



Care in Consensually Non-Monogamous Relationship Networks: Aspirations and Practices in a Contradictory Field

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ABSTRACT: The paper discusses the question whether currently emerging, new forms of non-monogamous intimate relationships generate new class and gender relations. Parts of the polyamory movement propagate that breaking with hegemonic norms in relationships opens up the possibility for replacing internalized patriarchal and capitalistically structured norms and behaviour patterns with ones that are to a higher degree self-reflexive and self-determined. Parts of the research about polyamory agree that there is emancipatory potential and stress the possibility of these relationships to break with heteronormative and sexist power structures and to initiate social change in various domains. However, it is just as feasible that poly-amory is a relationship form that aids in managing the demands of a highly flexible, project-oriented capitalist system. The paper outlines my qualitative method of research – a triangulation of intersectional multi-level analysis and network analysis – as well as my ideas for a care-theoretical approach to understanding polyamorous practices. Based on preliminary results of my doctoral research the paper leads to the conclusion that emancipatory aspirations are especially likely to succeed when they are supported by structural measures like collective housekeeping or obligatory modes of communication.

KEYWORDS: Social inequality, non-monogamies, care, gendered division of work, qualitative research



In recent years consensual non-monogamy has been interpreted as a progressive action against sexist gender norms and commodified modes of exchange within both the academic literature (Haritaworn, Lin & Klesse, 2006) and in particular by polyamory activists (Noël, 2006). My research focuses on everyday practices of care and whether these practices meet the above mentioned standards. Do people in non-monogamous relationships arrange care-work in such a way that hegemonic gender norms and modes of exchange are transgressed?

From a feminist materialist (Hartmann, 2013; Madörin, 2010; Winker, 2011) and moral-philosophical (Conradi, 2001) standpoint, I see three possible answers to this question. Consensual non-monogamies could be:

1. A flexible response to neoliberal constraints by transferring the neoliberal appeal of individuality and flexibility to the domain of relationships.
2. Evidence of the persistence of existing patriarchal patterns; as it is nothing new – at least not for men – to rely on the care work of several women.
3. A progressive step of emancipation from gender norms and roles, transcending the capitalist logic of exchange.

Narrative interviews with 15 people who are permanently living with more than one partner and define themselves as consensually non-monogamous in various terms provided an answer about the accuracy of these three theses. The interviewees' accounts of mutual care in different areas of life were subjected to an intersectional multi-level analysis (Winker & Degele, 2011) supplemented by an ego-centered network analysis (Diaz-Bone, 1997).

In this article, I will demonstrate how I arrived at deducing certain conceptions of justice from the interviews, and how these conceptions correspond to the theses of the persistence of patriarchal patterns and of the search for emancipatory potentials in consensually non-monogamous relationship-networks. Afterwards, I will demonstrate the evidence that supports the thesis of neoliberal flexibilization and will discuss the circumstances under which emancipatory aspirations are most likely to succeed. I argue that institutionalizing certain modes in relationships (like creating obligatory modes of communication) helps in implementing such aspirations, which I will illustrate with a concrete example from a relationship-network whose members live in a communal living project.

Consensual Non-Monogamy between Emancipation, Flexibilization, and Persistence

Previous discussions about the emancipatory potential of polyamory range from structure-determinist pessimist to voluntarist optimist approaches. Polyamory activists are, of course, interested in emphasizing the transformative potential of non-monogamous relationships. Scientific analyses must take note of this articulated will in order to create a more self-determined alternative to prescriptive norms; but they must also point out that other powerful norms and social structures can lead to an involuntary reproduction of power relations (Barker & Langdrige, 2010). Stressing the transformative potentials of polyamory, Noël (2006) puts forward the thesis that polyamory has the potential to revolutionize how people think about relationships and family. Yet, in her content analysis of polyamory self-help guides, she arrives at the conclusion that the concept of polyamory mainly offers an identity for the white, well-educated, able-bodied middle class with a secured residency status¹. Instead of generally deconstructing relationship norms, new relationship norms are constructed for a privileged social milieu. Following Connell (2005), Sheff (2006) coins the term “poly-hegemonic masculinities” for economically privileged heterosexual men who take the conveniences of consensual non-monogamy for granted, while the women initiate the organizational agreements that are necessary in order to bring different social contacts into accordance time-wise. Barker and Langdrige (2010) also stress that within most types of non-monogamy, the heterosexual couple relationship remains the core of the relationship network, making an extensive change of the heteronormative social order unlikely. In their critical introduction to polyamory, Haritaworn et al., (2006) link the critical and the transformative perspective. They stress the potential of these new relationship types almost exuberantly: “These new narratives of emotional and sexual abundance and collective care may provide real alternatives to capitalist and patriarchal ideologies of personal ownership and scarcity” (Haritaworn et al., 2006, p. 518) – providing that it will succeed in transgressing the exclusive narrowness of a privileged social group and thereby in effecting an impact on the societal level. For Klesse (2013, p. 7), care is the key to understanding the social meaning of consensual non-monogamy: “Only on the basis of de-

tailed research into the organisation of care work in polyamorous relationships and households can we understand the position of polyamory”.

I consider three possible options for how care may be realised in consensually non-monogamous relationship networks with regard to gendered and capitalist/neoliberal aspects (though they are not necessarily mutually exclusive within the same relationship):

1. **Flexibilization:** In polyamory networks, economically speaking, the provision of care is less secure than in other modes of reproduction and/or is realised in a commodified way. Therefore, polyamory can be understood as an adjustment, a reaction to a crisis of reproduction (Winker, 2013), a technique of the self that supports a tendency to emotional self-optimization (Illouz, 2007) and possibly an expansion of potentially exhaustive demands of self-responsibility and personal initiative (Ehrenberg, 2008) to a person’s immediate and private social contexts. Hence, the emergence of polyamorous relationships could be an effect of economic flexibilization.
2. **Persistence:** The “illusion of emancipation” (Koppetsch & Burkard, 1999) that exists in monogamous couple relationships is simply repeated: men exploit the work capacity of several women, while all participants make an effort to reconcile their hierarchical practices with their egalitarian norm conceptions. The simultaneous occurrence of exploitation and an ethics of care implies an ideological and legitimate function. Therefore, patriarchal inequalities are rather enforced than transgressed.
3. **Emancipation:** In networks of collective care, a practical ethical approach is developed during the process of building the relationship. This approach neither reproduces heteronormative gender relations nor the neoliberal logic of individual self-responsibility. As “pioneers in the daily life” (Kruppa, 2013, p. 149), all participants of the relationship network improve their capacity for action (Holzkamp, 1985). Hence, a polyamorous relationship could be perceived as a transgression of traditional divisions of care.

The following discussion of my research outcomes will demonstrate empirical evidence for all three theses, but illustrates also the material conditions that enforce specific modes of care.

Doing Empirical Research Founded on Two Care-Theoretical Approaches

Which of the theses about the social meaning of consensual non-monogamy outlined above is correct (or if they all apply in different ways in different places) cannot be settled by theory. This is the main reason I investigated this question by employing qualitative research, based on interviews and drawing on two different care-theoretical approaches.

One premise of my research is the conviction that the social meaning of intimate polyamorous relationships is dependent more on who cares for whom rather than, as often assumed, on who sleeps with whom or how jealousy is dealt with. Following materialistically founded feminist discourses on care (Dück & Schütt, 2014; Fraser, 2009; Hartmann, 2013; Madörin, 2010; Winker, 2011) that underline the importance of economics for understanding social processes, I conceive care as those reproductive activities that in traditional families are usually undertaken by women for free: catering for food as well as for physical and emotional well-being, caring for children and the sick, being responsible for a pleasant mood, a clean home, appropriate clothing and so on. However, care is not just an issue of allocation of work and resources, but is also a question of the regard for the needs of others. In order to understand this aspect of care, I will discuss whether in the field of polyamorous relationships, conceptions of justice are articulated as abstract conceptions of justice or as attentive attitudes toward specific people, following a moral-philosophical discussion by Gilligan (1982). The results will show why this distinction is relevant.

Sampling and Recruiting

In order to find out how people in consensually non-monogamous relationship networks care for each other, I sought out people who consider themselves as living consensually non-monogamously via an online survey. From the 200 people who filled out the online survey, I chose fifteen people for one-on-one narrative interviews (Schütze, 1983; Lamnek, 2005). In order to be able to explore a wide field as well as deepen the knowledge about typical cases, I followed the principle of minimal and maximal contrasting (Schütze, 1983) in terms of continuous theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Interviews

The opening question² aimed at evoking a narrative about practices of care instead of retrieving idealised self-image or socially desirable answers. As a further source of information, I asked all participants to visualize the care relations in their relationship networks via differently coloured playing pieces and labels. At the end of the interview, I collected socioeconomic data (gender, age, residency status, health, several indicators for cultural and economic capital) and information about the living situation of participants of the relationship network.

Subject, Social Structure and Symbolic Representation in Intersectional Multi-Level Analysis

The intersectional multi-level analysis (Winker & Degele, 2011; Winker, 2012) came into being as a method of qualitative research in the 2000s in Germany. It aims at understanding the interrelation between subject and social structure as well as its mediation through discourses, norms and cultural representations by way of qualitative research. The approach analytically distinguishes three levels of society: identity constructions, symbolic representations and social structures and aims, to consider how people construct themselves within the frame of symbolic representations and social structures.

The level of identity constructions is important because the polyamory scene often defines itself through the rejection of a societal norm (e.g. monogamy) and through resulting new norms that arise in the context of their own networks or their surrounding subculture (Pieper & Bauer, 2005). The construction of identity often does not appear to be an 'I-Identity', but a 'We-Identity' shared by the network. Some interview partners continuously spoke of themselves as 'we' and thereby constructed their identity as 'We, in our network'.

To conduct my analysis on a level of social structures does not only mean looking at large societal structures like class, heteronormativity or racism, but also incorporating the relationship structures of my interview partners into the analysis. As a sociologist, I assume that social practices create social structures. Thereby, when a construction like 'our relationship network' appears in an interview, I conceive this construction as an institutionalisation of a relationship that has more weight than, for example, just 'we' or 'us' on the identity level. Lease contracts,

shared economies and implicit or explicit rejections of hegemonic institutions like marriage and family lead to a solidification of the social and form a structural framework on a meso level. As part of my analysis, I am not only focusing on the above-mentioned levels as well as their interrelations, contradictions and consistencies. During the course of analysis, the case analyses are also contextualized in power structures as well as societal values, norms and patterns of interpretation (Winker, 2012).

Triangulating this approach with a network analysis makes it possible to better include the allocation of care practices in relationship networks.

Network Analysis of Care Relationships

These interviews show a wide range of aspirations of non-monogamists to care for the others in their networks. One problem that arises from the interview data is that while interview partners speak about their lives and their ideas, the actual practices and the perspectives of other network participants are not taken into account. In order to get closer to the reality of the relationships, I supplemented my interview-based research with an ego-centered network analysis (Diaz-Bone, 1997). I will subsequently demonstrate how I used some of its basic operations for taking a second look at the division of care-labour in the networks in question.

I asked my interview partners to visually recreate their relationship networks with playing pieces and to indicate care relations between individual participants with coloured pencils and various labels for different types of care. Some relations like 'cooks for', 'does laundry for', 'massages', 'consoles' or 'speaks about important matters with' were already laid out, but further unlabelled coloured arrows encouraged the addition of further dimensions of care.

The interview partners were given the following guidelines: on the one hand, the way they painted a line – spotted, dashed, solid or bold – should determine the strength of each care-relation. Further, they were asked to show the direction of each care relationship by adding an arrow to each line. Speaking in terms of the network analysis, I collected a group of nodes (persons) and directional and weighted ties (more or less strong and directional care relations) between the nodes.

The indicated direction of each relation allows for a distinction between caregiver and care receiver (Brückner, 2010) in each relationship. Weighting each rela-

tion makes it possible to take differently strong care relations into account. The collected data was entered in the free network-analysis software *Gephi*. Figure 1 shows the resultant visualisation of Bob's³ network.

The evaluated data makes it possible to deduct statements about the social integration⁴ of each network. In a fully integrated network, relations exist between all participants. In this example, the integration is at 0.643, meaning that 64.3% of the potentially possible care-relations exist. This is an example of a relatively strongly integrated network.

The different thicknesses of the arrows indicate the intensity of each care relation. Their comparison shows how symmetrical or asymmetrical care work is distributed in a network. The respective thickness of the

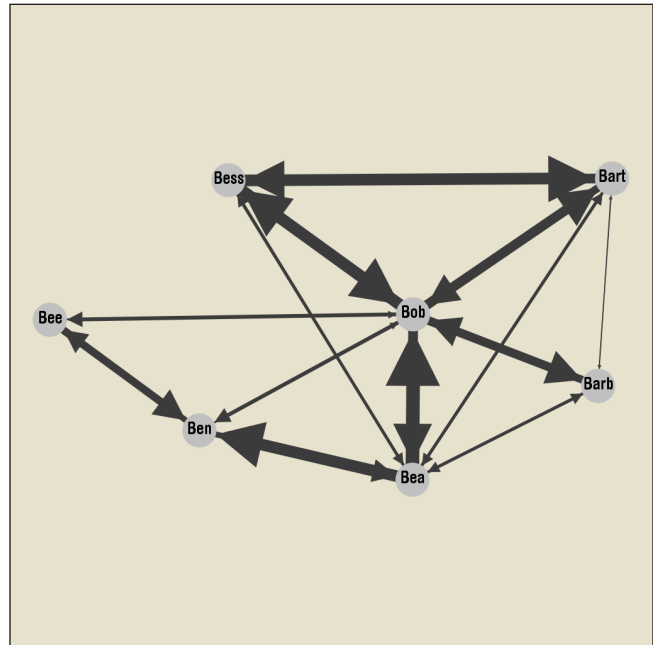


Figure 1: Diagram of Care Relations in a Consensually Non-Monogamous Relationship Network. The respective thickness of the arrow indicates the strength of each directional care relation.

arrow matches the weighted degree of each care relation. The weighted degree of a care relation is the sum of all individual weightings. To clarify: the double-ended arrow between Bob and Bart equates five different types of care that Bob marked during our interview. Four of these care activities are undertaken mutually, one of them by Bob alone for Bart. Matching the performed weighting⁵, the result is a weighted degree of both directional relations of 20 or 16. The thickness of the lines between the arrows show the weighted degrees of the undirected relations.

Even though the weighted degree of each care relation is only a blunt measure compared to elaborate network-theoretical concepts (Opsahl et al., 2010) – because, for example, the specifics of each activity are lost – this method still paints a different picture of the allocation of care in relationship networks than the interviews.

What the diagram does not show, however, is how much care each participant gives or receives all together. Table 1 shows the added values of the giving and receiving care relations for each node, or rather, person.

Node	Weighted Sum of the Received Care-Relations (In-Degree)	Weighted Sum of the Given Care-Relations (Out-Degree)
Barb	25	23
Bart	58	44
Bea	49	75
Bee	20	20
Ben	48	28
Bess	50	54
Bob	92	98

Table 1: Name of the Node and Weighted In- or Out-Degree (Sum of each received or given Care) of Each Node

Even though it is true that abstracting from the concrete activity relativizes the validity of the sum, it can still be noted that the data supports the thesis formulated during the analysis of the interviews that there is a gender-typical division of work from which the male participants benefit. The data shows much more precisely than the interviews that a woman, Bea, gives more care than she receives and that two men, Bart and Ben, receive more care than they give. This finding supports the thesis of the interview-analysis, that members of the network practice a traditional division of care-labour without being aware of it. In comparison to other networks it can be noted, however, that the asymmetries in this network are not very significant.

The triangulation of network analysis and interview data have made it possible not only to draw more parallels but also to make contradictions visible, which allows us to discuss them further⁶.

Normative Foundations of Practices of Care between Abstract Justice and Attentiveness

Interview partners talked about care in two ways: firstly, they brought up concrete practices of care and their allocation within their respective relationship networks. Secondly, they highlighted the ambition to care for each other and the areas to which this ambition applied. Thereby, normative ideas about mutual care often came up. In this section, I will briefly describe these and show that they correspond with the previously mentioned ethical concepts. I discuss my research question with three cases representative for the narratives found in my cases: Bob, Alice and Chloe.

Normative Foundations of Practices of Care between Abstract Justice and Attentiveness

In all conducted interviews, ideas of fairness and justice were expressed on the topic of care. In doing so, my interview partners implicitly and explicitly related to various theoretical concepts of justice. For Bob, for example, autonomy is of central value. It is important for him that none of the relationships exist just to provide for one another. All participants should act financially independently, and his relationship ideal is to be in charge of one's own life. In fact, he states that

In a relationship network, it is very important to get to a point where you are as much independent from others as possible.

In our interview, his typically strong emphasis of autonomy ends when it comes to social support and household work. Other than on financial issues, where he emphasizes the importance of fairness and transparency, he describes himself as “a laissez-faire kind of guy when it comes to household chores”. The way he sees it, in a relationship, temporarily unequal distributions of household chores can be easily accepted out of feelings like gratefulness and joy. When he speaks of household chores and care work, his words imply that they are relatively easy tasks.

Regarding the relation between autonomy and neediness, Bob advocates the ideal of the autonomous subject and trivializes existing care needs. It is therefore conceivable that the members of the network practice a traditional division of care-labour without being aware of it. Bob favours a model of negotiation that assumes two autonomous subjects – individuals who know what they want – who come together in a free and equal discussion about what they want from each other. Ideally, they each give the other something of equal value.

This conception of justice corresponds to the capitalist idea of fair trade. Following a ‘value critical’ approach to the analysis of capitalism, which is based on the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, I understand the exchange of equivalents as the basis of capitalist dynamics (Marx, 1974) and capitalism as a society based on exchange (Adorno, 2003a; regarding the relationship between the commodity form and form of thought in love relationships, see Adorno, 2003b, p. 89). Therefore, I interpret this notion of justice as structured by capitalist relations. At

the same time, the idea of the autonomous subject chimes with a specific gender regime. Before you are even able to express what you want, your nappies have been changed and you've been consoled, fed, dressed and in other ways been cared for countless times. The autonomous subject is thus dependent on someone in the background, who has already produced him as able to negotiate as free and equal. In the real world as well as in philosophical treatises on this specific subjectivity, women traditionally took and still take this role (Benhabib 1995). The intellectual figure of the autonomous subject ignores corporeity and dependency and confuses the outcome of a specific gender regime – the rational, independent and implicitly male subject – for its base, implicitly conceptualizing a particular point of view as a universal one. Therefore, I describe this position as androcentric universalism. In this context, the notion of justice found in Bob's statements supports the thesis of the persistence of patriarchally and capitalistically structured representations and practices in the field of consensual non-monogamy.

It would not be fair to Bob and the other members of his network to stop at this conclusion. In addition to the focus on autonomy and an abstractly defined notion of justice, his network shares the emancipatory goal that all participants should be need-oriented and approachable towards one another when it comes to caring. This goal is articulated even more explicitly and manifestly by Alice who belongs to another relationship network. Alice's idea of how care work should be allocated is based on the idea of attentiveness as the foundation for social relationships. To Alice, attentiveness means to always be aware of herself and others and to always bear everyone in mind. Attentiveness means to negotiate everyone's needs reflexively:

I must be aware of my need and I must be aware of your need. [...] I must put both needs in relation to each other [...] and then come to a decision.

Alice's statements correspond with a feminist ethic of attentiveness. This view does not justify the necessity for being attentive to others in reference to abstract reason, but instead, refers to the basic human condition of being dependent on one another. The contradictions that arise in asymmetrical care relations are thus not a failure of an abstractly defined justice, but an integral part of care-ethical negotiation processes (Conradi, 2001). Autonomy in this sense is not a precondition

tion for human interaction, but its product and goal (Benhabib, 1995). Alice not only mentions the concept of attentiveness, she also distances herself from two rival notions of justice. She does not want her relationship to be determined by an abstract set of rules, as would be the case in an androcentric moral philosophy that follows Kant and Rawls (Conradi, 2001). On the other hand, she has issues with traditional concepts of womanhood and femininity because, according to her, she was socialized to put others' needs above her own. This is an implicit reference to the originally religiously-based norm of the typically female morale of servitude and goodness, in which it is the duty of women to recognize and meet care needs. In that sense, Alice is looking for "real alternatives to capitalist and patriarchal ideologies" (Haritaworn et al., 2006, p. 518) in her relationship network. These aspirations should not be dismissed, instead it should be asked how they can best be put into practice. However, I would first like to show how in the interviews, aspects of neoliberal flexibilization – unsurprisingly – were also seen as part of non-monogamous relationships

Self-Optimisation and Flexibilization

In addition to these findings – which in Bob's case support the thesis about the persistence of hegemonic norms and in Alice's case support the thesis about a focus on emancipation – both interview partners also expressed their ideals of personal development and optimization.

According to Bob, his polyamorous lifestyle helped him solve a lot of his personal problems and has made him freer in his relationship choices. More so than Alice, he emphasizes that his polyamorous network helps him to identify personal weaknesses and to work on them. Alice, unlike Bob, rather sees her network as a means of developing a collective practice of attentiveness.

Even though my interview partners often talk about collectivity and alternative lifestyles in a positive light, they are also influenced by ideals of self-responsibility and self-optimization. To different degrees, they conceive life as a project in which they can make progress with the help of their relationship network. It seems that neoliberal tenets like activation, flexibilization and deregulation have not only reached the field of relationships, but specifically also become part of consensually non-monogamous relationships. Along with the already discussed

strong normative focus on emancipation and the persistence of patriarchal and commodified ideologies, most investigated relationship networks also support the thesis that polyamory can offer “custom-fit solutions for the requirements of the postfordist capitalist regimes” (Mayer, 2011, p. 35). It would have been surprising, had these aspects not been found in consensually non-monogamous relationship-networks. The previously mentioned emancipatory ambitions however, are more interesting and will be further discussed in the following section.

Relationship Structures and Care Practices

Almost all interview partners mention the difficulty of realizing one’s own ambitions. Chloe, for example, who belongs to yet another relationship network, states that incorporated gender norms often contribute to the reproduction of traditional gender-specific divisions of household chores for the female participants of a relationship network:

We divide our household chores in order to avoid that those who find it the dirtiest are always the ones cleaning and the others aren’t. Because that’s very gender-dependent. If we don’t do that, it’s always the women who are cleaning.

In accordance with the ambitions of justice and fairness between the different genders involved, Chloe’s network acts on the conviction that subjective perceptions of tidiness are the result of gender-specific socialization. If the network didn’t take active countermeasures, it would be the women who end up cleaning. The network’s active implementation of a division of labour contrary to gender-specific skills and needs also has the effect that all participants learn new skills that they did not get taught in their socialization processes. In order to fix this mute force of internalized societal relations, Chloe’s network meets regularly to divide up the chores of the following weeks. This is just one example of how normative ideas – convictions about how things *should* be – can have an impact when people take active measures to create structures, in this case an obligatory mode of communication.

The relations of convictions and framework conditions also play a role in other relationship networks. One of the analysed relationship networks is geographically spread across a small apartment in a large city and a large communal living pro-

ject in the countryside. In the city, the material side of care is handled on a very low level and without elaborate arrangements: there are no elaborate care-activities like ironing or window-cleaning nor are there complex arrangements to decide what is done by whom. This alternative (a low level of planning and elaboration around care, which I could also find in other relationship networks) mainly tries to forego care by minimising the care needs of the people involved – something that is only possible when no one has special care needs. It is an entirely different matter in the communal living project in the countryside. Here, the household work and the division of chores is organized and decided upon collectively. Chloe states that various social processes like assemblies and individual talks are organized to approach the shared goal of attentiveness and entail daily care. Further, the living project consists partly of children and there is at least the willingness to accept others who are in need of care as part of the living project. The communal living project as a collective social structure provides a framework for getting closer to fulfilling the ideal of a less capitalistically and heteronormatively structured way of living relationships – closer than it would be possible without this structural support. In fact, my comparison with other networks (the specifics of which would exceed the scope of this article) even suggests that established collective social structures without clearly formulated aims end up bringing about more material care than care-related aspirations without structural components as backup.

Conclusion

The central question I posed in this article was whether consensual non-monogamy means emancipation, a neoliberal flexibilization of relationships, or the reproduction of existing sexist norms and practices. It is not very surprising that I found proof for all three theses on the social meaning of non-monogamy: polyamorous relationships can be a response to neoliberal demands on the individual, as traditional gender-specific division of labour can be found in such relationships. However, my interview partners also followed aspirations that went against these objectives and were especially likely to succeed when specific modes of organizing care-work were institutionalized.

All my interview partners expressed a range of ambitions to care for each other that implicitly or explicitly contradicted patriarchal or commodified ideologies.

Some directly mentioned that these ambitions could be only partly fulfilled. With others, the interviews showed that reality often lagged behind the expressed ambitions.

It became clear that these considerations have given important impulses for empirical research based on a care-theoretical approach. Especially the triangulation of intersectional multi-level analysis and network analysis made it possible to understand the implicit and explicit contradictions between ambition and reality as expressed by the interview partners.

However, as could be suspected, there is no easy and clear answer to the question. All interview partners spoke of care in terms of an attentive attitude, but the importance of its meaning for their respective relationships varied greatly. In addition, rivaling ideas about the morality of care exist, whereby especially the concept of androcentric universalism with its strong focus on individual autonomy can serve as a normative base for the traditional gender division of work in the field of care work.

The results of the interview-analyses suggest that common neoliberal conceptions like flexibility, self-optimization and a project-like approach to life are also very common in consensual non-monogamous relationships.

The analyses of the interviews as well as the comparison between more and less institutionalized networks suggest that emancipatory ambitions can be realized especially in situations where they are supported by structural measures like collective housekeeping or obligatory modes of communication.

It appears that the polyamory movement loses sight of an important sociological insight due to partly individualistic approaches and the often economically well-secured status of its members: namely, that social structures are potentially more powerful than attitudes. This is one reason why I argue for care-theoretical approaches and reflections when analysing non-monogamy.

The considerations presented here lead me to the following temporary conclusions: When discussing political strategies, the focus of relationship-activists (of any kind whatsoever) should in the future be on redistribution instead of recognition. For example, relationship-activists could get involved in existing struggles for social infrastructure and basic welfare services. Also, polyamorous communities could consider founding solidary collectives, that not only share love and sex but also income and collective resources like living space. When non-monogamous

networks have the aspiration to act neither traditionally-patriarchally nor neoliberally-individualistically on matters of care, they should focus on creating and implementing social structures that enable self-organised collective care instead of mainly working on formulating ethical approaches and goals.

Endnotes

- ¹ My research corresponds to this insofar as the vast majority of participants – even those who are formally not well-educated – are culturally oriented towards a post-conventional middle-class culture, even if most participants live under precarious economic conditions.
- ² ‘The interview is about care in consensually non-monogamous relationships. I’m interested to know who cares for whom in your relationship – and that in the farthest sense possible, eve-rything to do with care. I would like you to tell me about it in detail. Maybe you can start with a specific situation, where somebody cared for you or you cared for someone.’
- ³ all names are pseudonyms
- ⁴ Integration is the quotient of real and potentially possible social relations (Diekmann 2005)
- ⁵ Weighting: spotted: 1; dashed: 2; solid: 4; bold: 8
- ⁶ In order to deal with uncertainties regarding the interpretation, I will, in the further course of my research, discuss these interim results with my interview partners and, if they will allow it, with the other members of their relationship networks, thereby following the principle of ‘co-research’ of Critical Psychology (Markard 2010).

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