TRANSITIONING TO A CONSENSUALLY NONMONOGAMOUS RELATIONSHIP: AN INVESTIGATION USING RELATIONAL TURBULENCE THEORY

A Thesis

by

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This thesis meets the standards for scope and quality of
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

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ABSTRACT

Nonmonogamous behaviors have interested the public and researchers for decades. For many years, attention to nonmonogamous behaviors has been paid primarily to infidelity. Within recent decades, however, the focus has begun widening to include a different kind of nonmonogamous arrangement. Consensual nonmonogamy, a relationship style that allows for nonmonogamous behaviors and avoids the many negative consequences associated with infidelity. Consensually nonmonogamous (CNM) relationships have been woefully underrepresented in research and only a handful of studies have attempted to understand the process by which CNM relationships are negotiated into existence from monogamous relationships. This paper responds to this need for understanding by using relational turbulence theory to explore the transitional period when a monogamous couple first decides to explore consensual nonmonogamy. We recruited 210 participants over 18 years of age who had been in a monogamous relationship that transitioned to a CNM relationship. Participants completed a quantitative questionnaire comprised of several survey measures, new and old, designed to assess their feelings and perceptions of their relationship before, during, and after the initial conversations regarding implementing consensual nonmonogamy. Results indicated that feelings of relational uncertainty, partner's facilitation and interference, and their conversational valence were significant predictors of relational turbulence and conversational satisfaction. This research provides valuable information to researchers and practitioners regarding CNM relationships, as well as expanding relational turbulence theory by applying it to new relational contexts.

Keywords: nonmonogamous behaviors, consensual nonmonogamy, open relationships, polyamory, relationship transitions, relational turbulence theory

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CHAPTER I

In Western societies, monogamy is the norm, some would even say compulsory, for romantic relationships (Heckert, 2010). It is expected of adults to select one mate (usually of the opposite sex) to form a lifelong, sexually and romantically exclusive pair-bond. Despite being the perceived norm, lifelong-monogamous marriages seem to be something few Americans achieve. Marriage rates have been on the decline, and currently 28.7% of individuals 18 years of age and older living in the United States have never been married (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Additionally, divorce rates have remained relatively stable over the past few decades at around 50% (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017). Within many marriages, lifelong exclusivity is hard to come by. Therapists have contended that approximately 70% of all marriages will be impacted by infidelity at some time and an estimated 2 to 4% of men and women have engaged in extramarital sex within the past year (Tsapelas, Fisher, & Aron, 2010). Together, these statistics suggest the cultural monogamous ideal is difficult to achieve or maintain for many.

Though monogamy is still thought to be the ideal relationship structure, nonmonogamous behaviors are common (see Thompson, 1983; Tsapales et al., 2010) and have interested researchers for decades. This research, however, has almost entirely focused on infidelity, cheating, and other nonconsensual nonmonogamous (NCNM) behaviors. Infidelity has been shown to have many negative individual and relational consequences for all involved, including lower psychological wellbeing, relationship termination, aggression, and inter-partner violence (Allen & Atkins, 2012; Flynn & Graham, 2010; Hall & Fincham, 2009). Researchers have identified dispositional and situational factors that correlate with infidelity (e.g., lack of commitment, abundance of alternatives) (Campbell & Wright, 2019). Understanding the nuances

of nonmonogamous behavior is important because, as stated earlier, infidelity can have severe consequences. However, infidelity is not the only way couples engage in nonmonogamous behavior.

Alternative relationship structures that allow for sexual and/or emotional openness and multiple partners are becoming more common (Haupert, Gesselamn, Moors, Fisher, & Garcia, 2017). Consensual nonmonogamy has been used as an umbrella term for all relationships in which all partners agree (consent) to extra-dyadic sexual and/or romantic relationships with other consenting individuals (Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2013). Consensually nonmonogamous (CNM) relationships have the potential to reduce or eliminate relational conflict based on attraction to others by acknowledging and/or embracing the idea that many individuals within relationships experience extra-dyadic attraction. Individuals in CNM relationships have more resources for meeting relationship needs so that one partner is not burdened by being the sole source of need fulfilment. They encourage and create diverse social networks circumventing dyadic withdrawal (the tendency of a couple to withdraw from and combine their social networks). Furthermore, they tend to encourage personal growth and autonomy (Conley & Moors, 2014; Moors, Matsick, & Schechinger, 2017). Consensually nonmonogamous relationships dismantle the traditional monogamous relationship structure in favor of building something new with the potential to work for all those involved.

Haupert and associates' recent 2017 survey revealed that more than one-fifth of participants have engaged in consensual nonmonogamy during their lifetime. Not only were they able to shed some light on the prevalence of these relationship structures, they were also able to dispel the myth that stemmed from Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) that CNM relationships are characteristic of only gay men. Although gay men in Haupert et al.'s (2017) research were

slightly more likely to have engaged in consensual nonmonogamy (32%-37% of gay men vs. 21.2%-21.9% of heterosexual men) gay men were not driving this effect. In their sample, the vast majority of participants who have engaged in a CNM relationship were heterosexual (78.7%-80.0%) mirroring the majority prevalence of heterosexuality in the general population. Approximately 5.3% of people are currently in a CNM relationship (Rubin, Moors, Matsick, Zeiger, & Conley, 2014). However, despite their prevalence, CNM relationship structures still face negativity and stigma from the general population.

Research has shown that CNM relationships face considerable stigmatization. In their foundational publication, Conley and her associates (2013) surveyed more than 1000 participants, 4.3% of whom were currently in a CNM relationship. The survey results revealed that in almost every respect traditional monogamy was preferred to consensual nonmonogamy by monogamous and CNM participants. Participants strongly believed that monogamous relationships are more satisfying relationally (including higher levels of commitment, trust, and emotional connectedness) and sexually (including reliable access to a sexual partner, and higher levels of passion), and prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections. Sizemore and Olmstead (2018) surveyed 549 young adults who were not currently involved in a CNM relationships and found that 78.7% of their participants were unwilling to engage in a CNM relationship, citing many of the negative attitudes revealed in Conley et al. (2013).

At the same time CNM relationships are stigmatized, monogamous relationships find themselves surrounded in a halo effect. Monogamous relationships are thought to protect you from jealousy, loneliness, communication issues, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and much more (Conley et al., 2013). However, this is not the case. Conley, Ziegler, Moors, Matsick, and Valentine (2012) summarize findings that CNM relationships compared to monogamous

relationships are equally or more satisfying, contain equal levels of commitment, lower levels of jealousy, higher levels of sexual satisfaction, and, perhaps most surprisingly, safer sex practices. They note that:

> Instead of providing security surrounding STIs, an agreement of monogamy may actually add an extra layer of risk: People may presume that their partner is being faithful (and simultaneously pose little threat to their sexual health) and that no protection to prevent STIs is needed. (p. 128)

The assumption that those engaged in consensual nonmonogamy are the least likely to practice safe sex is unfounded (Conley, Moors, Ziegler, & Karathanasis, 2012). CNM relationships may offer greater protection from jealousy, loneliness, and communication issues than expected. Accordingly, it is important to increase our understanding of how CNM relationships are communicatively negotiated and maintained.

Although CNM relationships can provide a successful alternative relationship structure, the stigma against them has kept them in the shadows. Little is known about how they are created or maintained. Some popular press sources (e.g., Hardy & Easton, 2017; Labriola, 2013, Taomino, 2008) attempt to guide the reader through creating a nonmonogamous relationship through a rulemaking process in which the couple engages in several conversations to determine their boundaries and manage their jealousy. This process has been mirrored in research as well (Kimberly & Hans, 2017; McLean, 2004). Although these publications attempt to explain processes associated with creating a satisfying nonmonogamous relationship, they acknowledge that the process of rulemaking alone does not encompass the complexity of opening a monogamous relationship.

The transition from a monogamous relationship to a consensually nonmonogamous one constitutes a relational turning point for couples. Turning points are complex periods of change in a relationship and transitions are the responses to change (Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Solomon, Weber, & Steuber, 2010). When a couple experiences a transition, they are experiencing a reformation of their roles, identities, definitions, and/or behaviors within the relationship (Solomon et al., 2010). Transitioning from a monogamous to CNM relationship is likely much more complex than establishing a set of rules. Understanding the creation or transition to, as well as the maintenance of, CNM relationships is important because they can serve as a successful relationship model that can avoid some of the negative consequences of infidelity.

The present study aims to fill some of these gaps in our knowledge by investigating *how* couples transition from a monogamous relationship to a consensually nonmonogamous relationship and what relational factors relate to the experience of the transition. Using a turning points perspective, some of the nuances and ambiguities of this complex time in a relationship's life can be teased out. Negotiating this transition is inherently communicative as the couple must verbalize their desires, insecurities, and boundaries. But what do these conversations look like and how does the relationship influence the nature of these conversations? The present study focuses on the role of communication during the initial conversations when a monogamous couple decides to try consensual nonmonogamy.

Understanding the communication that occurs when a couple transitions from monogamous to consensually nonmonogamous is important for three reasons. First, it has been shown that CNM relationships provide a successful alternative to the traditional monogamous relationship structure, however CNM relationships remain stigmatized and research on their nuances is scarce. The present research not only expands the body of knowledge related to CNM

relationships; it provides an understanding for how monogamous couples transition to nonmonogamy. Second, this research uses relational turbulence theory to help examine and understand processes associated with this relational transition. Relational turbulence theory states that relationship factors have a direct influence on the way the couple experiences transitional periods, and that these experiences influence feelings of turbulence. Although the model has been researched and used for almost twenty years, relational turbulence as a theory has only been formally articulated recently and further research testing its effectiveness is needed. Thus, this research expands the evidence for and understanding of relational turbulence theory. Finally, this research has practical value for those interested in a CNM relationship structure and for therapists and counsellors who may be confronted with nonmonogamous clients. Specifically, the information gathered by this research can be used to guide the couple's communication and expectations regarding the transition to consensual nonmonogamy tailored to their relationship qualities.

The present research fills an important gap in the literature by providing some understanding for the nuances of the transition from a monogamous relationship to a CNM relationship. It is done through the realist ontology and post-positivist epistemology which assumes some objective reality that can be known, studied, and measured. The content of this thesis provides a foundation for the study of consensual nonmonogamy and through systematic research, works to extends our knowledge in an effort to improve communication processes. This remainder of the thesis details the content and results of this research study. Chapter 2 outlines in detail the current body of research on nonmonogamous behaviors and CNM relationships. Chapter 3 contains the methodology and participants, Chapter 4, the results, and Chapter 5, the discussion, limitations, and implications.

CHAPTER II

As noted in Chapter 1, nonmonogamous behaviors are a common reality for many Americans despite their negative association. This is due to their long-standing association with infidelity and its consequences. Nonmonogamous research thereby focuses mainly on these nonconsensual behaviors and their potentially devastating outcomes for relationships and individuals. However, it is possible to engage in nonmonogamous behaviors in a way that is satisfying and healthy for all involved. Some alternative relationship structures exist which embrace nonmonogamy, these relationships are consensually nonmonogamous. Little yet is understood about how individuals communicate these relationships into existence. To understand the current state of research on consensually nonmonogamous behavior and relationships, nonmonogamous behaviors as a whole must be discussed. In this section the current research on nonmonogamous behaviors will be explored and evaluated.

Infidelity as Nonconsensual Nonmonogamy

Although alternative relationship structures have remained understudied, non-monogamous behaviors have interested researchers for decades. However, this research has been almost entirely focused on infidelity, or nonconsensual nonmonogamy. Infidelity research has focused on several areas including: defining infidelity, profiling who is likely to engage in infidelity, the relational and individual consequences for infidelity, and motivations for engaging in infidelity. Within these many topics, researchers have cast a wide net. There is much information, and some problems, regarding each of these topics. Each will be expanded on in the following sections.

The problem with defining infidelity. Researchers most often rely on one of two strategies for defining infidelity. One is to provide the participants with a definition, for example

engaging in sexual intercourse with someone other than one's primary partner (Lieberman, 1988), or any emotional or sexual intimacy with someone other than one's primary partner (Allen & Baucom, 2006). These definitions present a variety of problems. The first definition does not encompass the many other behaviors, such as falling in love, that are considered infidelity by most people. Although the second definition is broader behaviorally, it does not address the breaking of rules and boundaries in the primary relationship. Both definitions are based in the assumption that couples are engaged in an exclusive sexual and romantic relationship. Researchers who have sought to distill a definition from their participants have found that participants emphasized the breaking of trust, engaging in secret keeping, and deceit with little to no mention of specific behaviors (DeGroot & Blevins, 2017/2018; Frank & DeLamater, 2010). "Even fly-fishing could be considered cheating if despite your spouse's disapproval, you acted in secret, felt shame… and/or lied," one of Frank and DeLamater's (2010, p. 13) survey respondents said.

This sentiment, however, is not echoed in most researcher-provided definitions. Frequently, extramarital sex is substituted for cheating or infidelity indiscriminately (see Allen & Atkins, 2012; Campbell & Wright, 2019; McAnulty & Brineman, 2007; Previti & Amato, 2004). Those engaged in *consensually* nonmonogamous relationships may respond that they have indeed engaged in EMS, falsely inflating infidelity numbers and skewing understanding of motives and consequences. Concurrently, individuals who feel their relationship was impacted by an infidelity in which no sex occurred, have their experiences erased by the EMS equivalency, deflating infidelity numbers and ignoring the relationship consequences. The challenge in defining infidelity demonstrates the pervasiveness of mononormativity. It is important to recognize the influence these definitional starting points have on the study of

nonmonogamous behavior and relationships. Infidelity and consensual nonmonogamy are frequently conflated or confused and this indistinction furthers the stigmatization of consensual nonmonogamous behavior.

Who engages in infidelity? Several contextual factors, including education and income, have been correlated with infidelity. Tsapelas et al. (2010) note that lower levels and higher levels of education have both been associated with an increased likelihood of infidelity. Infidelity may be dependent on income and interdependence rather than education level (Campbell & Wright, 2019). Campbell and Wright (2019) found that individuals with higher income tend to be less dependent on their partner for security and tend to have jobs which afford them opportunities to travel, thereby decreasing commitment and increasing available alternatives. Additionally, they found that people who live in urban areas are more likely to engage in infidelity than those in rural communities. This is, again, likely due to the abundance of alternatives. Additionally, people in urban areas tend to have more liberal attitudes toward sex.

Relationship factors, specifically satisfaction, have received considerable attention in examining infidelity. Low relationship satisfaction and relationship distress have been found to positively correlate with infidelity (Campbell & Wright, 2019; DeGroot & Blevins, 2017/2018; Tsapelas et al., 2010). However, Previti and Amato's (2004) study showed that marital dissatisfaction was a predictor of infidelity only when there was perceived high likelihood of divorce, suggesting that it is a lack of commitment that may lead to infidelity. Another interpersonal factor that correlates with infidelity is a partner's past infidelity. Individuals have been shown to engage in infidelity as retaliation for the partner's perceived or real infidelity (DeGroot & Blevins, 2017/2018).

Several intrapersonal factors have been investigated for their connection to infidelity Using the "Big Five" personality traits, researchers have found that those who reported in engaging in infidelity reported higher levels of extraversion and openness than those who reported no infidelity (Orzeck & Lung, 2005). This may be related to extraverts having more of a social life, and therefore, access to an abundance of potential alternative partners, which has also been consistently correlated with EMS behaviors. Those who reported engaging in infidelity also scored lower on conscientiousness, lower agreeableness, and higher neuroticism (Campbell & Wright, 2019; McAnulty & Brineman, 2007). These personality traits describe a person who is more impulsive, self-interested, and emotionally unstable. Another way to look at personality traits is to look at individuals' attachment styles, which shape peoples' predispositions toward certain behaviors and beliefs about interpersonal relationships. Those with insecure attachment styles (i.e., anxious-ambivalent, anxious-avoidant) have been positively correlated with having engage in infidelity (Bogaert & Sadava, 2002). This could be related to sociosexual orientation or willingness to engage in sexual encounters without emotional attachment, which has been shown to covary with insecure attachment and positively correlate with engagement in infidelity.

Consequences of infidelity. The experience of infidelity can cause irreparable damage to a relationship. Psychological distress and lower well-being have been reported for both perpetrators and victims of infidelity (Hall & Fincham, 2009). Feelings of jealousy, anger, guilt, and regret are often reported by both victims and those engaged in infidelity (Campbell & Wright, 2019; Hall & Fincham, 2009). Accordingly, relationship termination is a common outcome of infidelity. Allen and Atkins (2012) found that between 41-62% of men and 48-67% of women who engaged in EMS divorced or separated from their partner. Infidelity is also often cited as a reason for aggression and inter-partner violence (Flynn & Graham, 2010). Tsapelas et

al. (2010) found that 30% of Asian American men and women and 48% of Arab American women and 23% of Arab American men believe that violence against an unfaithful partner is justified. The emotional, relational, and even physical consequences for infidelity can be devastating, so what drives people to infidelity in spite of the consequences?

Motivations for infidelity. Despite attitudes toward marriage and monogamy being decidedly positive, the intense disapproval of infidelity, and the devastating consequences thereof, the prevalence of nonmonogamous behavior is markedly high, and upwards of 90% of husbands and wives believe their own infidelity was justified (Tsapelas et al., 2010). Almost all of the factors that correlate with infidelity can trace their roots to one or both of the following motivations: commitment level and/or presence of alternative partners. Interdependence theory, or the investment model, consider these two factors to predict the stability of a relationship. According to the theory, lower levels of relational commitment combined with an abundance of potential alternative relational partners results in an unstable relationship (Drigotas et al., 1999). For example, the previous section noted that those with higher incomes tend to be less dependent on their partner for security and tend to have jobs which afford them opportunities to travel, which increases availability alternative partners. Together this creates an increased likelihood of infidelity occurring. People may commit infidelity because have the opportunity to be with someone they perceive to be better than their current partner, or because they lack a commitment to monogamy.

There has also been evidence of biological and evolutionary predictors of infidelity. Although they do not measure infidelity exactly, Walum et al. (2008) found that men carrying one or more copies of the 334 allele showed fewer feelings of attachment to their spouse and scored significantly lower on the Partner Bonding Scale. The results also correlated with several

factors related with infidelity including lower martial satisfaction. Evolutionary scholars have noted that monogamy is a rare find among mammals with only 3% of all species forming life-long monogamous pair-bonds (Barash & Lipton, 2001). These scholars suggest that infidelity likely contributed to reproductive success of *Homo sapiens,* providing "unconscious biological payoffs for both males and females throughout prehistory, thus perpetuating the biological underpinnings and taste for infidelity in both sexes today" (Tsapelas et al., 2010, p. 187). It may be that evolution and biology essentially predispose humans to desire nonmonogamous behaviors.

In summary, research on infidelity has shown that infidelity in a marriage can have devastating consequences for all involved. It makes sense then that up to 97% of Americans believe infidelity is wrong. Despite these beliefs, infidelity commonly occurs within marriages. Some researchers have taken the perspective that biological circumstances and evolutionary motivations drive humans to engage in nonmonogamous behaviors. However, not all nonmonogamous behaviors are necessarily negative. Some couples who have acknowledged their inclination or desire for nonmonogamy have built relationship structures which allow for nonmonogamous behaviors. By establishing nontraditional relationship boundaries, rules, and roles all parties can engage in nonmonogamy consensually and successfully.

Consensual Nonmonogamy

Although research on nonmonogamous behaviors has largely focused *nonconsensual* nonmonogamy, infidelity is not the only way people engage in nonmonogamous behaviors. Nonconsensual nonmonogamy implies the existence of consensual nonmonogamy (CNM). In a consensually nonmonogamous relationship all partners consent to extra-dyadic romantic and/or sexual behavior with others (Conley et al., 2013). As noted in Chapter 1, CNM relationships are

common with over one-fifth of Americans having been involved with a CNM relationship during their lifetime (Haupert et al., 2017), and approximately 5.3% of individuals are currently in a CNM relationship (Rubin, 2014). The body of research on CNM relationships has revealed three primary CNM relationship structures: polyamory, swinging, and open relationships. The following paragraphs will discuss these relationship structures in more detail, address the stigmatization of CNM relationships, and discuss the need for research into the nuances of these relationships. But before explaining the three types, polygamy will be addressed.

Polygamy. Polygamy refers to being married to multiple people. There are three types of polygamy: the most popular being polygyny (one man with several wives), followed by group marriage (multiple husbands and wives), and polyandry (one woman with several husbands) (Zeitzen, 2008). When people think of relationships of multiple partners, they often think of polygamy due to its ties to religion, such as Mormonism, and television shows like *Sister Wives.* However, because polygamous relationships are not legally recognized in the United States, this review will focus only on informal nonmonogamous relationships.

Polyamory. Polyamory is the most well-researched CNM relationship structure. From the Greek (poly) and the Latin (amor), the term polyamory translates to "many loves." Polyamorous relationships are those in which individuals have multiple romantic and/or sexual relationships concurrently (Kleese, 2006). Although polyamorous relationships may or may not involve sexual nonmonogamy, they do involve emotional nonmonogamy. The defining feature of polyamorous relationships is the focus on companionship, romance, and love. Individuals who engage in polyamorous relationships believe that people have the capacity to love multiple people at the same time and encourages partners to not depend on one individual alone to meet their relational and physical needs (Kleese, 2006). Polyamory has been commonly referred to as

the "ethical" nonmonogamy by those in polyamorous relationships and in monogamous relationships. This is likely because those in polyamorous relationships have gone to great strides to normalize their relationship structure to the monogamous majority (Hardy & Easton, 2017; Kleese, 2006). To combat the stigma associated with nonmonogamy, polyamorous individuals often seek to distance themselves from other CNM relationship structures by emphasizing that they are not promiscuous, often disowning or chastising swinging or open relationships. Polyamorous relationships emphasize love and friendship and they legitimize themselves in the mononormative culture by being perceived as having multiple partners or spouses all of equal import (Hardy & Easton, 2017; Klesse, 2006; Labriola, 1999; Taormino, 2008). Therefore, of CNM relationships, polyamorous relationships are viewed the least negatively by outside observers (Matsick, Conley, Ziegler, Moors, & Rubin, 2014).

Research on polyamory and polyamorous relationships has primarily focused on these areas: defining polyamory and investigating polyamory as an identity or orientation. Defining polyamory has proven difficult as the lines between relationships and love and sex are often fuzzy (Richie & Barker, 2006). Many times, in research and in the public, the terms CNM, polyamorous, and open relationship are used interchangeably, adding to the confusion. Another point of debate in the community and among researchers is whether polyamory is something that you *are*, or if a polyamorous relationship is something that you *do*. In other words, is polyamory a sexual orientation? Some evidence for polyamory as an orientation come from the way participants speak about their experiences. Barker (2005) describes an "at first…, but then" phrasing, for example "at first, they couldn't help cheating, but then they realized there was an honest way of having multiple relationships" (p. 83). Participants often described always feeling

different or not being wired for monogamy. However, in her same study, Barker's (2005) participants also described polyamory as a behavior.

"Monogamish" and swinging relationships. "Monogamish" is a term coined by Savage (2012) referring to those relationships that outwardly appear monogamous, but whose boundary is semipermeable (e.g. ménage à trois, threesome). Swinging, also referred to as mate-swapping, is a type of "monogamish" relationship, in which couples engage in extra-dyadic sexual relations as a couple, often in a social context (i.e. at a club or party) (Zimmerman, 2012). Swinging tends to be viewed more negatively by outsiders than polyamory, but more positively than true open relationships (Matsick et al., 2014). This is because the commitment level of the dyad is perceived to be higher than in open relationships and the extra-dyadic sex is viewed as a sexual fantasy rather than a change in relationship roles/identities (McDonald, 2011). Swinging relationships tend to be perceived as being more promiscuous and more sexually driven than polyamorous relationships, leading to increased stigma toward them. Simultaneously, swinging relationships are considered more committed than open relationships because the traditional dyadic structure is preserved. However, nonmonogamous relationship styles may be beneficial for relationship maintenance in some couples, (e.g., "[i]f we hadn't been swinging, I think we would have gone our separate ways a long time ago" (Kimberly & Hans, 2017, p. 793)). Specifically, Kimberly and Hans' (2017) participants note that swinging had helped them to develop open communication, increased empathy, and trust for their partner and that this in turn had many benefits for the nonsexual aspects of their relationship.

Research on swinging relationships dates back to the 1970s, making it the longest researched CNM relationship structure. This research has generally focused on STI prevention/prevalence and partner jealousy. It suggests that swingers are more likely to have

been diagnosed with an STI than the general population (see Platteau, van Lankveld, Ooms, & Florence, 2017), however participants for these studies were recruited via STI clinics, so there is some chance that this may have affected the results. Swingers report that STI testing, partner notification, and condom use are norms within the swinging community (Spauwen, Niekamp, Hoebe, & Dukers-Muijrers, 2018).

Research has also focused on jealousy for couple who engage in swinging. These couples often experience jealousy, especially during the beginning of their swinging journey, but seek to manage their jealousy rather than eliminate it (de Visser & McDonald, 2007). Whereas polyamorous relationships welcome multiple romantic partners and opportunities to fall in love, jealousy in swinging relationships is often managed through the separation of emotional fidelity from sexual nonmonogamy (de Visser & McDonald, 2007). Swingers tend to view their sexual partners as "playmates," confining their role to bedroom play (McDonald, 2010). This protects the couple from perceived threats to their commitment. This is strategy is seen also, but not always, with open relationships.

Additionally, when compared to polyamorous and open relationships, swinging relationships have the lowest percentage of homosexual participants (2%, Houngbedji & Guillem, 2016). This may be because swinging relationships tend to reinforce traditional gender roles and heteronormativity in their relational dynamics (Vaillancourt & Few-Demo, 2014). In contrast, those in non-heterosexual relationships must build their relationship structure from scratch rather than relying on standard relationship scripts. Therefore, they can create their relationship roles, including freedoms and rules for monogamy or lack thereof (Heaphy, Donovan, & Weeks, 2004). Though over-represented in the swinging literature, heterosexual persons are woefully under-represented in polyamory and open relationship research. Open

relationships have a longstanding association with gay men because it was thought that open relationships were more common among gay men. For example, in 1983 Blumstein and Schwartz found that 65% of gay male couples had a CNM agreement. However, this trend has changed. More recent surveys have shown that the percentage of gay male CNM couples is closer to 32% (Haupert et al, 2017) with bisexual, lesbian, and heterosexual couples being almost equal (25-37%) (Haupert et al., 2017; Moors, Rubin, Matsick, Ziegler, & Conley, 2014).

Open relationships. Open relationships, sometimes called partnered nonmonogamy, like polyamorous and monogamish relationships, are those in which couples agree to engage in extra-dyadic sex. However, unlike monogamish relationships, individuals in open relationships may or may not engage in these nonmonogamous behaviors with the inclusion of the primary partner, may or may not establish relationship hierarchies (primary, secondary, tertiary, etc. partners), and may or may not emphasize a strict separation between love and sex (Conley & Moors, 2014). Furthermore, unlike polyamorous relationships, open relationships partners of partners (metamours) may or may not meet or date (Conley & Moors, 2014; Ritchie & Barker, 2006). This relationship type is the least researched CNM structure. Of the CNM relationship types, open relationships tend to be viewed most negatively by outsiders (Matsick et al., 2014). Although commitment levels in open relationships tent to be just as high as other CNM and monogamous couples, they are viewed as being the least committed, resulting in the most stigma (Matsick et al., 2014).

Research on open relationships has primarily focused on their prevalence and outsiders' attitudes toward them. As stated earlier, this research has shown that upwards of one-fifth of the population are in/have been in an open relationship (Haupert et al., 2017) and many more are open-minded or are willing to engage in a CNM relationship under the right circumstances

(Sizemore & Olmstead, 2018). Research on attitudes toward open relationships have consistently shown that they are viewed negatively, that monogamy is consistently viewed through a halo effect, and that this together serves to further heteronormativity and strengthen the false beliefs and stigma against open relationships (Conley et al., 2013).

Though expanding over the past decade, research into CNM relationships has been mostly limited to investigating attitudes and stigma (Balzarini, Shumlich, Kohut, & Campbell, 2018; Cohen & Wilson, 2017; Conley et al, 2013; Conley et al., 2017). Reseach idicates that although CNM relationships have become more salient in academic research and popular culture, they are still viewed negatively (especially heterosexual CNM relationships) (Conley et al., 2017). This negative attitude toward CNM persists despite studies showing that CNM relationships are as healthy and satisfactory as monogamous relationships (Conley et al., 2017; Conley, Piemonte, Gusakova, & Rubin, 2018; Moors et al., 2017; Muise, Laughton, Moors, & Impett, 2018). Individuals in CNM relationships also consistently report safer sex practices than both monogamous and NCNM couples (Moors et al., 2017).

In conclusion, CNM relationships and nonconsensual nonmonogamous (NCNM) behavior are stigmatized in western cultures. The experiences of stigma can have serious consequences for romantic relationships and for research (Doyle & Molix, 2014, 2015; Frost, 2011; Wigginton & Setchell, 2016). Sexual minorities often experience increased stress and risk for mental illness due to stigmatization and the consequences thereof (Hatzenbuehler, 2009; Meyer, 2003). Previous research on nonmonogamous behaviors have frequently conflated all nonmonogamous relationships as infidelity or left off consensual nonmonogamy entirely. This research focuses specifically on CNM relationships while excluding NCNM behavior because of their inherently different relationship structures and relationship outcomes. Plenty of knowledge

regarding NCNM exists, but there is still much more that needs to be discovered about CNM relationships.

Creating and Maintaining a CNM Relationship

Research on CNM relationships has primarily focused on their prevalence, others' attitudes toward them, and relationship satisfaction. We know that CNM relationships are common (Haupert et al., 2017), often viewed negatively (Conley et al., 2017), and are just as healthy and satisfying as monogamous relationships (Moors et al., 2017). But very little research has investigated the inner workings and nuances of CNM relationships. One recent study by Kimberly and Hans (2017), attempted to construct a model of monogamous couples' transition to swinging. Other research has primarily focused on the rulemaking process that tends to occur after the couple has decided to have a CNM relationship (Barker & Langridge, 2010; Finn, 2014; McLean, 2004). The following section will discuss Kimberly and Hans' (2017) model and elaborate on the purposes of common rulemaking practices.

CNM Model. Kimberly and Hans (2017) constructed of a model of the relationship transition from being monogamous to swinging using qualitative data collected from semi-structured interviews of 16 couples recruited from online communities. The model describes a three-stage process: Transition into Swinging, Experiences in the Lifestyle, and Maintaining Marital Satisfaction. All three stages are surrounded and influenced by sets of self-imposed rules. Transition into Swinging, the model's first stage, focuses on relationship processes that occur before the couple engages in any nonmonogamous behavior and includes two sections: "fantasies vocalized" and "self-esteem assessed." Fantasies vocalized reflects the initial conversations in which one or both partners introduce into the relationship the possibility of swinging. Self-esteem assessed is described as one or both partners assessing their insecurities and self-esteem

before agreeing to try the swinging lifestyle. This process is essential to transition into swinging without severe feelings of inadequacy and vulnerability.

The second section of the model, Experiences in the Lifestyle, describes two patterns: continued focus on sexual fantasies and "man screens, woman decides." The former describes experiences individuals have had with "other sexually variant" behaviors, such as exhibitionism/voyeurism, BDSM, and threesomes. The latter represents a consistent pattern where the male seeks out the potential swinging partners and the female accepts or rejects the proposal. This stage is highly focused on communicating about and acting out various sexual fantasies. It also showcases the reinforced heteronormativity noted in swinger couples by Vaillancourt and Few-Demo (2014) in which men maintain their role as the sexual initiator and women their role as the sexual gatekeeper.

The final section of their model, Maintaining Marital Satisfaction, states that couples maintain satisfaction via creating long-term friendships, increasing shared activities between partners, enhancing trust, creating open communication, and self-imposing rules. Several of the couples described maintaining long-term friendships with couples they swing with as well as swinging increasing the amount of quality time spouses spent together. Conley and Moors (2014) describe the tendency for monogamous couples to engage in dyadic withdrawal where both partners withdraw from their individual social networks in favor of engaging socially as a unit. This can lead to partners feeling suffocated. They suggest that CNM relationships allow for the expansion and re-individualization of social networks, thereby oxygenating the relationship.

Participants also described how swinging forced them to have more frequent and higher quality communication with their spouse and that swinging had caused them to trust their partner more than they had previously, this is again consistent with Conley and Moors' (2014) findings.

Finally, although described as part of the maintaining satisfaction stage, the model illustrates self-imposed rules as surrounding the entire swinging experience. The authors note several commonly established rules developed in CNM relationship. “No means no,” means that if any partner communicates a “no,” that boundary is to be respected. “Aggression not tolerated,” refers to blocking any potential sexual partners if they become aggressive or pushy. “Condom usage” emphasizes that condoms must be worn during certain or all sexual activity. “Emotional attachment shunned” emphasizes the strict separation between love and sex engagement of swingers. Finally, “privacy prioritized” emphasizes keeping their swinging lifestyle a secret from specific or all outsiders.

There are several problems with the Kimberly and Hans’ (2017) study, beginning with their definition of swinger couples, defined as “committed couples who consensually engage in extra-relational sex for recreational purposes” (p. 789). Their definition is too broad and does not reflect the social nature of swinger couples shown in many studies and definitions (Klesse, 2006; Labriola, 1999; Zimmerman, 2012) and through the responses from their own participants (consistent mentions of swinger clubs or conventions and doing things together with other couples). Their problematic definition renders their model non-generalizable to all open relationship types and their dismissal of swinger-polyamorous transitions renders their model incomplete. Their research also does not address what moves a couple through each stage, what separates stages, or how each stage is related to each other. They do not make predictions or draw correlations for what makes a successful transition into the swinging lifestyle or which experiences lead to marital satisfaction/dissatisfaction. The transition stage of their model merely includes vocalizing sexual fantasies and assessing self-esteem. These two concepts do not

sufficiently describe the couple's redefinition of roles and expectations for the relationship, nor does it explain the prominent rulemaking process that has been discussed in research.

Rulemaking processes. Various research and popular press publications have focused on the CNM couple's rulemaking processes, rather than on the overall transition to CNM (e.g., Hardy & Easton, 2017; McDonald, 2010; McLean, 2007; Taomino, 2008; etc.). Once the couple has decided to transition from being monogamous to becoming consensually nonmonogamous, the couple tends to engage in a rulemaking process. Many rules are made before any extra-dyadic sexual relations, some are made after, and others are adjusted or deleted based on experiences. Rules are made to combat areas of uncertainty or insecurity: ensuring commitment (limiting the non-sexual intimacy a partner can have outside of the primary relationship), maximizing trust (establishing an open and honest ongoing dialogue), and reducing jealousy (limiting types of sexual activities or gender of partner). Most rules are established to ensure relational stability of the primary couple, generally through the drawing of distinct lines between love and sex (Barker & Langridge, 2010; Finn, 2014; McLean, 2004). Some of these motivations can be seen in the self-imposed rules described by Kimberly and Hans (2017).

Self-help publications also describe strategies for opening a relationship that focus on the rulemaking process. In Hardy and Easton's 3rd edition of *The Ethical Slut* (2017) and Taormino's *Opening Up* (2008), the authors suggest sitting down and comparing notes about how individuals want their future to look and then constructing a list of rules for partners to follow. These rules reflect the same motivations described in research and noted above. These popular press publications' suggestions on rulemaking sessions may be helpful, but they do not capture the complex nature of truly opening a relationship. Kimberly and Hans' (2017) model attempts a more detailed understanding of the transition from being monogamous to swinging,

but still falls short on many fronts for capturing the nuances of the transition. It is likely that opening a relationship is much more than engaging recreational extra-dyadic sex since the sexual roles between partners is often tied to the very core of one's identity as a spouse. This study seeks to expand our understanding of the other types of processes involved in this transition.

Turning Points in Relationships

Transitioning to a CNM relationship could be described as a turning point. A turning point has been conceptualized as "any event or occurrence that is associated with change in a relationship" (Baxter & Bullis, 1986, p.470). Viewing a relationship through its turning points allows for a unique and detailed description of the relationship from those involved. Turning points have been studied in a variety of relationships in familial, professional, and romantic environments (e.g., Bangerter & Waldron, 2014; Barge & Musambira, 1992; Baxter & Pittman, 2001; Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009). Studying relational turning points highlights the importance of studying relationship change. "Relationships take shape in the interplay of conflicting and interconnected forces evident in the partners' behavioral patterns, motivational dynamics and contextual environments" (Montgomery, 1993).

Turning points offer a rich understanding of relationship progression that differs from traditional stage theories in several ways. Turning points are complex moments in relationships where the people involved may experience a significant change, increased uncertainty, metacommunication (communication about the relationship), and/or changes in commitment (Solomon, Weber, & Steuber, 2010). What constitutes a turning point is highly specific to each relationship, and even each person, while stage theories focus on broad generalizations for relationships. An event may cause significant change in one relationship whereas that same event may not cause change in another relationship. Some relationships may experience frequent

turning points while others remain relatively stable and unchanging. Also, turning points describe the events or situations that are meaningful to the couple. In turning points theory, the participant defines their turning points and the nature of their relationship whereas stage theories define the stages and participants are expected to determine where they fit (Solomon et al., 2010).

Turning points can be fraught with tension. Uncertainty can magnify this tension by preventing relationship talk. However, deep, meaningful discussion and positive tone can ease the tension felt during times of transition (Dailey, Rossetto, McCracken, Jin, & Green, 2012). Turning points in and of themselves are not inherently problematic. Becker et al. (2009) denote that turning points reflect a relationship's flexibility rather than fragility. When dyads agree on what their positive turning points were, spend time reminiscing with each other, and communicate these transitions to others, they are more likely to be satisfied and committed to the relationship (Baxter & Pittman, 2001; Braithwaite et al., 2018). Rather than the content of the turning point being the point of emphasis, it is how the couple handles the transition that determines their satisfaction.

For many, transitioning to a CNM relationship constitutes a significant relationship change, a turning point. Previous research on CNM relationship creation and rulemaking have just barely scratched the surface of understanding these nuanced and unique processes. Using a turning point perspective can evoke detailed description of the CNM transition process, gain rich understanding of how these changes are taking place, and identify the relationship factors lead to a successful transition.

Relational Turbulence Theory

Relational turbulence theory (RTT) was articulated by Solomon, Knobloch, Theiss, and McLaren (2016) as a formal theoretical follow up to the relational turbulence model developed by Solomon and Knobloch in 2001. Relational turbulence theory is a theory of turning points. This theory "focuses on transitions within close relationships as moments that make interpersonal communication relevant to relationship outcomes" (Solomon et al., 2010, p. 117). By looking at CNM relationship transitions through the lens of relational turbulence theory, greater insight on these transitions and the communication that creates them can be gleaned.

In the original model, relational turbulence refers to "a period of discontinuity between times of relative stability, during which individuals adapt to changing roles, identities, and circumstances" (p. 510). The model was designed to show how relationship factors of uncertainty (how certain they are of their feelings toward their partner and the future of the relationship) and partner influence (how much and how positively their partner is involved in their life) relate with the conversational elements of directness/indirectness (how forthright they or their partner are with their conversational goals and their feelings) and valence (positive/negative tone) during a relational turning point or transition. Furthermore, the model proposed that these variables would correlate with the couple's experience of relational turbulence.

The theoretical reformulation of the relational turbulence model addresses three theoretical advances. First, whereas the model addresses uncertainty and partner interference as parallel forces shaping perspectives of experience, the theory addresses the distinct process uncertainty and interference have on cognition and emotion. Second, the theory makes distinct the causal relationships among emotion, cognition, and communication. Finally, the theory

clarifies how specific experiences add up to form an overall relational perception of chaos and how this influences relational outcomes.

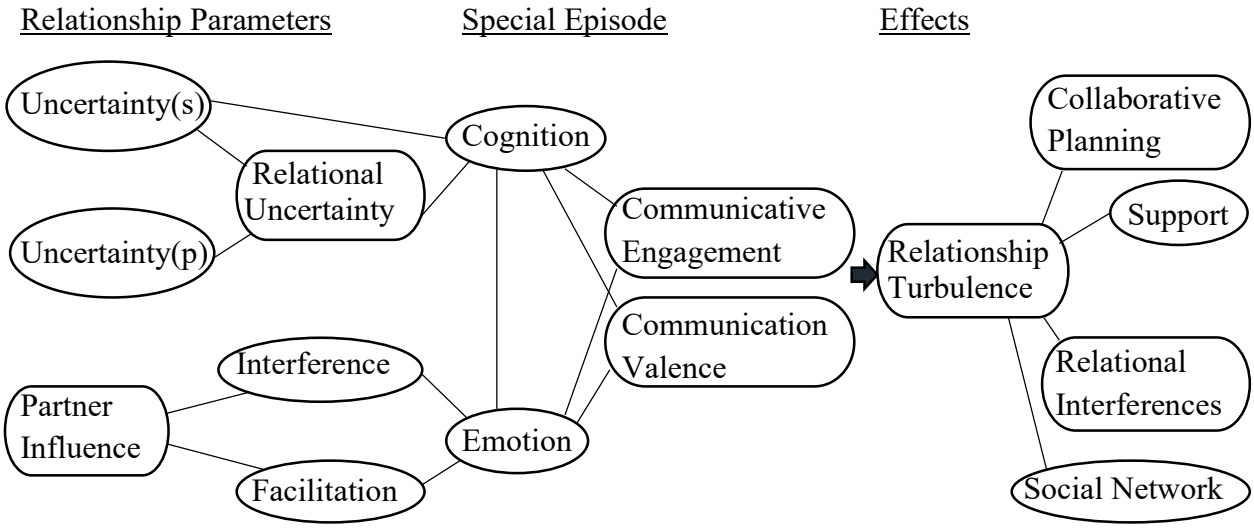
Uncertainty. The first relationship parameter of RTT is relationship uncertainty, that is the uncertainty of the status of the relationship. This is made up of self-uncertainty (uncertainty regarding one's place or commitment to the relationship) and partner uncertainty (uncertainty regarding the perception of one's partner's place or commitment to the relationship). Negative cognitive appraisals have also been shown to positively correlate with less integrative communication, less effective problem solving, and negatively correlate with complaint withholding (e.g., Miller & Bradbury, 1995; Solomon & Samp, 1998).

Partner Influence. The second parameter of RTT is interdependence, or partner influence, which is broken down into partner interference (the degree to which partners disrupt or make tasks more difficult) and partner facilitation (the degree to which partners assist in achieving goals or make tasks easier). Partner interference has also been shown to correlate with negative cognitive appraisals, intensified emotions, and polarized communication. Relational turbulence theory asserts that partner influence has a direct relationship to the intensity of emotions during the specific episode where interference correlates with negative emotions and facilitation correlates with positive emotions. Intensified negative emotions have been positively correlated with communication that is negatively valenced and the reverse has been shown for intensely positive emotions (Solomon et al., 2016, p. 518).

Relational Turbulence. The core of relational turbulence theory is, of course, relational turbulence, which is defined as "a global and persistent evaluation of the relationship as tumultuous, unsteady, fragile, and chaotic that arises from the accumulation of special episodes" (Solomon et al., 2016, p. 518). Relational turbulence is an outcome of special episodes when

those episodes are characterized by negative cognitive bias, intense emotions, and polarizing communication. Relational turbulence is especially present in relationships that have a history of accumulating negative special episodes (Solomon et al., 2016). Couples experiencing relational turbulence may experience difficulty planning collaboratively.

Figure 1: Model of Relational Turbulence Theory



Relational Turbulence and CNM Relationship Transitions

The transition from a monogamous to nonmonogamous relationship is a representation of the types of transitions (those which lead to a redefinition of roles, identities, and circumstances) presented in RTT that can cause relational turbulence. From the previous research on rulemaking, rules are decided upon with the intention of reducing or preventing relational uncertainty. RTT can further elaborate this process. With the inclusion of partner influence, RTT can be used to explain and predict couples' communication behaviors during the turbulent transition. RTT variables and their connection to better understanding CNM relationship transitions is described below.

Uncertainty. During transitions, the uncertainty partners feel about their place in and the future of their relationship can be amplified. High levels of uncertainty have been correlated with

less direct and more negatively valenced communication. Therefore, this theory suggests that monogamous couples who are attempting the transition to nonmonogamy will likely experience less communicative engagement and more negative communication valence if they are experiencing elevated self- and/or relationship uncertainty. This leads to the following hypotheses about partner uncertainty.

H1: (a) Self-uncertainty will be positively correlated with the initiating partner's use of more indirect communication. (b) Relationship uncertainty will be positively correlated with the initiating partner's use of more indirect communication.

H2: (a) Self-uncertainty will be positively correlated with the receiving partner's perception of the initiating partner's use of more indirect communication. (b) Relationship uncertainty will be positively correlated with the receiving partner's perception of the initiating partner's use of more indirect communication.

H3: (a) Self-uncertainty will be negatively correlated with the initiating partner's conversation valence. (b) Relationship uncertainty will be negatively correlated with the initiating partner's conversation valence.

H4: (a) Self-uncertainty will be negatively correlated with the receiving partner's perception of the initiating partner's conversation valence. (b) Relationship uncertainty will be negatively correlated with the receiving partner's perception of the initiating partner's conversation valence.

Partner Influence. During transitions, partner influence can have varying impact on communicative engagement and valence dependent on the intensity and nature of that influence. Relationships marked by partner interference may respond to transition with less direct and more negatively valenced communication, whereas the opposite may be true for relationships with

high partner facilitation (cite). Accordingly, monogamous couples who are attempting to become nonmonogamous will likely experience communication that is more negatively valenced if their partner engages in interference behaviors. In contrast, when partners engage in more facilitation behaviors their communication should be more positively valenced. This leads to the following hypotheses about partner influence.

H5: (a) Partner interference will be positively correlated with the initiating partner's use of more indirect communication. (b) Partner facilitation will be negatively correlated with the initiating partner's use of more indirect communication.

H6: (a) Partner interference will be positively correlated with the receiving partner's perception of the initiating partner's use of more indirect communication. (b) Partner facilitation will be negatively correlated with the receiving partner's perception of the initiating partner's use of more indirect communication.

H7: (a) Partner interference will be negatively correlated with the initiating partner's conversation valence. (b) Partner facilitation will be positively correlated with the initiating partner's conversation valence.

H8: (a) Partner interference will be negatively correlated with the receiving partner's perception of the initiating partner's conversation valence. (b) Partner facilitation will be positively correlated with the receiving partner's perception of the initiating partner's conversation valence.

Relational Turbulence. Relational turbulence may be felt throughout the relationship as a result of the partners' handling of the transition. If the initial conversations a transitioning couple has are characterized by indirect/avoidant communicative engagement or negative

communication valence, that couple should experience heightened relational turbulence. This leads to the following hypothesis about relational turbulence.

H9: (a) Indirect communication will be positively correlated with relational turbulence. (b) Conversation valence will be negatively correlated with relational turbulence.

Conversation Satisfaction. Relational turbulence theory connects relational turbulence to satisfaction in that relationships affected by relational turbulence may become unsatisfactory over time. Therefore, the same pattern between communicative engagement and communication valence should be present. If the initial conversations a transitioning couple has are characterized by indirect/avoidant communicative engagement and negative communication valence that couple should experience decreased conversation satisfaction. Furthermore, relational turbulence should also be negatively correlated with conversation satisfaction. This leads to the following hypotheses about conversation satisfaction.

H10: (a) Indirect communication will be negatively correlated with conversation satisfaction. (b) Conversation valence will be positively correlated with conversation satisfaction.

H11: Relational turbulence will be associated with conversation satisfaction.

Relational turbulence theory provides an excellent foundation for understanding the relationship factors and conversational elements that make for a successful transition from a monogamous to nonmonogamous relationship. Until now, research on the inner workings of CNM relationships has scarcely focused on anything other than rulemaking practices. This research will show how the relationship qualities of uncertainty and partner influence have an impact on the relational turning point of monogamy to nonmonogamy. Furthermore, it will show the impact of this experience on individual's feelings of turbulence and satisfaction within the

relationship. Additionally, this study will add to the growing body of empirical knowledge for both consensually nonmonogamous relationships and relational turbulence theory.

CHAPTER III

Participants

Participants for this study included 210 individuals who were at least 18 years of age and self-identified as being in or having been in a romantic and sexual relationship which began monogamously but transitioned to be consensually nonmonogamous (CNM). Participants were recruited via snowball sampling through recruitment posts on social media. The author contacted the moderators of relevant social media groups and forums on Facebook and Reddit. In each message to the moderators, the author explained the purpose of the study, participant requirements, and asked permission to post the call to the group or forum. There were no responses from one subreddit and permissions were not granted from one subreddit and one Facebook group. Permissions were received and recruitment posts were posted on the Facebook group Polyamory Discussion, and on the SubReddits r/SampleSize, r/Polyamory, r/Swingers, and r/BDSMAdvice. The call was reposted to each group and forum every two-five days throughout the duration of the recruitment period (approximately 7 weeks). Additionally, fliers were posted with permission at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and Roasted Coffee Shop. Information regarding this study along with a link to the Qualtrics survey was also included on the author's Tinder profile.

Participant Demographics. Ages of participants ranged from 18 to 70 (M = 34.45, SD = 10). The majority of the participants identified as cisgender women or men (45.2% and 41.4% respectively), 11% of participants identified as non-cisgender including female-to-male and male-to-female transgender, nonbinary, agender, genderqueer, and questioning. Most of the participants identified as bi/pansexual or heterosexual (40% and 38.6% respectively), 18.7% used alternative descriptions such as bi-curious, queer, heteroflexible, gynesexual, demisexual,

homosexual, asexual, and questioning. The majority of the sample identified as White/Caucasian (83%). Other races/ethnicities were present were mixed, Asian, Latinx/Hispanic, Black, and Indian. Finally, participants were asked if they or their partner initiated the transition to consensual nonmonogamy. In this sample, 60.5% of participants were the initiating partner. Additional participant demographic details are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Participants	*n* (% of total)	Participants	*n* (% of total)
Gender		Sexual Orientation	
Woman/Female	95 (45.2%)	Bi/Pansexual	84 (40%)
Man/Male	87 (41.4%)	Heterosexual	81 (38.6%)
Nonbinary	12 (5.7%)	Bi-curious	9 (4.3%)
Female-to-Male Transgender	4 (1.9%)	Queer	8 (3.8%)
Agender	3 (1.4%)	Heteroflexible	6 (2.8%)
Genderqueer	2 (1%)	Gynesexual	5 (2.5%)
Male-to-Female Transgender	1 (0.5%)	Demisexual	4 (1.9%)
Questioning	1 (0.5%)	Homosexual	3 (1.4%)
Declined to Answer	5 (2.4%)	Asexual	2 (1%)
Race/Ethnicity		Questioning	2 (1%)
White/Caucasian	174 (83%)	Declined to Answer	6 (2.7%)
Mixed	10 (4.8%)		
Asian	7 (3%)	Initiated the Transition	127 (60.5%)
Latinx/Hispanic	6 (2.8%)		
Black	2 (1%)	Did Not Initiate the	
Indian	2 (1%)	Transition	83 (39.5%)
Other	5 (2.5%)		
Declined to Answer	4 (1.9%)		

Procedures and Measures

Participants who perceived that they met the study requirements followed the Qualtrics survey link included in the call. The first screen of the survey included the informed consent form. This form outlines participant requirements and rights, known risks and benefits to the participants, and whom they could contact for more information. Participants who agreed to participate were taken to the full questionnaire. Participants could choose to exit the survey at any time.

The independent variables used in this study were self- and relationship uncertainty, partner influence, initiator directness, and initiator valence. The dependent variables in this study were initiator directness, initiator valence, conversational satisfaction, and relational turbulence. These variables were measured using the following instruments: the Relational Uncertainty Scale, Partner's Interference and Partner's Facilitation scales, an adapted version of the Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory, and a scale developed specifically for use in this study to measure initiator directness, communication valence, and relational turbulence. The full questionnaire included 81 items and took approximately 10-60 minutes to complete, with the majority of participants (84.39%) finishing in less than 30 minutes.

Self- and Relational Uncertainty were measured with the Self- and Relational Uncertainty Scales (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999), two 16-item measures that ask participants to rate their feelings of uncertainty in their relationship. Examples of items include "how committed you were to the relationship," "how much you wanted this relationship to last," and "your goals for the future of this relationship." Responses were measured using a six-point Likert-type scale ranging from *completely uncertain* (1) to *completely certain* (6). An exploratory factor analysis with principle axis extraction and promax rotation was performed on the measure to assess its dimensionality. Analyses produced a single-factor solution accounting for 64.1% of the variance (eigenvalue = 3.85) and consisting of 6 total items for self-uncertainty. A single-factor solution accounting for 66.5% of the variance (eigenvalue = 7.31) and consisting of 11 total items was produced for relationship uncertainty. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for the present study was .91 (M = 1.40, SD = .68) for self-uncertainty and .96 (M = 1.73, SD = .90) for relational uncertainty. This measure can be found in Appendix A.

Partner Interference and Partner Facilitation were measured with the Partner's Interference and Partner's Facilitation scales (Knobloch & Solomon, 2003). The Partner's Interference scale is a seven-item measure used to assess a partner's capacity to interfere with their individual outcomes. Examples include "my partner interfered with plans I would make" and "my partner disrupted my daily routine." The Partner's Facilitation scale is a five-item measure used to assess a partner's capacity to promote their individual outcomes. Examples include "my partner made it easier for me to schedule my activities" and "my partner helped me achieve everyday goals I set for myself." For both measures, participants reported their agreement with statements that offered possible descriptions of themselves or their partner. Responses for each were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). An exploratory factor analysis with principle axis extraction and promax rotation was performed on the measure to assess its dimensionality. Analyses produced a single-factor solution accounting for 59.4% of the variance (eigenvalue = 4.16) and consisting of 7 items for partner interference. A single-factor solution accounting for 55.6% of the variance (eigenvalue = 2.78) and consisting of 5 items was produced for partner facilitation. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for the present study were .91 (M = 2.41, SD = 1.31) for partner interference and .86 (M = 5.48, SD = 1.17) for partner facilitation. This measure can be found in Appendix B.

Conversational Satisfaction was measured with nine items from the Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory (Hecht, 1978), a measure that assessed how satisfied partners are with a particular interaction. The original measure was designed for evaluating conversation between strangers, therefore items that implied nonacquaintance, such as "the other person wanted to get to know me," we removed. Furthermore, some additional items were

removed following an exploratory factor analysis. The nine remaining items included: “My partner let me know I was communicating effectively,” “I felt like I was able to present myself as I wanted my partner to view me,” “My partner showed me that they understood what I said,” “I was very satisfied with this conversation,” “My partner expressed a lot of interest in what I had to say,” “I did not enjoy the conversation,” “I felt like I could talk about anything with my partner,” “We each got to say what we wanted,” and “The conversation flowed smoothly.” Responses were measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). An exploratory factor analysis with principle axis extraction and promax rotation was performed on the measure to assess its dimensionality. Results revealed a single-factor solution accounting for 67.8% of the variance (eigenvalue = 6.10) and consisting of 9 items. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for the present study was .95 (M = 5.51, SD = 1.40). This measure can be found in Appendix C.

Initiator Directness, the degree to which the initiating partner speaks plainly and directly about their desire for a nonmonogamous relationship was measured from both the initiating partner’s and the receiving partner’s perspectives, henceforth termed self-directness and partner-directness respectively. There is currently no established scale for measuring conversational directness, therefore measures were created for this study. Five items for self-directness and five items for partner-directness were created. However, following an exploratory factor analysis, five items were removed leaving three items measuring self-directness and two measuring partner-directness. Self-directness was assessed using three items: “I said directly that I wanted a nonmonogamous relationship,” “I was unclear about what exactly I wanted,” and “I said that we should move toward being nonmonogamous.” Partner-directness was assessed using two items: “My partner said directly that they wanted a nonmonogamous relationship” and “My partner said

that we should move toward nonmonogamy." Responses were measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). An exploratory factor analysis with principle axis extraction and promax rotation was performed on the measure to assess its dimensionality. Analyses revealed a single-factor solution accounting for 40.9% of the variance (eigenvalue = 1.23) and consisting of 3 items for self-indirectness. A single-factor solution accounting for 66.7% of the variance (eigenvalue = 1.33) and consisting of 2 items was produced for partner-indirectness. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for the measures in the present study were .60 (M = 3.36, SD = 1.40) for self-directness and .79 (M = 3.64, SD = 1.77) for partner-directness. This measure can be found in Appendix D.

Initiator Valence, the degree to which the initiating partner speaks positively or negatively was measured from both the initiating partner's and receiving partner's perspectives, henceforth termed self-valence and partner-valence respectively. The self-valence and partner-valence scales were inspired by similar scales by Wheeless (1978) and Afifi and Metts (1998). There scales were not appropriate for use in this study due to differing goals in their development. Wheeless (1978) and Afifi and Metts (1998) both focus on valence regarding behavior and response, whereas the current study is concerned with the valence of the words themselves. For example, Afifi and Metts' (1998) scale included items such as this… "…was a very positive/negative behavior" and "…was a behavior I did not like at all." Using these two sources as a reference, ten items (five for self-valence and five for partner-valence) were crafted. However, following an exploratory factor analysis two items were removed from the self-valence measure. Self-valence was assessed using the following three items: "I approached the conversation with a positive tone," "I focused more on my own feelings and wants," and "I approached the conversation with a negative tone." Partner-valence was assessed using five

items: “My partner approached the conversation with a positive tone,” “My partner was considerate of my feelings and wants,” “My partner focused on their own feelings and wants,” “My partner focused on what was wrong with our relationship,” and “My partner approached the conversation with a negative tone.” Responses were measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). An exploratory factor analysis with principle axis extraction and promax rotation was performed on the measure to assess its dimensionality. Analyses revealed a single-factor solution accounting for 53.2% of the variance (eigenvalue = 1.60) and consisting of 3 items for self-valence. A single-factor solution accounting for 50.7% of the variance (eigenvalue = 2.54) and consisting of 5 items was produced for partner-valence. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for the present study was .72 (M = 5.52, SD = 1.20) for self-valence and .83 (M = 5.45, SD = 1.31) for partner-valence. This measure can be found in Appendix D.

Relational Turbulence, the degree to which the relationship is perceived as unsteady or fragile was assessed using four items: “I felt the relationship was unstable,” “I felt uncertain about the future of the relationship,” “I felt uncertain about my partner’s feelings for me,” and “I felt the relationship had completely changed.” These items were created for this study as there is no standard measure for relational turbulence. These items were crafted from the outcomes of relational turbulence described by Solomon et al. (2016). Responses were measured using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). An exploratory factor analysis with principle axis extraction and promax rotation was performed on the measure to assess its dimensionality. Analyses revealed a single-factor solution accounting for 55.4% of the variance (eigenvalue = 2.22) and consisting of 4 items. The Cronbach alpha

reliability coefficient for the present study was .89 (M = 2.72, SD = 1.79). This measure can be found in Appendix D.

CHAPTER IV

The first hypothesis predicted that self- and relationship uncertainty would be significantly and positively correlated with the initiating partner's use of more indirect communication (self-indirectness). The results of a Pearson Correlation revealed no support for the hypothesis as self- and relationship uncertainty were not related to the initiating partner's perceptions of their own indirect communication (r = -.02, p = .86). The results of a multiple regression revealed an insignificant model that accounted for .3% of the variance in indirectness (F (2, 101) = .15, p = < .86). A closer examination of the beta weights revealed that self-uncertainty (β = -.08) and relationship uncertainty (β = .05) were not significant predictors of self-indirectness. As a result, the first hypothesis was not supported.

The second hypothesis predicted that self- and relationship uncertainty would be significantly and positively correlated with the receiving partner's perception of the initiating partner's indirectness (partner-indirectness). The results of a Pearson Correlation revealed no support for the hypothesis as self- and relationship uncertainty were not related to the receiving partner's perception of the initiating partner's indirectness (r = -.01, p = .49). The results of a multiple regression revealed an insignificant model that accounted for 2.4% of the variance in indirectness (F (2, 59) = .73, p = .49). A closer examination of the beta weights revealed that self-uncertainty (β = .18) and relationship uncertainty (β = -.19) were not significant predictors of partner-indirectness. As a result, the second hypothesis was not supported.

The third hypothesis predicted that self- and relationship uncertainty would be significantly and negatively correlated with the initiating partner's valence (self-valence). The results of a Pearson Correlation revealed partial support for the hypothesis as relationship uncertainty (r = .09, p < .005), but not self-uncertainty (r = .09, p = .37), was negatively related

to self-valence. The results of a multiple regression revealed a significant model that accounted for 10.2% of the variance in valence (F (2, 101) = 5.75, p < .004). A closer examination of the beta weights revealed that relationship uncertainty (β = -.40), but not self-uncertainty (β = .13), was a significant predictor of self-valence. The third hypothesis was partially supported.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that self- and relationship uncertainty would be significantly and negatively correlated with the receiving partner's perception of the initiating partner's valence (partner-valence). The results of a Pearson Correlation revealed support for the hypothesis as self- and relationship uncertainty were negatively related to partner-valence (r = .25, p < .001). The results of a multiple regression revealed a significant model that accounted for 27.1% of the variance in partner-valence (F (2, 57) = 10.60, p < .001). A closer examination of the beta weights revealed that relationship uncertainty (β = -.70) and self-uncertainty (β = .35) were significant predictors of partner-valence. Hence, the fourth hypothesis was partially supported.

The fifth hypothesis predicted that partner interference would be significantly and positively correlated while partner facilitation would be significantly and negatively correlated with self-indirectness. The results of a Pearson Correlation revealed no support for the hypothesis as partner interference and partner facilitation were not related to self-indirectness (r = -.01, p = .52). The results of a multiple regression revealed an insignificant model that accounted for 1.3% of the variance in self-indirectness (F (2, 103) = .66, p = .52). A closer examination of the beta weights revealed that partner interference (β = -.13) and partner facilitation (β = -.03) were not significant predictors of self-indirectness. The fifth hypothesis was not supported.

The sixth hypothesis predicted that partner interference would be significantly and positively correlated, while partner facilitation would be significantly and negatively correlated with partner-indirectness. The results of a Pearson Correlation revealed no support for the hypothesis as partner interference and partner facilitation were not related to partner-indirectness (r = -.02, p = .64). The results of a multiple regression revealed an insignificant model that accounted for 1.5% of the variance in partner-indirectness (F (2, 59) = .45, p = .64). A closer examination of the beta weights revealed at partner interference (β = .04) and facilitation (β = .15) were not significant predictors of partner-indirectness. As a result, the sixth hypothesis was not supported.

The seventh hypothesis predicted that partner interference would be significantly and negatively correlated, while partner facilitation would be significantly and positively correlated with self-valence. The results of a Pearson Correlation revealed support for the hypothesis as partner interference and facilitation were related to self-valence (r = .07, p < .01). Results of a multiple regression revealed a significant model that accounted for 9.1% of the variance in self-valence (F (2, 103) = 5.18, p < .01). A closer examination of the beta weights revealed that partner facilitation (β = .34), but not partner interference (β = .06) was a significant predictor of self-valence. As a result, the seventh hypothesis was partially supported.

The eighth hypothesis predicted that partner interference would be significantly and negatively correlated, while partner facilitation would be significantly and positively associated with partner-valence. The results of a Pearson Correlation revealed support for the hypothesis as partner interference and facilitation are related to partner-valence (r = .28, p < .001). The results of a multiple regression revealed a significant model that accounted for 30.6% of the variance in partner-valence (F (2, 57) = 12.55, p < .001). A closer examination of the beta weights revealed

that partner interference (β = -.49), but not partner facilitation (β = .08), was a significant predictor of partner-valence. As a result, the eighth hypothesis was partially supported.

The ninth hypothesis predicted that indirectness would be significantly and positively correlated, while valence would be significantly and negatively correlated with relational turbulence. Results of a Pearson Correlation revealed support for the hypothesis as indirectness and valence were related to relational turbulence (r = .30, p < .001). Results of a multiple regression revealed a significant model that accounted for 31.9% of the variance in relational turbulence (F (4, 164) = 19.19, p < .001). A closer examination of the beta weights revealed that self-valence (β = -.34) and partner-valence (β = -.42), but not self-indirectness (β = -.07) nor partner-indirectness (β = -.11) were significant predictors of relational turbulence. As a result, the ninth hypothesis was partially supported.

The tenth hypothesis predicted that indirectness would be significantly and negatively correlated, while valence would be significantly and positively correlated with conversation satisfaction. The results of a Pearson Correlation revealed support for the hypothesis as indirectness and valence were related to conversation satisfaction (r = .46, p < .001). The results of a multiple regression revealed a significant model that accounted for 47.6% of the variance in conversation satisfaction (F (4, 164) = 37.28, p < .001). A closer examination of the beta weights revealed that self-valence (β = .37) and partner-valence (β = .58), but not self-indirectness (β = -.03) nor partner-indirectness (β = -.02) were significant predictors of conversation satisfaction. As a result, the tenth hypothesis was partially supported.

Finally, the eleventh hypothesis predicted that relational turbulence would be associated with conversation satisfaction. Results of a Pearson Correlation revealed support for the

hypothesis as relational turbulence was related to conversation satisfaction (r = -.66, p < .001). The eleventh hypothesis was supported.

CHAPTER V

The purpose of this study was to examine how relationship and conversational qualities impact a monogamous couple's transition to consensual nonmonogamy. Relational turbulence theory provided the theoretical framework for exploring how dynamics of the monogamous relationship and the conversational qualities predict turbulence. This study was one of the first to focus on the interdependent relationships between relationship and conversational qualities and relational turbulence. Generally, the results indicate that relationship qualities influence conversational qualities, and that, subsequently, conversational qualities influence relational turbulence. However, self- and partner-indirectness were not found to be significant predictors of relational turbulence. Overall, the results of this study suggest that the qualities of the relationship may be more important to the outcome than the characteristics and content of the conversations themselves. In other words, relationships with a strong initial foundation are more likely to complete the transition to consensual nonmonogamy in a satisfactory manner and with little relational turbulence. The results of this study extend relational turbulence theory and provide insight into the qualities that may contribute to turbulence during the transition to consensual nonmonogamy.

This study was based upon eleven hypotheses generated from the variables of relational turbulence theory. Hypotheses one and two stated that relationship and self-uncertainty would have a direct and negative correlation with self- and partner-directness. Hypotheses three and four stated that relationship and self-uncertainty would have a direct and negative correlation with self- and partner-valence. Hypotheses five and six stated that partner facilitation and partner interference would have direct and positive and negative correlations respectively with self- and partner-directness. Hypotheses seven and eight stated that partner facilitation and partner

interference would have direct and positive and negative correlations respectively with self- and partner-valence. Hypotheses nine and ten stated that self- and partner-directness and self- and partner-valence would have direct negative correlations with relational turbulence and direct positive correlations with conversational satisfaction. Finally, hypothesis eleven stated that relational turbulence and conversational satisfaction would be correlated.

Three variables significant predictors in this study: relationship uncertainty, partner influence, and valence. Hypotheses three and four were concerned with self- and relational-uncertainty and their influence on self- and partner-valence. Relationship uncertainty was shown to be a significant predictor of self- and partner-valence, the same was not true for self-uncertainty. These results suggest that when individuals are feeling uncertain of the stability and trajectory of their relationship, they are more likely to initiate and perceive their partner's initiation of the transition to consensual nonmonogamy negatively. This is consistent with previous research that has identified relationship uncertainty as more likely than self-uncertainty to influence biased interpretations of a partner's actions (McLaren, Solomon, & Priem, 2011; Priem & Solomon, 2011).

Self-uncertainty, however, did show a significant and positive association with partner-valence. This means that when individuals feel uncertain of themselves and their role in the relationship, they are more likely to initiate and perceive their partner's initiation of the transition to consensual nonmonogamy positively. This result was unexpected and seems counterintuitive. Sometimes self-uncertainty can show as having the opposite effect of relationship uncertainty, this unique effect of self-uncertainty has been previously observed (e.g., Priem & Solomon, 2011). Perhaps when participants feel a high degree of self-uncertainty, they are more likely to doubt their interpretation of the conversation because they are feeling highly uncertain of

themselves. This result could be explained by participants giving themselves or their partners the benefit of the doubt in a situation where they feel they are unsure of themselves.

Hypotheses seven and eight were concerned with the influence of partner facilitation and interference on self- and partner-valence. Results revealed that partner facilitation was a significant predictor of self-valence, and that partner interference was a significant predictor of partner-valence. That is, if a partner is perceived as a positive influence on the participant's life, the participants were more likely to engage (self-valence) in the conversation with positive valence. Conversely, if a partner is perceived as a negative influence on the participant's life, the participants were more likely to perceive their partner (partner-valence) as engaging in the conversation with negative valence.

These results are also consistent with previous research on partner interference (Solomon & Theiss, 2011). Relational turbulence theory predicts that patterns of partner influence intensify emotional responses to specific episodes, and that partner interference may exert stronger influence than partner facilitation (Solomon et al., 2016). These results suggest that if the initiating partner perceives that their partner helps them in their daily lives, they are more likely to initiate the transition to consensual nonmonogamy positively. Whereas, if the receiving partner perceives that the initiating partner interferes with their daily life and goals, they are more likely to perceive the initiating partner's attempt to transition to consensual nonmonogamy negatively.

Finally, hypotheses nine and ten were concerned with valence and directness' relationship to relational turbulence and conversation satisfaction. Self- and partner-valence were found to be significant predictors of relational turbulence and conversation satisfaction. When participants perceived themselves and their partner as engaging in the conversation positively,

they were less likely to experience relational turbulence and more likely to be satisfied with the conversation. This finding is not surprising as it is also consistent with the predictions made by relational turbulence theory (Solomon et al., 2016). Relational turbulence and conversation satisfaction were negatively correlated as well. These results indicate that relational turbulence and conversation satisfaction are direct results of valence. That is, that if the initiating partner communicates positively when initiating the transition to nonmonogamous the participants are less likely to experience relational turbulence and are more likely to be satisfied with the conversation.

It is meaningful to note that directness/indirectness did not prove to be a significant quality in the present study. We hypothesized that relationship and self-uncertainty and partner interference would be negatively correlated with self- and partner-directness, and that partner facilitation would be positively correlated with self- and partner-directness. Specifically, as participants felt more uncertain about themselves and their relationship, they engaged in less direct communication. Also, partners who were helpful inspired direct communication, whereas partners who were perceived as a hinderance were also perceived as communicating less directly. Furthermore, we predicted that self- and partner-directness would be negatively correlated with relational turbulence and positively correlated with conversational satisfaction. However, neither self- nor partner-directness were shown to be significant predictors of relational turbulence or conversational satisfaction. These results are contrary to previous research which formed the basis for relational turbulence theory (Theiss & Estlein, 2014; Theiss & Nagy, 2013). This study attempted to measure this variable with a quantitative measure designed specifically for this study. As noted in Chapter 3, the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for this measure were low (.60 for self-directness and .79 for partner-directness). This may be because the items were

confusing or misinterpreted by participants, there were not enough items to effectively measure directness, or directness is not a concept easily recalled by participants. Therefore, these results do not necessarily discredit the predictions made by the theory. These results suggest the need for improvement to a measure of conversational directness.

Implications

The transition monogamous couples face when they decide to become consensually nonmonogamous is an important and sensitive time in the life of a relationship (Baker & Langridge, 2010). Several previous works have called for unique approaches to researching this topic that go beyond rulemaking processes (e.g., Hardy & Easton, 2017; McDonald, 2010; McLean, 2007; Taomino, 2008). This study revealed how relationship and conversational qualities are implicated in the CNM transition experience and expanded the literature for both CNM relationships and relational turbulence theory.

This research suggests that relationship uncertainty and partner influence may be relevant issues for monogamous couples transitioning to consensual nonmonogamy. Findings also suggest that experiences of relational turbulence and the consequences thereof may be mitigated by reducing relationship uncertainty and initiating key conversations with positivity. As couples deconstruct societal norms of monogamy, individuals are likely to develop questions of themselves and the relationship. Furthermore, as partners begin to integrate nonmonogamous behaviors into their relationship there will likely be continued conversation about nonmonogamy and their relationship throughout the entire transitional period. Applying relational turbulence theory in this context may help couples who are transitioning to consensual nonmonogamy prepare for these and other changes by highlighting the potential for the influence of relationship uncertainty and partner influence during this transition.

These findings indicate that to successfully transition from a monogamous relationship to a CNM relationship, the couple must first have built a strong foundation. The move to consensual nonmonogamy should not be suggested or implemented with the express goal of fixing existing relationship problems. Uncertainty and partner interference are likely to be amplified during the transition. Instead, couples should focus on establishing a satisfying and stable relationship before attempting to engage in the complex process of becoming consensually nonmonogamous.

These findings about the how relational and conversational factors influence the transition to a CNM relationship help advance the fields of sexuality and relationship research, including sex and marital therapy, by providing researchers and clinicians with insight on how these relationships are created and how these crucial moments in the relationship affect the relationship as a whole. Previous research on creating CNM relationships has focused almost entirely on rulemaking processes (Barker & Langridge, 2010; Finn, 2014; Hardy & Easton, 2017; McDonald, 2010; McLean, 2007; Taomino, 2008). However, the present study shows that much of what impacts these transitions lies in the qualities of the relationship and conversations rather than or in addition to the content of those conversations. This suggests that couples who have high quality relationships going into the conversation are more likely to use relationship focused and positive language leading to outcomes of low relational turbulence and high conversational satisfaction. Thus, the present study provides a basis for practitioners to consider these factors when working with clients who may be pursuing or interested in pursuing a CNM relationship with their partner.

This study has theoretical and methodological strengths. Theoretically, this study extends relational turbulence theory by applying it to a unique and understudied relationship transition.

It also used quantitative measures of directness and turbulence. By creating and honing reliable survey measures, these variables can be easily studied in larger samples and more easily generalized. Methodologically, this study is important because it focuses on monogamous dyads that are negotiating the transition to consensual nonmonogamy, which is an improvement over much of the literature on this experience that focuses on rulemaking processes. This study also used an open-answer technique for gathering demographic data. This method allowed participants to define their own identities contributing to the diversity among participants.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although this study makes several contributions to the literature on creating CNM relationships, several limitations are noted here. First, this research looked at only one specific way a CNM relationship might develop, namely, an established monogamous couple decides to incorporate consensual nonmonogamy into their existing relationship. Consensual nonmonogamy is an umbrella term that encompasses many relationship types including polyamorous, swinger, and open relationships. Many relationships begin as a CNM relationship and thus do not have a transition period. As such, it is noted that this study did not examine how these other forms of CNM relationships are created and negotiated. This is an important limitation and future studies should consider additional relationship starting points or trajectories.

Second, this study focused exclusively on monogamous couples who had successfully transitioned to consensual nonmonogamy. It is possible that the relationship qualities and experiences of couples who, following an initial conversation, chose to remain monogamous or terminate the relationship may be fundamentally different. This research did not consider those experiences and is a limitation. Future research should investigate the relational difference

between couples who transitioned to consensual nonmonogamy successfully and those who did not.

Third, although the type of CNM transition this study was looking for was described to the participants, it is unclear as to whether all participants read this and continued to the study because they had the noted CNM transition. It may be that some respondents proceeded to answer questions under the false assumption that this study was intended for all persons in a CNM relationship. This is potentially problematic as it is not yet known how those that transition from monogamous to CNM relationships differ in their development from other types of CNM relationship paths, if at all. In future studies, a validity check may be reasonable to ensure participants understand what CNM relationships are being studied.

Fourth, this study distinguished between partners who initiated the CNM transition and those who did not. This study focused solely on self and partner perceptions of the initiating partner, not differences between initiating and receiving partner behaviors. Future research could further explore the relationship between the initiating partner's and receiving partner's perceptions and behaviors. However, it is meaningful to note that this distinction may not be necessary. It is likely that discussion of consensual nonmonogamy takes place over several conversations, perhaps spanning years, before a couple decides to take the next step. In these circumstances, the initiator/receiver distinction is blurred and may be negligible.

Finally, this study relied on participants' self-reported data. Participants' survey responses must be taken at face value although they are subject to the known limitations of self-reported data. For this study, participants were asked to recall their feelings, perceptions, and actions from before, during, and after a specific episode that occurred sometime in the relationship's history. As such, responses are subject to selective/altered memory, post-episode

attribution, and various response biases, resulting in answers that are not necessarily true to reality. Future research on the monogamous-CNM transition may consider alternative methodologies to reduce this limitation.

Future research on consensual nonmonogamy could investigate other stages in the relationship's lifetime, such as dissolution or return to monogamy. So far, no studies have covered this topic, however, it is a prominent phenomenon in CNM communities. What relational and situational factors can cause a couple to return to monogamy, how is that change negotiated, what effects does it have on the relationship, and how does this experience change people's attitudes toward consensual nonmonogamy? The answers to any of these questions could pose serious risk to the wellbeing of the relationship.

Furthermore, more research is needed on how CNM relationships are communicated to outsiders, family, friends, and strangers, and the effects thereof. With whom and how much information do people choose to share regarding their CNM relationship? Communication privacy management theory could prove useful for understanding how couples manage the disclosure of their CNM status. Since CNM relationships are still stigmatized, disclosing this information could pose a serious risk for the couple and their familial and community relationships.

Finally, more research is needed on CNM family structures and children with CNM parents. How do children manage life in a multi-adult (potentially multi-parent) household, how do polyamorous families define and create their roles, what effects to multi-adult/multi-parent households have on children's outcomes? Living in a CNM household is already a part of some children's realities, and as CNM relationships become more common, the number of children raised by CNM parents will increase as well. Future consensual nonmonogamy research should

use a variety of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to obtain the best knowledge, and we should continue to strive for diverse samples and inclusive measures.

Conclusion

The findings reported here make several unique contributions to the fields of sexuality and romantic relationships. Previous research focusing on CNM relationships has shown that a significant number of people (more than one-fifth) have been in a CNM relationship (Haupert et al., 2017) and that many of the assumptions people have about CNM relationships is wrong. For example misperceptions include: CNM relationships are only for gay men (Haupert et al., 2017), people in CNM relationships are not committed to each other (Matsick et al., 2014), CNM relationships are not satisfying (Conley et al., 2017), and CNM relationships lead to unsafe sex and STIs (Moors et al., 2017). Creating a CNM relationship is a complex process requiring patience, empathy, redefining identities, and many conversations (Barker & Langridge, 2010; Hardy & Easton, 2017; Kimberly & Hans, 2017; McDonald, 2010; McLean, 2007; Taomino, 2008).

The results of the present study show how relational and conversational factors play a role in making the transition to a CNM relationship. Satisfying conversations and smooth relational transitions may be more contingent on the preceding qualities of that relationship than the content of any conversation. These findings also highlight the importance of continued research on the creation and maintenance of various CNM relationship styles and histories and relational turbulence theory. Furthermore, researchers should continue working toward avoiding a deficit approach when investigating relationship alternatives to monogamy. This research supports that goal first by acknowledging and validating the experiences of nonmonogamous relationships and second, by engaging in CNM research without the underlying assumption that

monogamous is better. Finally, given the prevalence and complexity of these relationships, I urge researchers and practitioners to consider alternatives to monogamy in their work.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX PAGE

APPENDIX A

Relational Uncertainty Scale

SELF-UNCERTAINTY

How certain did you feel about…

1. How committed you were to the relationship?
2. Whether or not you wanted the relationship to last?
3. How much you liked your partner?
4. How important this relationship was to you?
5. How much you were romantically interested in your partner?
6. Whether or not you wanted this relationship to workout in the long run?

RELATIONSHIP UNCERTAINTY

How certain did you feel about…

1. The definition of this relationship?
2. Whether or not you and your partner felt the same way about each other?
3. Whether or not you and your partner would stay together?
4. How you and your partner would describe the relationship?
5. The future of the relationship?
6. Whether or not the relationship would end soon?
7. How you and your partner viewed this relationship?
8. The state of the relationship at the time?
9. Whether or not your partner liked you as much as you liked them?
10. Whether or not this is a romantic or platonic relationship?
11. Where the relationship is going?

APPENDIX B

Partner Influence Scales

PARTNER INTERFERENCE

1. This person interferes with the plans I make.
2. This person causes me to waste time.
3. This person disrupts my daily routine.
4. This person interferes with how much time I devote to my school work.
5. This person interferes with the things I need to do each day.
6. This person makes it harder for me to schedule my activities.
7. This person interferes with whether I achieve the everyday goals I set for myself (for example: goals for exercise, diet, studying, entertainment).

PARTNER FACILITATION

1. This person helps me to do the things I need to do each day.
2. This person helps me in my efforts to spend time with my friends.
3. This person makes it easier for me to schedule my activities.
4. This person helps me to achieve the everyday goals I set for myself (for example, goals for exercise, diet, studying, entertainment).
5. This person supports my daily routine

APPENDIX C

Interpersonal Communication Satisfaction Inventory

ADAPTED INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION INVENTORY

1. My partner let me know I was communicating effectively
2. I would like to have another conversation like this one
3. I was very dissatisfied with the conversation
4. I felt like I was able to present myself as I wanted my partner to view me
5. My partner showed me that they understood what I said
6. I was very satisfied with the conversation
7. My partner expressed a lot of interest in what I had to say
8. I did not enjoy the conversation
9. I felt I could talk about anything with my partner

APPENDIX D

Measures of Directness, Valence, and Relational Turbulence

SELF-DIRECTNESS

1. I said directly that I wanted a nonmonogamous relationship.
2. I was unclear about exactly what I wanted.
3. I said that we should move toward being nonmonogamous.

PARTNER-DIRECTNESS

1. My partner said directly that they wanted a nonmonogamous relationship.
2. My partner said that we should move toward being nonmonogamous.

SELF-VALENCE

1. I approached the conversation with a positive tone.
2. I focused more on my own feelings and wants.
3. I approached the conversation with a negative tone.

PARTNER-VALENCE

1. My partner approached the conversation with a negative tone.
2. My partner was considerate of my feelings and wants.
3. My partner focused on their own feelings and wants.
4. My partner focused on what was wrong with our relationship.
5. My partner approached the conversation with a negative tone.

RELATIONAL TURBULENCE

1. I felt the relationship was unstable.
2. I felt uncertain about the future of the relationship.
3. I felt uncertain about my partner's feelings for me.

4. I felt the relationship had completely changed.