Breaking the Bias on Consensual Non-Monogamy

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Abstract

Background: Although several studies have found that consensual non-monogamous (CNM) relationships are not disadvantageous in quality and intimacy, CNM individuals still face severe stigmatization in their everyday life. As the idea of CNM becomes more prevalent today the investigation of the reasons for this stigmatization becomes even more important. A factor that could influence the degree of stigmatization may be gender and especially females and gender non-conforming individuals are assumed to face more severe stigmatization. Aim: It was hypothesised that sexual scripts formed through a positive representation of female sexuality and gender non-conformity reduce the impact of gender on the degree of stigmatization. Hence, the study aimed to measure the relationship between the gender of the person in the CNM relationship and the degree to which they are stigmatized, as well as the effect of positive representation on this effect. Methods: An experimental study with 224 participants was used to assess this relationship. The participants were randomly split into three groups, each being presented with the same description of the persona, only the gender and pronouns changed. Afterward, a 20-item scale was used to test the degree of stigmatization. Lastly, a multiple-choice question was asked, to infer which films and series, displaying a positive representation of female sexuality and gender non-conformity, were watched by the participants. Results: The results indicated that there was no relationship between the gender of the persona and degree of stigmatization. Moreover, no significant effect has been found of positive representation on the before-mentioned relationship. Conclusion: Therefore, several implications for future research have to be introduced. Most importantly, the collection of participants should be widened to gain a more varied sample that can be used to say something about the whole population. For this, a translation in the native language of the participants should be considered. Moreover, the construction of the questionnaire should be revised in regard to the films and series as well as the Likert Scale used. Lastly, the results of this study have to be interpreted with caution as it is questionable whether the sample can be generalized to the whole population.
Keywords: Consensual non-monogamy, stigmatization, gender non-conformity, female sexuality, sexual double standard, intersectional discrimination

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Introduction

More and more people decide today for different relationship styles. For instance, 17.8 to 26.3 percent have been found to have engaged in consensual non-monogamy (CNM) at some point in their life (Træen & Thuen, 2021). CNM generally refers to any relationship in which all partners communicate openly and agree to practice sexual or romantic relationships with extradyadic partners, which means individuals outside their primary relationship (Conley et al., 2013). Nevertheless, there is no easy definition that fits all of these relationships (Levine et al., 2018). Although CNM has been found to have several advantages, individuals in CNM relationships face severe stigmatization (Levine, et al, 2018). Gender differences are assumed to influence this stigmatization. This could be the case, for instance, due to the sexual double standard, a theory that proposes that women face more severe stigmatization than men when engaging in unusual sexual activity (Jonason, & Marks, 2009). Furthermore, intersectional discrimination in the case of gender-non-conforming people, who already face stigmatization based on their gender, will also be examined closely (de los Reyes, 2016; Crenshaw, 2019; Kirkland, 2021). Lastly, the effect of media representation in combination with the establishment of sexual scripts will be looked at in regard to their possible effect on the stigmatisation of women and gender non-conforming individuals (Craiger, 2019).

CNM is a collective name for different kinds of relationships. In order to get a differentiated idea of what CNM includes exactly, the different forms have to be understood. The term includes polyamory which means having several romantic and/or sexual relationships (Conley et al., 2012). Next, polyfidelity belongs to CNM and means having at least three individuals form a relationship (Levine et al., 2018). Another type of CNM is swinging which is extradyadic sex with both partners present (Conley et al., 2012). When a couple engages apart from each other in sexual relationships without any emotional connection it is called an open relationship (Levine et al., 2018). The last type is the polyaffective relationship which is a non-sexual but emotionally intimate connection (Sheff, 2016).

Regarding the influence of this relationship type on the person, CNM can have several positive effects on the individual. A study by Conley et al. (2018) found that CNM participants were slightly more sexually satisfied as well as reported a higher frequency of sex than the ones in monogamous relationships. Moreover, several studies report a similar or higher level of relationship satisfaction among CNM couples compared to monogamous couples (Conley et al., 2018; Levine et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, individuals who participate in CNM relationships face severe stigmatization. Heterosexual and monogamous sexual practices are deemed appropriate and morally right (Levine et al., 2018). This in turn leads to CNM relationships to be regarded as lower in moral, quality as well as less satisfying sexually compared to monogamous relationships. Moreover, those in CNM partnerships are associated by the general population with having a higher risk for sexually transmitted diseases (Levine et al., 2018). This stereotype persists even if the results of studies suggest the opposite. For instance, a study by Lehmiller (2015) points out that individuals in CNM relationships are more frequently using condoms with primary as well as extradyadic partners than those in monogamous or non-consensual non-monogamous relationships. This stereotype of a higher chance for sexually transmitted diseases contributes to a substantial barrier to receiving medical as well as psychological care (Levine et al., 2018). Discrimination reaches from the open condemnation of clients, the attribution of mental diseases to CNM, to forcing them to adopt monogamous lifestyles (Levine et al., 2018). Additionally, fear of judgment by health professionals can influence the likelihood of seeking services in connection with sexual health, for instance undergoing tests for sexually transmitted diseases (Kirkman et al., 2015).

Studies have shown that the above-mentioned effect differs according to the gender of the individual (Thompson et al., 2017). Therefore, research done in regard to the stigmatization of women's sexuality constitutes an important field of investigation (Thompson et al., 2017). Jonason and Marks (2009) and Thompson et al. (2017) found that women are judged more negatively compared to their male counterparts concerning their sexuality. This is also called the sexual double standard (Jonason & Marks, 2017). It has been found regarding the number of sexual partners, the engagement in sexual activities with more than one partner simultaneously, casual sex as well as in other non-traditional sexual behaviours (Jonason & Marks, 2017). As mentioned before, monogamous relationships are still considered the norm. Therefore, CNM is likely to qualify as non-traditional sexual behaviour which leads to the assumption that females in CNM relationships face the sexual double standard.

Next to women who are confronted with the sexual double standard, gender non-conforming people face stigmatization due to their gender identity in everyday life. Nevertheless, difficulties, as well as reasons for the stigmatization, differ from that of women as they are not part of the binary system of gender (Worthen, 2021). The identity of gender non-conformity provides the opportunity for individuals who do not feel to fit in the labels of the binary men/women system, to find an identification (Worthen, 2021). Harassment based

on stigmatization varies from being called the wrong name, or gender, unnecessary questioning to misdiagnoses or non-recognition of health conditions (Kirkland, 2021). Thus, the stigmatization influences the life of gender non-conforming people negatively.

Already being discriminated against based on not fitting in the binary system of gender, gender non-conforming people, living in CNM relationships, face intersectional stigmatization. Intersectionality means the combination of multiple types of inequalities that act simultaneously (de Los Reyes, 2016). The concept is used to highlight problems, exclusion and forms of oppression specific to people who face these intersecting kinds of discrimination. Thus, it brings visibility to people that are ignored in the everyday conversations of stigmatization (Crenshaw, 2015;2019). Additionally, in the regard to gender non-conforming people in CNM relationships, an intersectional focus could be used to reveal their specific stigmatization. Nevertheless, no research has yet examined whether gender non-conforming people face a higher degree of stigmatization than gender-conforming people when they are in a CNM relationship (Jonason & Marks, 2017).

A factor decreasing the stigmatization of identities that are not considered the norm by the broad population has been found to be a positive representation in films and series (Wiederman 2015). Wiederman (2015) argues that people learn throughout their life what appropriate sexual behaviour is. This collection of knowledge is called sexual script. More in-depth, they are: "schemas that frame the way people make sense of and experience sexual interactions" (Hoppe, 2011:197 as cited in Craiger, 2019). The formation of these sexual scripts is influenced by role models, relationships and behaviours that one experiences in everyday life (Craiger, 2019). This process is also influenced through the display in media, especially in films and series. In particular, non-traditional sexual behaviour is often lacking real-world examples which make films and series an even more important factor in the creation of sexual scripts (Craiger, 2019). Hence, it can be argued that a positive representation of female sexuality and gender non-conforming identity in films and series can decrease the formation of stigma. Although this can be assumed, it has never been researched in regard to CNM relationships.

To summarize, although CNM has been shown to have several positive influences on the individual, they still face severe stigmatization. Moreover, it has been suggested that women, due to the sexual double standard, face more severe stigmatization, when they are in a CNM relationship. Additionally, a similar effect is suggested for gender-non-conforming people. It is proposed that they face, due to intersectional discrimination, more severe stigmatization than gender-conforming people. Furthermore, it has been found that films and

series affect the formation of sexual scripts of individuals which in turn influence how an individual thinks about the sexual behaviour that is shown. Hence, it is assumed that a positive presentation of female sexuality and gender non-conformity has a moderating effect on the influence of gender on stigmatization. As these assumptions have not yet been tested by previous research, this research becomes even more important. To investigate these hypotheses, this research will concentrate on the question of whether men, women and gender non-conforming people face different degrees of severeness of stigmatization. Additionally, we will also look at the impact of a positive representation of female sexuality and gender non-conforming people on the formation of stigmatization. Due to the discussed literature, it is expected that women face more severe stigmatization than men and gender non-conforming people face more severe stigmatization than gender-conforming people while being in a CNM relationship. Moreover, it is expected that the effect of gender of the persona in a CNM relationship on stigmatization is stronger if the person who is stigmatised has not seen a film or a series in which female sexuality or gender non-conformity is presented positively.

Figure 1

Research Design
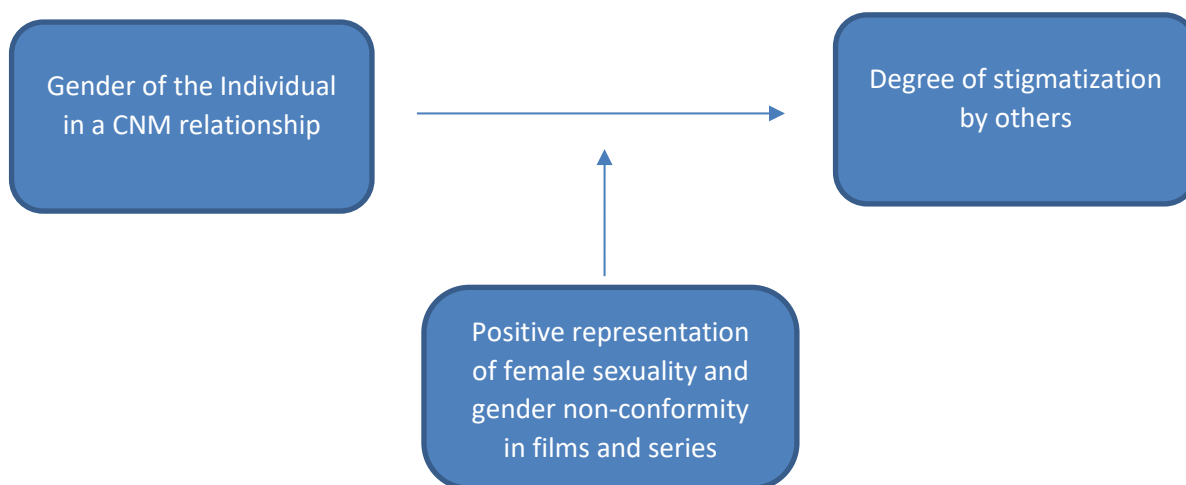
Hypotheses

H1: Women in CNM relationships face more severe stigmatization than men when being in a CNM relationship.

H2: Gender non-conforming people in CNM relationships face more severe stigmatization than gender-conforming individuals in CNM relationships.

H3: The effect of gender of the persona in a CNM relationship on stigmatization is stronger if the person who is stigmatised has not seen a film or a series in which female sexuality is represented positively.

H4: The effect of gender of the persona in a CNM relationship on stigmatization is stronger if the person who is stigmatised has not seen a film or a series in which gender non-conformity is represented positively.

Methodology

Design

This study is part of a bigger study. Nevertheless, for this paper only the study relevant items will be considered. Moreover, an experimental study design was used with a randomized allocation to three conditions: 1. Female, 2. Gender non-conforming and 3. Male. It was employed to examine the correlation between gender of a persona in a CNM relationship and the degree of stigmatisation by the participant. Moreover, it was looked at whether a moderation effect exists through a positive representation of female sexuality and gender non-conformity in film and series.

Participants

In total, 302 participants completed the questionnaire anonymously. The participants were gathered through convenience sampling as well as snowball sampling, as this provided the most time-efficient and effortless way to access the whole population. Additionally, the study was available on Sona which is a platform run by the Behavioural, Management and Social Science faculty of the University of Twente. For answering the questionnaire, students received 0.25 credits as a reward.

After the exclusion of participants who did not fulfil the criteria for this study, 224 participants were left. The exclusion criteria included people who did not give their consent or who stopped before finishing the questions. The participants were in an age range between 16 and 81 with a mean of 27.59 and a standard deviation of 13.21. For additional information regarding the research population's demographics see Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics of the Sample Population (n=224)

Characteristics	n	%
Gender		
Female	138	61.6

Male	71	31.7
Gender non-conforming	12	5.4
Other	1	.4
Prefer not to say	2	.9
Country of residence		
Germany	159	71.0
The Netherlands	19	8.5
Other	46	20.5
Educational level		
Secondary education	20	8.9
Secondary education with A-level	76	33.9
Bachelor's (or equivalent)	80	35.7
Master's (or equivalent)	42	18.8
Doctorate (or equivalent)	6	2.7
Sexual Orientation		
Heterosexual	141	62.9
Homosexual	8	3.6
Bisexual	49	21.9
Queer	17	7.6
Other	6	2.7
Prefer not to say	3	1.3

Note. n=total number

Material

To create and distribute the online survey, Qualtrics was used. Furthermore, to avoid privacy complications, the automatic collection of IP addresses in Qualtrics was disabled. As

an online questionnaire was used, the participants needed to have access to a computer, laptop, or smartphone. Moreover, they needed to have an active internet connection. Additionally, for the distribution of the questionnaire, various platforms on the internet were used. As these varied from social media to WhatsApp, it was not required for the participants to have access to a certain site. Lastly, for the analysis of the data, SPSS has been used.

Consent Form

The online survey included a consent form in which the participants were able to agree or disagree (see Appendix A). It included information about the topic of the study, and their right to withdraw at any moment. Moreover, it was explained to the participants that their data was anonymised and stored for two years. Lastly, the researchers were introduced, and the participant was given the opportunity to contact the researchers if any questions appeared (see Appendix A).

Films with a positive presentation of female sexuality and/or gender non-conformity

Moreover, the questionnaire included a multiple-choice question that measured whether a participant had watched a film that presented either female sexuality or gender non-conformity positively. Therefore, it was asked whether the participants know and actively watched one of the following films: Tomboy, Sex education, Big Mouth, A kid like Jake, Upgrade, John Wick- Chapter 3, The Overnight, The Principles of Pleasure, Portrait of a Lady on Fire or La vie d'Adèle (see Appendix B). As this has not yet been studied, bog posts were examined to decide on which films to include. The criteria were that all of these films present either female sexuality and pleasure and/or gender non-binarity positively (Knott et al., 2013; Karpouzi, 2017; Megarry, 2019; Ashley, 2022). Moreover, the participant had the opportunity to choose "other" or "none of the above". If "other" was chosen, the participant was asked to mention the film they watched below (see Appendix B). Through this, it was ensured that the film mentioned could be checked on whether it fulfilled the characteristics that were needed.

The Persona

To test whether the gender of a person influences the degree to which they are stigmatized, the participants answered questions based on their imagination of the description of the persona. The description of the persona was provided in the questionnaire to make sure that all participants were thinking about similar factors while answering the scale described below. Therefore, the description of the persona included information about their partners, partners' partner and the relationship they all have with each other (see Appendix C). Moreover, conflict strategies and wishes for the relationships were described to make the persona more tangible. Lastly, three different descriptions for the personas were formulated as

three different genders were included in the research. Thus, the first persona was female, the second male and the third gender non-conforming. Apart from gender and pronouns, the story was the same (see Appendix C). Thereby, it was made sure that only the variable gender influenced the answers that were given. By randomisation, each participant was assigned to one of three conditions. Through this, a normally distributed sample, meaning that each group is similar and thus comparable, was ensured. The short description varied following the condition the participant was assigned to. By providing a different persona for each participant it has been ensured that the answers given for the previous persona did not influence the answers for the following one.

The scale by Marks et al. (2019)

Additionally, a 20-item evaluation scale by Marks et al. (2019) was implemented in the questionnaire to test the degree of stigmatization of the persona in four domains, namely values, likeability, success, and intelligence (see Appendix D). A seven-point Likert Scale was used to report their answers. It provides the possibility to answer the statement with (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) More or less disagree; (4) Neither agree nor disagree; (5) More or less agree; (6) Agree; (5) Strongly agree. The scale that was used was already applied by Marks et al. (2019). As the mean scores of all answers of the participants were taken to compare the degree of stigmatization, the participants were able to have a mean score between one and seven. A higher mean score meant that the person is stigmatized less, while a lower score indicates higher stigmatization (Marks et al., 2019).

A high correlation was found between the four sub-scales (range: .62–.77), which makes it eligible to assume that the item 20-item mean can be used as an overall evaluation score (Marks et al., 2019). Moreover, a high internal consistency ($\alpha = .95$) has been measured (Marks et al., 2019). The participants used in the formerly mentioned study were between 18 and 35 years old and from the US.

The internal consistency in this study was measured with Cronbach's alpha. As three experimental groups existed, this was checked for each group separately. The first experimental group named "male persona" showed a good internal consistency ($\alpha=.88$). The same was the case for the second group, "female persona" ($\alpha=.89$) and for the third group, "gender non-conforming persona" ($\alpha=.91$).

Procedure

As soon as the study was approved by the BMS ethical committee (request nr. 220317), an anonymous link to the questionnaire was sent via various platforms, like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. Moreover, the participants were asked in the

recruitment text if they could send the questionnaire to other people that might be willing to fill it out. The link led directly to Qualtrics and the questionnaire (see Appendix E). Participants who were found through Sona also reached Qualtrics by starting the study. All questions of the study had to be answered in order to continue to the next page. In total, the survey took 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The survey started with the consent form (see Appendix A). If the participant denied it, the questionnaire was ended. When they accepted the consent form, the participants were led to the next question in which they were asked about their demographics, including their age, gender, nationality, sexual orientation and education level. Next, the participant was asked to indicate whether they have watched one of the chosen films (see Appendix B). If they indicated that they have watched other films/series presenting female sexuality and/or gender non-binarity in a positive way, the participants were asked to name it below. Afterwards, a short story about a persona in a CNM relationship was displayed and the participant was asked to read it carefully (see Appendix B). This persona's gender varied according to the randomized group of participants. This was followed by the 20-items evaluation scale. After completing all questions, a short thank-you note was displayed.

Data Analysis

All obtained data were analysed using the statistical tool SPSS. In the first step, participants that did not fulfil all inclusion criteria, namely the completion of the questionnaire and the agreement to the consent form, were excluded. Next, the demographic characteristics of the population were analysed, with a focus on frequencies, means and standard deviations to gain a concise overview of the study population. Next, Cronbach's alpha was measured which was used to assess the scale's internal consistency and thus infer something about its reliability.

Afterwards, the variables were clearly defined. The independent variable was called: "Gender of the Persona" and is categorical as it consists of three groups, namely "female persona", "male persona", and "gender non-conforming persona". The dependent variable: "Degree of Stigmatization" was measured on a 7-point Likert Scale and was thus numerical. Lastly, the moderating variable "Positive Representation in Film and Series" was categorical with the two groups "yes" and "no". Then, the hypotheses were tested.

For the first two hypotheses, that (1) women in CNM relationships face more severe stigmatization than men when being in a CNM relationship, and that (2) gender non-conforming people in CNM relationships face more severe stigmatization than gender-conforming individuals in CNM relationships, a simple linear regression analysis was

performed. This analysis was used to compare the averages of the variable "Degree of Stigmatization" for the three categories, female, male and gender non-conforming of the variable "Gender of the Persona". Specifically, for the first hypothesis, the group with the "female persona" was compared with the group of the "male persona", while the participants in the group "gender non-conforming persona" were excluded. First, the variable had to be dummy coded. "Female persona" was coded one, "male persona" became the dummy variable and "gender non-conforming persona" was excluded by making it a missing value. This was the case as the hypothesis only focused on male and female differences in the degree of stigmatization. For the second hypothesis, the participants in the gender non-conforming group were compared to the participants in the gender-conforming groups (male and female persona). For this group, a dummy variable was created as well with "gender non-conforming persona" being coded as one and "male persona" and "female persona" as one dummy variable.

The moderation effect by the variable "Positive Representation in Film and Series", and thus the third and fourth hypotheses were tested using the extension for SPSS "PROCESS 4.0 by Andrew Hayes" (Hayes, n.d.). Hypothesis three focused on the effect of a positive representation of female sexuality in film and series on the relationship between the gender of the persona and the degree of stigmatization. Particularly, it was looked at whether the effect tested in hypothesis one changed if people watched one of the named films or series that represent female sexuality positively. Therefore, the variable "positive representation in film and series" was further separated into "positive representation of female sexuality" and "positive representation of gender non-conformity" as not all films and series displayed both. Then, for the third hypothesis, it was tested using Process whether the moderating variable "positive representation of female sexuality" affected the relationship examined in the first hypothesis (female/male persona and degree of stigmatization). For the fourth hypothesis it was specifically focused on whether the effect tested in hypothesis two changed if people watched a film that represents gender non-conformity positively. Therefore, the variable "positive representation of gender non-conformity" was checked for a moderating effect on the difference in the degree of stigmatization between participants in the group "gender-conforming persona" and "gender non-conforming persona".

Results

Descriptive Statistics

After excluding all participants that did not fulfil the inclusion criteria, 224 were left in total. The sample population was randomly distributed into three experimental

groups. The first group "male" consisted of 78 participants, the second group "female" included 76, and the third group "gender non-conforming" contained 70 participants. Moreover, 70 participants had not watched a film/series containing a positive representation of gender non-conformity and 72 subjects did not watch a film/series that positively represented female sexuality. For a more detailed description of the participants in each group of analysis see table 2.

Next, Table 3 describes the means of the different groups on the 20-item scale that was used to measure the stigmatization of a persona. The related standard deviations, as well as the 95 percent confidence interval, are also shown in the table below.

Table 2

Group Sizes

	Positive representation of female sexuality	No positive representation of female sexuality	Positive representation of gender non-conformity	No positive representation of gender non-conformity
Female persona	51	25		
Gender non-conforming persona			51	19
Male persona	51	27	53	25

Note: values in missing cells were excluded as they were unnecessary for the interpretation of the results in this study

Table 3

Stigmatization Scores of the Independent and Moderation Variable (n=224)

			95 % Confidence Interval	
Groups	*M*	*SD*	Lower	Upper
Persona				
Male Persona	10.02	0.70	9.86	10.17
Female Persona	9.94	0.68	9.65	10.08

Gender Non-Conforming Persona	9.93	0.69	9.69	10.08
Film/Series				
No Film/Series	9.85	0.70	9.63	9.942
Female Sexuality	10.05	0.67	9.70	10.40
Gender Non-Conformity	10.02	0.68	9.58	10.38

Note: *M* = mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation

Assumptions

Afterwards, the assumptions of linearity, normal distribution and equal variance of residuals were checked. As dummy variables were used, the linearity assumption was automatically met. The relationship could not be curvilinear due to the two data points of the dummy. The normality of the sample was tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test which showed no significant departure of the whole study population from normality, W (224) =.99, p=.06. Moreover, the histogram of the residuals did not deviate from a normal distribution (Appendix E). Next, the assumption of equal variance was checked by looking at the scatterplot. The residuals did not fan out triangularly, which means that the assumption was met (Appendix F).

Relationship between Gender of the Persona and Stigmatisation

To test the first hypothesis, that women in CNM relationships face more severe stigmatization than men when being in a CNM relationship, a simple linear regression analysis was performed. The results showed that there was no significant effect in predicting the degree of stigmatization based on the gender of the persona (comparison between male and female), with b = -0.08, t (152) = -0.69, p = .49.

For the second hypothesis, that gender non-conforming people in CNM relationships face more severe stigmatization than gender-conforming individuals in CNM relationships, a simple linear regression analysis was done. The simple linear regression analysis revealed that there was also no significant effect in mean score between "gender non-conforming" and "male"/"female" with b = -0.05, t (222) = -0.45, p = .65. No relationship exists between the gender of the persona and degree of Stigmatization.

Moderation Analysis

Next, the third hypothesis, that the effect of gender of the persona in a CNM relationship on stigmatization is stronger if the person who is stigmatising has not seen a film or a series in which female sexuality is represented positively, was tested. The whole model including the interaction effect between the positive representation of female sexuality in film and series and gender of the persona was not significant, $b = -0.26$, $t (150) = -1.10$ $p = .27$. A significant result has been found for the effect of positive representation of female sexuality in film and series on stigmatization with $b = 0.33$, $R^2 = .03$, $t (150) = 1.20$, $p = .05$, showing that the participants who have watched the listed films/series, rated the persona more positive than the once who did not.

Table 3

Output of Analysis of Hypothesis Three

	b	SE	t	p
Constant (male persona)	9.80	0.13	74.10	.00
Female persona	0.09	0.19	0.47	.64
Film/Series with female sexuality	0.33	0.16	1.20	.05
Interaction	-0.26	0.23	-1.10	.28

Afterwards, the fourth hypothesis, that the effect of gender of the persona in a CNM relationship on stigmatization is stronger if the person who is stigmatizing has not seen a film or a series in which gender non-conformity is represented positively, was looked at more closely by carrying out a process analysis. The model including the interaction effect between the positive representation of gender non-conformity in film and series and gender of the persona has also been found to be not significant, $b =0.09$, $t (220) =0.40$, $p =.69$. Moreover, the effect of positive representation of gender non-conformity in film and series on stigmatization ($b =0.16$, $t (220) =1.38$, $p =.17$) was not significant. This shows that positive representation of gender non-conformity has neither an effect on the relationship between gender of the persona and degree of stigmatization nor on the degree of stigmatization on its own.

Table 4

Output of Analysis of Hypothesis Four

	b	SE	t	p
Constant (female & male persona)	9.87	0.10	102.27	.00
Gender Non-Conforming persona	-0.12	0.19	-0.64	.52
Film/Series with Gender Non-Conformity	0.16	0.12	1.38	.17
Interaction	0.09	0.22	0.40	.69

Discussion

The purpose of this experimental study was to gain insight into whether the gender of a person in a CNM relationship influences the degree to which they are stigmatized. Moreover, it was specifically investigated if a moderating effect of positive representation of either female sexuality or gender non-conformity in films and series exists. All four hypotheses of the study were rejected as no significant results were found. Hence, this study showed that the gender of a person in a CNM relationship has no effect on the degree to which they are stigmatized. Moreover, the results revealed no decreasing effect of gender on the degree of stigmatization due to a positive representation of female sexuality or gender non-conformity in films and series.

The first hypothesis, that women in CNM face more severe stigmatization than men when being in a CNM relationship, could not be confirmed in the current study. Contradictory to this, Marks et al. (2019) found a significant effect of gender on stigmatization. Nevertheless, they did not provide the participants with information about a persona but had them imagine a person they knew who was in a CNM relationship (Marks et al., 2019). Although this supported the participants in imagining what the person is like when filling out the questionnaire, it also did not take into consideration other factors that could have influenced the participants' decisions, for instance, the relationship with the imagined individual. A reason for the differing results could have been that the participants in this study were not able to imagine the persona to be more than the limited information they got in the

description. Hence, it should be considered in the future to use a more tangible persona, while not prompting the participants in a certain direction.

In the second hypothesis, it was assumed that gender non-conforming people in CNM relationships face more severe stigmatization than gender-conforming individuals in CNM relationships. This hypothesis was not confirmed by this research. No literature before has focused specifically on the effect of gender non-conformity of a person in a CNM relationship on the stigmatization they experience. While studies suggest an intersectional impact of skin colour, age and gender, CNM was not part of the investigation (de Los Reyes, 2016). Therefore, the results cannot be easily explained by comparing this study to previous research. Nevertheless, the explanation mentioned for hypothesis one, that the participants might have not been able to imagine the persona due to the limited information given in the description, could also explain partly the results of the second hypothesis. Although the article by Marks et al. (2019) did not focus specifically on gender non-conforming individuals it still focused on a difference between gender in regard to stigmatization in CNM relationships. Nevertheless, both parts of the study were constructed equally and therefore similar limitations can be assumed.

Both, the results for hypotheses three and four are not in line with the previous findings of Wiedermann (2015) and Craiger (2019) who suggested that sexual scripts can indeed be influenced by the content shown in films and series and that this is especially the case for unusual sexual behaviour, for instance, CNM. A reason for the rejection of the third and fourth hypotheses could be that the theory of sexual scripts used was not complete. In this regard, research suggests that sexual scripts indeed exist, but it is stated that sexual scripts are influenced in three different ways (McCormick, 2010). First, cultural scenarios influence how and with which person sexual intercourse is enacted in a culturally accepted way. Furthermore, interpersonal scripts are supposed to be learned through behaviour shown in the person's direct social environment and further influence the way cultural scenarios are interpreted. Lastly, Intrapsychic scripts are argued to be at the deepest cognitive level for the formation of sexual scripts and comprise the construction of desire and fantasy (McCormick, 2010). Taking into consideration the three factors while looking at the results of this study, it could be argued that the study did not consider all types of sexual script acquisition. Instead, as only films and series were considered, only the influence of cultural scenarios was integrated. Hence, the unique formation of interpersonal and intrapsychic scripts of the individuals could have influenced their final sexual script and thus their degree of stigmatization of female sexuality or gender non-conformity. Therefore, all three facets of the

sexual script acquisition have to be incorporated into future research. This could be done by adding questions concerning the representation of gender non-conformity and female sexuality in the direct social environment. Moreover, the integration of intrapsychic scripts could be integrated by getting information about participants' sexual desires and fantasies. Nevertheless, it would be important to take into consideration the tabu that still exists talking about these topics while asking these questions (McCormick, 2010).

Moreover, the effect of positive representation of film/series might have been non-significant as the films/series most often chosen from the list, for instance, John Wick-Chapter 3, did not have gender non-conformity as the main topic but rather on the side of the action (John Wick: Chapter 3 – Parabellum, 2019). Hence, it can be questioned whether the formation of sexual scripts occurs also unconsciously. This has not yet been researched (Craiger, 2019). Therefore, it could have been that the films chosen were watched by many people but did not have the effect as intended. In future research it would thus be wise to include a pre-study, investigating the relationship between conscious awareness of gender non-conformity in films and series and the formation of sexual scripts.

As most participants were from Germany and the Netherlands, a language barrier may also be the cause for the results of all hypotheses. As the questionnaire was conducted in English, confusion could have occurred with the description of the persona. This could have then influenced the way the participants answered, especially for the older generations (Statista, 2022a). Moreover, the language barrier could also be a cause for the low rate of answers from participants above 40 (n=32) as it can be assumed that the English language of the questionnaire prevented those people to fill out the questionnaire. This has been reported by people engaging in snowball sampling who mentioned that their older colleagues, parents or relatives did not feel eligible to fill out the questionnaire due to their skills in English. Therefore, future researchers should consider translating the questionnaire to the native language of their participants.

Strengths and Limitations

Multiple strengths and limitations can be identified in this research study. The first strength is that the sample size was satisfactory for the analysis performed. Additionally, the 20-item scale used to test stigmatization was found to be reliable and had a strong internal consistency score. Moreover, the scale had been used multiple times in the last years, where these results were replicated successfully (Marks, & Fraley, 2005; Marks et al., 2019). Next, in this study a specific focus was put on including members of the LGBTQ+ community, which can be seen in the demographics of the study population (see Table 1). This is

especially important as findings suggested that the LGBTQ+ population has been neglected in research which increases knowledge gaps and favours the emergence of stigmas (Boemer, 2011).

However, multiple limitations can also be identified in the study design. First of all, it can be argued that the study population is not representable for the broader population and that all results have to be interpreted with great caution. One argument for this is that the sample used is WEIRD, meaning that most of the participants were white, educated, industrialised, rich and living in a democratic country, for instance, Germany or Netherlands. Using only WEIRD samples means that the study population is not representable for all humans (Muthukrishna, 2020). Therefore, this sample cannot be used to make broad, not reflected claims about the stigmatization of individuals in CNM relationships (Muthukrishna, 2020). Moreover, the mean age of the sample was around 27 years old, although the mean of the general population in a country like the Netherlands was 2021 42.3 years old (Statista, 2021). This age difference could be explained by the fact that the majority of participants were students found on the University of Twente's SONA page. Moreover, convenience sampling as well as snowball sampling, especially over social media can also lead to a distortion of the population (Etikan, 2016). Statistics have shown that the biggest group using the social media page Instagram were between 18 and 34 years old (Statista, 2022b). Therefore, it can be assumed that this group was majorly reached by the distribution of the questionnaire on social media, while the recruitment of over 35 years olds was disadvantaged. Lastly, the majority of participants identified as female, while males were underrepresented in comparison to the general population (see Table 1). Thus, in future research, a great focus should be put on recruiting a more varied sample by using broader advertising methods.

Lastly, the results of the questionnaire about the degree of stigmatization all centred around nine, meaning that the participants neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. In the received feedback some participants stated that they did not know the persona and thus did not feel eligible to answer the questions. Nevertheless, the goal of the description of the persona was to leave room for interpretation so that own imagination has to be used which gives a better insight into the stigmas they possess. This is in line with Chapman, et al.'s (2008) finding that the prevalence of a persona decreases with added attributes. Therefore, it is seen necessary to leave the description of the persona as non-suggestive as possible. A possible solution could be to use a six-point Likert scale in the future, to force people to decide. Research showed that by removing the neutral scale point, social desirability bias is reduced (Garland, 1991). Keeping the neutral point can even distort the results (Garland,

1991). In addition to this Allen and Seaman (2007) argued that removing the neutral scale point forces a choice on the participants as they have to take a position and cannot remain neutral. This has to be considered when talking about sensitive information. As all information is measured anonymously, the positive factors can be argued to outweigh.

Implications

Due to the research limitation and the following concerns about its applicability to all humans, it may be too ambitious to formulate implications in our society to counter stigmatization. Nevertheless, stigmatization as a field of research, especially in combination with minority populations, like CNM and gender non-conforming individuals, is important for several reasons. First of all, future research, applying the suggestions mentioned in the text above, can help to investigate the reasons for the emergence of stigmatization. Moreover, by investigating the impact of a positive representation in the media, possible solutions for counteracting the formation of prejudice can be made apparent. This is in particular important as the positive significant effect of positive representation of female sexuality on the degree of stigmatization in this study already showed some potential.

<div align="center">**Conclusion**</div>

In conclusion, there was no correlation detected between gender and the degree of stigmatization. Furthermore, this means that there is no effect of representation in film/series on the effect between gender and the degree of stigmatization. Nevertheless, this study still contributes to the growing number of research in this field. In particular, it brought some important suggestions for future research. For instance, the collection of participants should be widened to gain a more varied picture and be able to infer something about the whole population from the sample. Moreover, it should be considered to translate the questionnaire into the native language of the participants to also reach older generations as well as people who are not fluent in English. Furthermore, it is suggested that a pre-study is done, to find out whether consciousness influences the effect of positive representations in films and series. Lastly, it is suggested that in future research a six-point Likert Scale is used to avoid social desirability bias and force the participants to answer honestly. Over time, more research could revolutionize the ways in which stigmatization can be counteracted which would mean an enormous relief for the affected individuals.

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Appendix A

Consent Form

Breaking the Stigma of CNM (Consensual Non-Monogamous Relationships)

This study examines factors regarding attitude towards and/or People in CNM relationships. If you agree to participate, you will answer survey questions that are about your demographics, attitudes and values.

You are free to discontinue your participation at any time. If you want to, the final report can be sent to you. If you agree to participate in the study, it will take approximately 15-25 minutes to complete the survey and task. No personally identifiable information will be collected, so that your response cannot be traced back to you. This anonymous data will be saved by the university for at least 2 years.

This research study is being conducted by Max Düwel, Selin Gündüz and Rika Neumann as part of a BSc thesis. The project supervisor is Nils Keesmekers, Department of Psychology, Positive Psychology (Principles of Human Flourishing), University of Twente. If you have questions or concerns about your participation in this study or would like to receive the results, you may contact us via e-mail, m.k.duwel@student.utwente.nl, r.neumann@student.utwente.nl, s.guenduez@student.utwente.nl

By clicking "Yes, I Agree" below, you are indicating that you have understood your role in this research, and consent to participate in this research study.

Appendix B

Films that show female sexuality and/or gender non-conformity positively

Please indicate whether you watched one or multiple of the following films or series

1. Tomboy (2011) '
2. Sex education *'
3. Big Mouth *'
4. A kid like Jake (2018) '
5. Upgrade (2018) '
6. John Wick- Chapter 3 (2019) '
7. The Overnight *
8. The Principles of Pleasure *'
9. Portrait of a Lady on Fire *
10. La vie d'Adèle (Blau ist eine warme Farbe) *
11. Other
12. None of the above

If Other, please specify which below.

* shows female sexuality

'shows gender non-conformity

Appendix C

Descriptions of the Persona

Female

Read the text of the following persona carefully and imagine what the persona is like.

Taylor identifies as female and is in her early 30s. She lives in Amsterdam with a partner, Alex, whom she has been dating for over five years. Taylor is seeing another woman, Jordan, whom she considers her life partner, and has been close to for approximately three years. Additionally, she also has other relationships, including Kyle with whom she is in a serious relationship. Kyle lives in the United States which makes this relationship long-distance. All of Taylor's partners have other relationships as well. It is most important for Taylor to keep talking with her different partners and to be honest with each other about their feelings, difficulties, and concerns. Taylor thinks that this will help them avoid being hurt. For instance, Taylor experienced that a lack of agreement on how much time is spent with her partners led to jealousy and negative feelings. Nevertheless, when she and her partner openly discussed their feelings, they were able to find a solution and the problem dissolved.

Male

Read the text of the following persona carefully and imagine what the persona is like.

Taylor identifies as male and is in his early 30s. He lives in Amsterdam with a partner, Alex, whom he has been dating for over five years. Taylor is seeing another woman, Jordan, whom he considers his life partner, and has been close to for approximately three years. Additionally, he also has other relationships, including Kyle with whom he is in a serious relationship. Kyle lives in the United States which makes this relationship long-distance. All of Taylor's partners have other relationships as well. It is most important for Taylor to keep talking with his different partners and to be honest with each other about their feelings, difficulties, and concerns. Taylor thinks that this will help them avoid being hurt. For instance, Taylor experienced that a lack of agreement on how much time is spent with his partners led to jealousy and negative feelings. Nevertheless, when he and his partner openly discussed their feelings, they were able to find a solution and the problem dissolved.

Gender non-conforming

Read the text of the following persona carefully and imagine what the persona is like.

Taylor identifies as gender non-conforming and is in their early 30s. They live in Amsterdam with a partner, Alex, whom they have been dating for over five years. Taylor is seeing another woman, Jordan, whom they consider their life partner, and have been close to for approximately three years. Additionally, they also have other relationships, including Kyle with whom they are in a serious relationship. Kyle lives in the United States which makes this relationship long-distance. All of Taylor's partners have other relationships as well. It is most important for Taylor to keep talking with their different partners and to be honest with each other about their feelings, difficulties, and concerns. Taylor thinks that this will help them avoid being hurt. For instance, Taylor experienced that a lack of agreement on how much time is spent with their partners led to jealousy and negative feelings. Nevertheless, when they and their partner openly discussed their feelings, they were able to find a solution and the problem dissolved.

Appendix D

Stigmatization Scale (Marks, et al., 2019)

Subscale 1: Values

1. This person is trustworthy
2. This person is respectful
3. This person is immoral*
4. This person is dishonest*
5. This person is careless*
6. This person is dependable

Subscale 2: Subjective perceptions (Likability)

1. This person gets along well with others
2. I distance myself from this person*
3. I like this person
4. This person is socially competent
5. I like being around this person

Subscale 3: Success

1. This person performs well in everything he/she does
2. This person is successful
3. This person is a high achiever
4. This person has a bright future
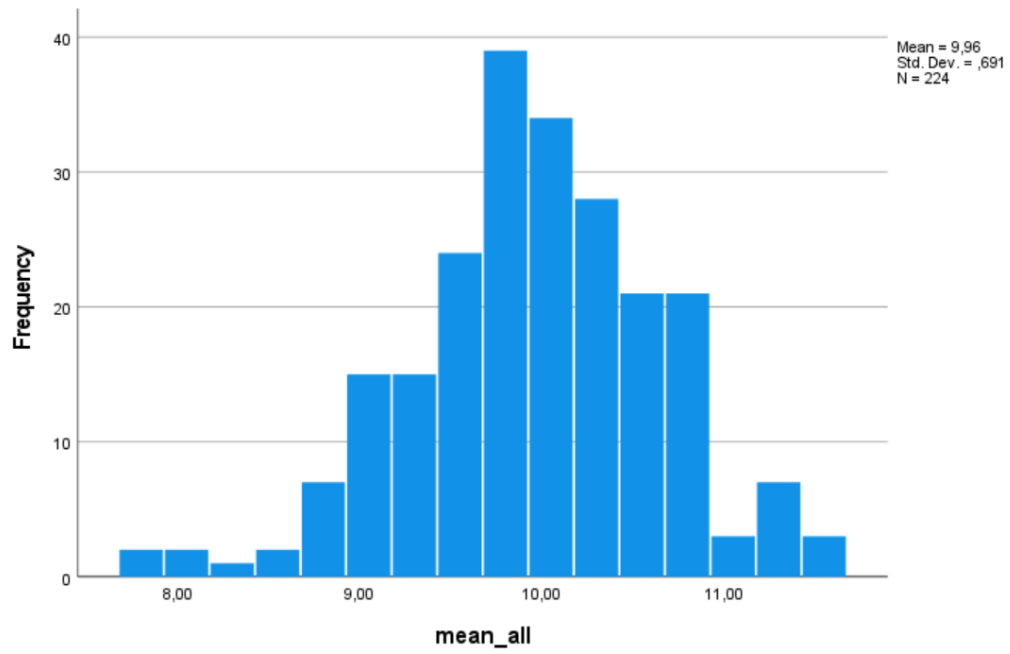5. This person is lazy*

Subscale 4: Intelligence

1. This person is intelligent
2. This person makes a lot of mistakes*
3. This person is good at analysing situations
4. This person is bright

*is coded the other way around

Appendix E

Histogram

mean_all

Appendix F

Scatterplot

Dependent Variable: mean_all