United States, Mexico, Brazil, Ireland, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, Namibia, Japan, Korea, and the former Soviet Union (e.g. White 1981; Buunk & Hupka 1987). As Buss writes:

Cultures in tropical paradises that are entirely free of jealousy exist only in the romantic minds of optimistic anthropologists, and in fact have never been found (2000: 32).

More importantly, these studies find significant sex differences regarding the content and focus of men and women's jealousy and what specifically triggers it. Just as the evolutionary account predicts, men's jealousy is more responsive to cues of *sexual* infidelity, whereas women's jealousy is more responsive to signals of *emotional* infidelity. Buss and his colleagues conducted the first major – and now-classic – study on these gender differences in 1992. He provides the following summary:

[M]y colleagues and I asked 511 college men and women to compare two distressing events—if their partner had sexual intercourse with someone else and if their partner formed a deep emotional attachment to someone else. Fully 83 percent of the women found their partner's emotional infidelity more upsetting, whereas only 40 percent of the men did. In contrast, 60 percent of the men experienced their partner's sexual infidelity as more upsetting, whereas only 17 percent of the women did.

To evaluate a different group—this one comprising sixty men and women—on their physiological distress in response to sexual and emotional infidelity, we placed electrodes on the corrugator muscle in the brow, which contracts when people frown; on the first and third fingers of the right hand to measure skin conductance, or sweating; and on the thumb to measure heart rate. Then we asked people to imagine two types of infidelity, sexual and emotional. Men became more physiologically distressed by the sexual infidelity. Their heart rates accelerated by nearly five beats per minute, equivalent to drinking three cups of coffee in one sitting. Their skin conductance

increased 1.5 micro-siemens with the thought of sexual infidelity, but showed little change from baseline in response to the thought of emotional infidelity. And their frowning increased, showing 7.75 microvolt units of contraction in response to sexual infidelity, as compared with only 1.16 units response to emotional infidelity. Women tended to show the opposite pattern, exhibiting greater physiological distress at the thought of emotional infidelity. Women's frowning, for example, increased to 8.12 microvolt units of contraction in response to emotional infidelity, from only 3.03 units of contraction in response to sexual infidelity (2016: 199-200).

Other studies have also revealed psychological differences between men and women regarding the content and focus of, and cues for, their jealousy. Consider this question: How would you feel about your partner having sexual fantasies about another person? If you are not at all bothered or only bothered a little, you are probably a woman. If you would feel very jealous, it is more likely that you are a man. Research has found that men across various cultures display more intense jealousy in response to such a scenario (Buunk & Hupka 1987). Other studies have also found sex differences in the physiological responses to sexual versus emotional infidelity using multiple measures (Baschnagel & Edlund 2016).

There was an interesting challenge to much of the research I have just described: *the belief hypothesis*. Critics highlighted that sexual and emotional infidelity often go hand-in-hand. However, the sexes may differ in their beliefs about how the two go together (DeSteno & Salovey 1996). In general, men might think that women are only likely to have sex with someone they are emotionally involved with. They also might be able to envision that a woman can have an emotional affair without any sexual contact. Consequently, in the studies, they would rate *sexual* infidelity as more jealousy-inducing because they think it involves *both* sexual and emotional infidelity.

On the other hand, women might generally think that men can have casual sex without any emotional attachment. They might also believe that emotional infidelity would also involve sexual infidelity. Therefore, in the studies, they would judge the emotional infidelity as more upsetting as they think it also involves sex, whereas the sexual infidelity would just be sex without intimacy.

The upshot of the belief hypothesis is that men and women might not differ in their responses to the different types of infidelity. Fortunately, Buss and his colleagues have conducted four enhanced studies in three cultures, all of which supported the evolutionary account rather than the belief hypothesis (Buss et al. 1999). As Buss explains:

Appendix A

The first study involved 1,122 undergraduates at a liberal arts college in southeastern United States. The original infidelity scenarios were altered to render the two types of infidelity mutually exclusive. Participants reported their relative distress in response to a partner's sexual infidelity with no emotional involvement and their response to the partner's emotional involvement with no sexual infidelity. A large gender difference emerged, as predicted by the evolutionary model. If the belief hypothesis were correct, then the gender difference should have disappeared. It did not.

Our second study provided four additional tests of the predictions from the two models, using three research strategies. One strategy employed three versions of rendering the two types of infidelity mutually exclusive. A second strategy posited that both types of infidelity had occurred and asked participants to indicate which aspect they found more upsetting. A third strategy used a statistical procedure to test the independent predictive value of sex and beliefs in accounting for which form of infidelity would be more distressing. The results were conclusive: large gender differences were discovered, precisely as predicted by the evolutionary model. No matter how the questions were worded, no matter which methodological strategy was employed, and no matter how stringently the conditional probabilities were controlled, the gender differences remained robust.

Our third study replicated the infidelity dilemmas in a non-Western sample of native Koreans. The original sex differences were replicated. With two strategies to control for the co-occurrence of sexual and emotional infidelity, the gender differences again remained robust. The evolutionary hypothesis survived this empirical hurdle. In our fourth study, we tested the predictions about jealousy and about the nature of beliefs in a non-Western Japanese sample. The results again provided support for the evolutionary hypothesis (2016: 201-202).

Such forced-choice methods have also been used in studies in England, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Romania, Brazil, and other countries. And all these studies find the same significant gender differences (see Buss 2019: 318-323).

Even further support comes from researchers who have examined responses to actual instances of cheating. For example, a study on the Himba of Namibia compared men's and women's responses to infidelity that was both sexual and emotional. Unsurprisingly, men were more distressed by the sexual component than women (Scelza 2014). Another study looked at how men and women interrogated their partners after discovering their infidelity. Men were more likely to

ask questions like “Did you have sex with him?” while women were more likely to ask, “Do you love her?” (Kuhle 2011).

Unsurprisingly, in a 2017 paper reviewing all the research on the sex differences in jealousy since 1992, the authors, John Edlund and Brad Sagarin, stated the following in conclusion:

Looking back at 25 years of research investigating the sex difference in jealousy, we believe that the weight of the evidence supports the conclusion that the phenomenon is a real effect with evolutionary underpinnings.

Appendix B Supporting material for §2.2 on the health benefits of sexual activity and satisfaction

This appendix describes some of the research that (strongly) suggests that sexual activity and satisfaction can enhance many people's health in the following areas: mental health and life satisfaction, cognitive health, heart and blood health, cancer, and life expectancy. It also addresses the objection that people can maintain good health through other non-sexual means, so maintaining a frequently active and satisfying sex life is unnecessary.

B.1 Mental health and life satisfaction

In one study, the researchers collected data in 2012/13 from 2,614 men and 3,217 women in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, a population-representative study of adults aged 50 or older. The participants had self-reported their past-year declines in sexual desire, frequency of sexual activities, and sexual function. Three markers of their well-being (depressive symptoms, quality of life, and life satisfaction) were also assessed. People who experienced a decline in sexual desire or frequency of sexual activities had more depressive symptoms. For men, there was an association between a decrease in sexual desire and lower life satisfaction, and declining erectile function was associated with more depressive symptoms, lower quality of life, and lower life satisfaction. For women, a decrease in the frequency of sexual activity was associated with lower life satisfaction, and declines in their ability to become sexually aroused were associated with more depressive symptoms, lower quality of life, and lower life satisfaction. The study's authors concluded that "older adults who experience a decline in their sexuality report poorer wellbeing than those adults who do not" (Jackson et al. 2019; see also Schmiedeberg et al. 2016).

Numerous studies have specifically focused on the relationship between sex and depression in men. For example, one study examining men from Brazil, Italy, Japan, and Malaysia found that sexual satisfaction is associated with an increased frequency of sexual intercourse and is inversely related to depression. The authors believe this suggests that the depressive symptoms often associated with erectile dysfunction result from the interaction between decreased sexual activity and dissatisfaction with an unhealthy sexual life (Nicolosi et al. 2004). Another example is a Canadian study that found celibacy was associated with high scores on depression and suicidality indexes among heterosexual, gay, and bisexual men aged 18-27 (Bagley & Tremblay 1997). In addition, a growing body of research suggests that low testosterone is a significant risk factor for symptoms of depression. Not only do many studies find a strong association between the two,

Appendix B

but some research even indicates that raising testosterone through supplementation can alleviate symptoms of depression (see Yeap 2014).

Research has also found that sexual activity and/or satisfaction may also have a protective effect against symptoms of depression in women. One interesting study examined approximately three hundred sexually active female college students. They found that those who consistently engaged in penile-vaginal intercourse *without a condom* had lower depression levels and fewer suicide attempts than women who abstained from intercourse, women who always used condoms, and women who occasionally used condoms. This was after controlling for other potentially confounding variables such as relationship status and relationship duration. Furthermore, depressive symptoms and suicide attempts were proportional to the consistency of condom use: more condom use meant more depression and suicide attempts. The researchers suggest an intriguing explanation for these findings:

Research has shown that the vagina absorbs several biological products contained in seminal fluid (e.g. estrogen, testosterone, prostaglandins) that can be measured in the female's bloodstream within several hours after administration...Our data are consistent with...[the] suggestion that semen in the female reproductive tract may play a role in modulating depressive symptoms (Gallup et al. 2002: 292).

However, more research in this area is needed. Although this 'semen as an anti-depressant' hypothesis has not been discarded, there was a failure to replicate it. The data from that failed replication indicated an alternative predictor for women's symptoms of depression: how satisfied women were with their partner – the more satisfied they were, the fewer symptoms of depression they felt (Prokop 2014).

Other research on male and female college students has examined the impact of sexual activities on their mental well-being more generally. For example, in one study, 152 college students reported on their sexual activities and answered questions about their mental well-being every day for three weeks. Then, the researchers examined how sex on one day predicted mental well-being the following day. They found that their participants experienced gains in their mental well-being the day after sex, such as more positive mood states, fewer negative mood states, and more meaning in life. Furthermore, the more pleasurable the sex was reported to be, the better their mood was. But, more importantly, the researchers investigated whether mental well-being one day predicted the likelihood of having sex on subsequent days – i.e. are people in a good mood more likely to have sex in the next few days? Interestingly, mental well-being on one day was *not* predictive of sexual activity on later days, suggesting that sex leads to improved mental well-being rather than the other way around (Kashdan et al. 2018).

These findings cohere with several studies which find that sexual activity, perhaps especially orgasm, can reduce stress (Charnetski & Brennan 2001). For example, one study found that when couples in a good quality relationship have sex on one day, they report feeling less stressed the next day (Ein-Dor & Hirschberger 2012). Orgasm may be one significant factor behind this effect because of the surge in the hormone oxytocin it produces. Indeed, research has found that increasing a person's oxytocin levels can alter their stress response and reduce it. In addition, oxytocin appears to relieve tension by stimulating feelings of warmth and relaxation (Weeks 2002). These findings may explain why one study found that 39% of 2,632 women reported that they masturbate (partly) to relax (Ellison 2000). However, orgasm from penile-vaginal intercourse might be a superior stress reducer. One study recorded the sexual activity of their participants over the two weeks leading up to them giving a speech and taking a verbal mathematics test. Interestingly, blood pressure and stress levels were lower among those who had penile-vaginal intercourse but did not masturbate or have other kinds of partnered sexual activity. This suggests something about penile-vaginal intercourse specifically produces stress-reducing effects (Brody 2006).

B.2 Cognitive health

Experimental studies have found that sexual activity benefits the cognition of rats, who, interestingly, are often used as a comparison point for humans given various neurological similarities. For example, one study on male rats found a link between sexual activity and neuron growth: those rats allowed to have sex daily over two weeks demonstrated more neuron growth than those only allowed to have sex once during that time (Leuner, Glasper, & Gould 2010). A later study on male rats found this same link between sexual activity and neuron growth. Furthermore, their sexually active rats demonstrated enhanced cognitive functioning compared to those deprived of sex (Glasper & Gould 2013).

Could sexual activity also improve the cognitive functioning of humans? Research suggests it can. One study with 78 young heterosexual women examined whether the frequency of penile-vaginal intercourse was associated with memory ability while controlling for other variables such as menstrual cycle phases, oral contraception use, grade point average, and relationship length. They found that women with more frequent sexual intercourse were better at recalling abstract words but not faces. The researchers believe that this may be because memory for words is a function of the hippocampus, the precise brain structure where neuron growth was found in the studies on male rats. Meanwhile, memory for faces has been linked to other brain regions (Maunder et al. 2016).

Studies on older adults indicate that sexual activity enhances cognitive functioning. For example, one study explored the associations between sexual activity and cognition in 6,833 adults aged 50-89. After controlling for education, wealth, age, physical activity, depression, self-rated health, and other (potentially) relevant factors, they found significant associations between sexual activity and word recall in both sexes and also with number sequencing in men (Wright & Jenks 2016). A later study replicated and extended this research, finding that greater frequency of sexual activity was associated with better cognition across more domains, including visuospatial ability and verbal fluency. The authors said their study “demonstrates that older men and women who engage in regular [sexual activity] have better cognitive functioning than those who do not engage in [sexual activity], or do so infrequently” (Wright et al. 2019: 50). Another study looked at 2,672 men and 3,344 women over 50, focusing on sexual frequency and its impact on memory. After adjusting for demographics and lifestyle factors, they found that more frequent sexual activity was associated with better performances on an episodic memory task completed twice two years apart (Allen 2018).

In the case of men, it may be that testosterone levels affect cognitive functioning, particularly in older age. Indeed, in a review of the research on testosterone levels and cognition in elderly men, the researchers concluded that there “is a growing body of evidence to support the potential protective effects of testosterone against age-related decline and dementia.” However, they noted that their results were “far from conclusive” (Holland et al. 2011: 330).

B.3 Heart and blood health

An early study in this area examined the sex lives of one hundred Israeli women hospitalised due to having a heart attack. They were compared to one hundred women in hospital for other reasons. This control group was matched for age. The researchers found a positive association between sexual frigidity, sexual dissatisfaction, and a history of a heart attack (Abramov 1976). ‘Sexual frigidity’ in this study was “indicated by a lack of enjoyment of sexual intercourse, an inability to achieve orgasm during coitus that led to emotional distress, and/or a lack of orgasm, sexual enjoyment, and/or sexual intercourse due to a partner’s illness or impotence” (Whipple et al. 2007: 3).

In another study, the researchers examined the relationship between sexual intercourse frequency and experiencing coronary heart disease and ischaemic stroke among 918 men, aged 45-59, in Caerphilly, South Wales, recruited between 1979 to 1983. Even when they adjusted for age and other risk factors, the researchers found that frequent sexual intercourse (two or more times per week) was correlated with a lower incidence of fatal coronary heart events. When they

examined the men at a 10-year follow-up, they found that rates of fatal coronary heart incidences among those who reported a low or intermediate sexual intercourse frequency (both being less than once per month) were double that of those among men who reported high sexual intercourse frequency (Ebrahim et al. 2002).

Another study, this time of 1,165 men aged 40-70, examined whether the frequency of sexual activity was linked to rates of cardiovascular disease. The participants' health status was tracked for an average of 16 years. Those men who had sex once per month or less were 45% more likely to experience cardiovascular issues than those who had sex 2-3 times per week or more. This association was found even though the researchers controlled for erectile dysfunction, age, and general cardiovascular risk (as determined by cholesterol level, blood pressure, diabetes, smoking status, and other factors). Consequently, the authors believe their results indicate that there may be something specific about sexual activity that has a protective effect on heart health (Hall et al. 2010).

Why might sexual activity have such protective effects on heart health? Research on middle-aged men suggests that the release of the hormone dehydroepiandrosterone during orgasm may be part of the explanation since there is evidence that higher levels of this hormone reduce the risk of heart disease (Feldman et al. 1998). Other research has found that, for men and women, testosterone can help lower heart attack risk and reduce the harm caused to coronary muscles if it does occur (Booth et al. 1999; Fogari et al. 2002). Indeed, numerous studies suggest low testosterone in men is a significant risk factor for a range of heart health issues (e.g. Alexandersen, Haarbo, & Christiansen 1996; English et al. 2000; Torkler et al. 2011; Haring et al. 2012; Lee et al. 2014)

In addition, research strongly indicates that people who maintain an active and satisfying sex life may be at less risk for coronary heart disease and type-2 diabetes (partly) because they are more likely to avoid being overweight. As Whipple et al. (2007: 3) summarise:

Frequent vaginal intercourse, infrequent masturbation, and, to a lesser degree, other noncoital partnered sexual activity has been shown to be related to a decreased hip and waist circumference in both men and women. In women, both a larger waist size and a higher waist-hip ratio are associated with [coronary heart disease] risk. In men, a larger waist size is considered to be the most powerful anthropometric measure of [coronary heart disease] risk. In both sexes, an increased waist circumference is the strongest predictor of type-2 diabetes (Brody, 2004; Mamtani & Kulkarni, 2005; Rexrode et al., 1998; Smith et al., 2005).

For men, erectile dysfunction – which, as discussed earlier, may often result from factors associated with long-term monogamy, including lack of sexual activity and satisfaction, low testosterone, and obesity – is likely another risk factor. Indeed, in a 2019 meta-analysis of 25 studies totalling 154,794 participants, the researchers found that men with erectile dysfunction were at 43% higher risk for cardiovascular disease, 59% higher risk for coronary heart disease, and 34% higher risk for stroke. And those with severe erectile dysfunction were at even higher risk for cardiovascular disease (Zhao et al. 2019).

B.4 Cancer

Various studies report a correlational relationship between higher ejaculation frequency and lower risk of prostate cancer in men (e.g. Giles et al. 2003; Leitzmann et al. 2004). Unfortunately, these studies did not specify what proportion of these ejaculations were from partnered sexual activity rather than masturbation.⁵⁰ However, one review of the research on sexual risk factors for prostate cancer found that patients experienced sexual intercourse much less frequently from the age of 50 than did age-matched healthy control samples (Bosland 1998). Likewise, another study found that men with prostate cancer had less frequent sexual intercourse over their lifetime. Indeed, those who had penile-vaginal intercourse more than 3,000 times in their life had half the risk of developing prostate cancer than those who had less (Mandel & Schuman 1987). All that said, my reading of the literature on this topic suggests the jury is still very much out on whether sexual activity has a protective effect against prostate cancer in men.

There is arguably stronger evidence that sexual activity and satisfaction has a protective effect against breast cancer in women. Researchers have suggested this is due to the increase in levels of dehydroepiandrosterone and oxytocin that occur with sexual arousal and orgasm in women – and, indeed, men (e.g. Murrell 1995). However, there is also evidence suggesting that only penile-vaginal intercourse *without condoms* (or withdrawal) has this protective effect – or, at least, provides the most significant protective effect. The clinical psychologist Dr Stuart Brody (2010: 1346) provides the following helpful summary of this literature:

In a retrospective case-control study, both low PVI [penile-vaginal intercourse] frequency and greater condom (or withdrawal) use were identified as risk factors for the development of breast cancer [Lê et al. 1989]. Women with infrequent or no PVI had thrice the breast cancer risk of the controls (women who had more frequent PVI) in the

⁵⁰ Other research indicates that the ejaculation from partnered sexual activity, perhaps penile-vaginal intercourse specifically, is more conducive to better prostate health than ejaculation from masturbation (see Brody 2010: 1345-1346 for a discussion).

study. In addition, those women who did have PVI but used a contraceptive method that decreased pleasure by decreasing the contact of the vagina with the penis, and decreased the woman's vaginal contact with semen (women who used condoms or *coitus interruptus*), were at greater risk for developing breast cancer than women who used oral contraception or an intrauterine device [Lê et al. 1989]. The interactive effect (PVI frequency and not disrupting PVI by choosing condoms or withdrawal) was noteworthy: those women who had PVI (without the disruptive effects of condoms or withdrawal before ejaculation) for at least 20 years had one-tenth the breast cancer risk of women who never had intercourse...

In addition...an earlier study from the United States found a similar association [Gjorgov 1978; 1998]. Women whose men used condoms or withdrawal (which generally involves the male switching from intercourse to masturbation for ejaculation), as well as women not engaging in intercourse at all, had a breast cancer rate five times higher than users of contraceptives that do not reduce vaginal exposure to semen.

Greater lifetime number of sexual partners was associated with decreased breast cancer risk [Rossing et al. 1996], and nuns were found to have very high rates of breast cancer [Fraumeni et al. 1969].

Furthermore, some research has also indicated an inverse relationship between orgasm frequency during adulthood and breast cancer rate among men (Petridou et al. 2000).

B.5 Life expectancy

Unsurprisingly, research finds that sexual activity and satisfaction may help extend life expectancy, at least for men. For example, in one study, the researchers examined the relationship between orgasm frequency and mortality among 918 men, aged 45-59, in Caerphilly, South Wales, recruited between 1979 to 1983. When examined ten years later, the researchers found a 50% lower mortality risk among those men who had more frequent orgasms (2 or more per week) than those who experienced orgasm less than once per month. Moreover, the inverse relationship between orgasm frequency and mortality risk was statistically significant even when controlling for other variables, including smoking status, age, and social class. Thus, the authors concluded that "[s]exual activity seems to have a protective effect on men's health" (Smith et al. 1997).

Other research has examined the relationship between sexual intercourse and lifespan in both sexes. For example, a Swedish study recruited one hundred and sixty-six men and two hundred

women who were 70 years old. Their records were checked five years later to see who had died before their 75th birthday. Mortality was higher among men who had ceased having sexual intercourse earlier in life, but no association between mortality and sexual intercourse was found for women (Persson 1981). Another study investigated what factors are crucial for determining lifespan by following 252 racially diverse people in North Carolina over 25 years. The frequency of sexual intercourse was positively associated with greater longevity for men but not for women. However, past enjoyment of sex was a predictor of a longer life for women (Palmore 1982).

B.6 Are there not other ways to maintain good health?

Some might claim that most of the issues relating to health that I have discussed in §2.2 and this Appendix may primarily be attributable to becoming overweight or obese and, for men, low testosterone levels. They could then argue that people do not need to maintain an active and satisfying sex life to avoid these issues. Instead, people can just avoid being overweight or obese (and having low testosterone) through other means, including a healthy diet, regular exercise, moderate alcohol consumption, and, in the case of testosterone, financial success, career achievements, sporting victories, success in other competitive realms of life, and testosterone supplements.

There may be much truth in this. However, as noted earlier, people can lose the motivation to stay in shape because they have lost (much of) their sexual interest in their partner and are no longer seeking new sexual partners. More importantly, though, this objection overlooks the fact that when people stay fit and maintain high testosterone levels (in the case of men), this often has the following consequences: First, it helps keep up their sex drive. It also helps preserve their level of sexual opportunity. So if they are the kind of person who wants to sleep around outside their monogamous relationship, these two factors will mean they will have more temptation to do so. Being successfully monogamous, then, becomes more demanding and arguably leads to more intense sexual frustration. And as I will explain shortly, this can lead to significant relationship issues, cheating, and, ultimately, relationship breakdown.

For many people, when they instead let themselves go and, in the case of men, experience a significant decline in testosterone, this arguably helps them have a happy, successful, lifelong, monogamous relationship: by gradually losing their sex drive and sexual opportunities, they consequently have less desire to stray.

Appendix C Implications of the accuracy of the real-world view for other issues in sex and relationship ethics

Where is the correct position on the real-world view spectrum? Many ethical attitudes on sex and relationships are (partially) based and perhaps dependent upon a particular position. I will describe some examples in this section. In doing so, I demonstrate some of the implications Chapter 11 has for sex and relationship ethics. If an ethical attitude is (partially) based on a position that we have good reasons to doubt, we should be sceptical of it; if an ethical attitude depends on a position that turns out to be incorrect, we should reject it.

C.1 A case for conservative sexual ethics

The real-world view may serve as a crucial premise in a case for conservative sexual ethics regarding casual sex, promiscuity, sex work, pornography, and other ‘sexually liberal practices’. This case can be outlined as follows.

First, happy, lifelong relationships are highly valuable for most individuals, especially those wishing to be parents. Ideally, children should be reared by two parents that stay together. Parenting is also easier within the context of a happy, lifelong relationship. Furthermore, most individuals desire such a relationship (and family). Also, society benefits substantially if people, in general, especially parents, have happy lifelong relationships. Thus, we should do everything to enable and encourage people to have such relationships.

For many people, arguably most, engaging extensively in sexually liberal practices – as a participant (casual sex and promiscuity), a consumer (pornography and sex work), or a provider/employee (sex work and pornography) – will significantly compromise their ability to have a happy, successful, lifelong, *monogamous* relationship (the monogamous ideal). An extensive history of such sexual behaviours can make successful, long-term monogamy too sexually dissatisfying, especially for men (Anderson 2012; Regnerus 2017). It can also make a person an unattractive choice of partner for a monogamous relationship. This is especially true of women because men are evolutionarily disposed to find a history of promiscuity off-putting in women: such women are less likely to be sexually faithful, undermining paternity certainty (Buss 2016: 104-109).

But if the real-world view is correct, then the alternative of having a happy, successful, lifelong, sexually open relationship is not feasible (for most people). So instead, the optimal – albeit imperfect – arrangement for having a happy, lifelong relationship is successful monogamy. Thus, we should do everything to enable and encourage people to achieve the monogamous ideal. Since engaging extensively in sexually liberal practices reduces people’s ability to accomplish this goal, we should discourage and even condemn these practices.⁵¹

C.2 A case for ethical cheating

Some may appeal to *the first part* of the real-world view to defend sexual infidelity. Their case can be outlined as follows.

First, “ethical cheaters” agree with the starting points of the conservative case: they believe that happy long-term relationships are highly valuable for most individuals, children, and society. They also agree with *the first part* of the real-world view: that although sexually open relationships are not inherently (or in principle) unethical, and while they are theoretically appealing for many, such relationships are (most often) too ethically problematic in practice.

However, “ethical cheaters” disagree with *the second part*: that despite its restrictions, successful monogamy is the relationship style (most) people should pursue. Instead, they (broadly) agree with my perspective on monogamy presented across Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. That is, “ethical cheaters” believe that for at least many people, long-term successful monogamy will negatively impact their health, character, and general happiness, as well as significant relationship issues, all due to (increasingly) infrequent sexual activity and/or (increasing) sexual dissatisfaction. And they think the relationships of such people will eventually become unhappy and, in many cases, end.

But “ethical cheaters” do not think (most) such people should pursue a happy, successful, lifelong, sexually open relationship instead because they believe such a goal is unattainable (for most people). The only other non-cheating option for such people is to avoid long-term relationships altogether. However, “ethical cheaters” agree with conservatives that preexisting (and potential) happy long-term – ideally lifelong – relationships are highly valuable, especially for couples who (plan to) have children. Therefore, rather than having many long-term monogamous relationships break up and have many people commit to lifelong singledom, “ethical cheaters” believe sexual infidelity – if conducted discreetly and respectfully – is often the morally preferable option.

⁵¹ Louise Perry presents a similar case in her (2022) book, *The case against the sexual revolution: A new guide to sex in the 21st Century*.

Such attitudes may be common in societies – such as France, Italy, and Japan – where a significant proportion of the population have more relaxed, permissive, and laissez-faire attitudes toward cheating (see Druckerman 2008; Pew Research Center 2014).

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