Relational Turbulence and Identity Gaps Amongst Committed Consensually Non-Monogamous Partners

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Relational Turbulence and Identity Gaps Amongst
Committed Consensually Non-Monogamous Partners

R. E. Purtell

Dissertation submitted
to the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
at West Virginia University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in
Communication Studies

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Morgantown, West Virginia
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Keywords: relational turbulence, communication theory of identity, identity gaps, consensual non-monogamy

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ABSTRACT

Relational Turbulence and Identity Gaps Amongst Committed Consensually Non-Monogamous Partners

R. E. Purtell

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate relational turbulence processes and test Relational Turbulence Theory’s (RTT) first five propositions in a sample of 528 committed consensually non-monogamous (CNM) partners as they are experiencing the transition of their committed partner adding a new sexual or romantic partner other than themselves. CNM relationships are those in which at least one partner has multiple sexual and/or romantic relationships with the consent of all parties involved. Generally, the first five propositions of RTT were supported. Specifically, self uncertainty and partner uncertainty positively predicted relationship uncertainty, which in turn predicted biased cognitive appraisals, and was also positively predicted by self uncertainty. Partner interference positively predicted intensified emotions but partner facilitation failed to predict intensified emotions. Biased cognitive appraisals negatively predicted communication engagement and valence and was linked to intensified emotions, but intensified emotions failed to predict communication engagement and valence. Finally, biased cognitive appraisals and intensified emotions positively predicted perceptions of relational turbulence, but communication engagement and valence failed to predict perceptions of relational turbulence. This dissertation also found evidence that relationship parameters of uncertainty and partner interdependence may also be predictive of intensified emotions and biased cognitive appraisals, respectively. Additionally, perceptions of relational turbulence also positively predicted anticipated CNM stigma, personal-relational identity gaps, and personal-enacted identity gaps. This dissertation also analyzed participants open-ended responses for evidence of communal identity gaps participants had with the LGBTQIA+ community. Evidence of communal-personal, communal-enacted, communal-relational, and communal-communal identity gaps with their identities as members of the LGBTQIA+ community were also found among a smaller portion of the participants’ responses. Implications for RTT and the Communication Theory of Identity as well as practical implications for individuals in or supportive of CNM relationships are also discussed.
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CHAPTER I
Introduction

Consensual non-monogamy is an overarching label that describes any romantic and/or sexual relationship in which all parties grant explicit consent to at least one partner’s engagement in multiple intimate, romantic, and/or sexual relationships (Moors, Ramos, et al., 2021). According to two national samples in the U.S. and a nationally representative sample of Canadians, about 1 in 5 adults have consensually engaged in some form of non-monogamy in their life and about 4-5% of people are currently part of a non-monogamous relationship while 12% report that it would be their ideal relationship structure (Moors, Ramos, et al., 2021). Furthermore, this portion of the population is diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and religious and political affiliation (Moors, Ramos, et al., 2021) although men and individuals identifying as gay, lesbian, and bisexual are more likely to report previous engagement with consensual non-monogamy (Haupert et al., 2017), especially among gay and bisexual men (Stults, 2019). Individuals in monogamous, versus non-monogamous, relationship structures are also not psychologically different from each other (Lecuona et al., 2021). Yet, those in committed consensually non-monogamous (CNM) relationships are an underserved population by the field of communication studies and the social sciences in general (Brewster et al., 2017).

Until recently, the limited investigations of CNM relationships was narrowly focused on topics like relationship styles within CNM, stigma, and embedded within discussions of issues facing the larger LGBTQIA+ community (Brewster et al., 2017). Some researchers have even argued that researchers who have studied CNM relationships from a mononormative perspective have presented findings fraught with bias and methodological issues (Conley et al., 2017) and
have discussed CNM relationships in terms of how they compare to ideologically dominant monogamous relationships rather than how these unique, multi-faceted relationships function in and of themselves (Sakaluk et al., 2021). Thus, it is worth noting the author, a cisgender white woman, openly identifies as a member of the CNM community, and pansexual, and will disclose this in her communication with participants. It is hoped that the author’s disclosure of her positionality will aid the study in terms of participants’ comfortability, use of language in discussing CNM relationships, and interpretation of results as they inform scholarship on and practical implications for those navigating CNM relationships.

Individuals engage in CNM relationships for a variety of reasons, some related to sexual activity like adult experimentation, sexual identity exploration, favorable attitudes towards casual sex (Sizemore & Olmstead, 2017), and managing kink interests (Vilkin & Sprott, 2021). Additional reasons include individual and relational well-being and need fulfillment like autonomy support, beliefs and value systems, relationality, sexuality, personal growth, and pragmatism (Wood et al., 2021). Those in CNM relationships also report comparable psychological well-being and relationship quality (Rubel & Bogaert, 2015) as well as relationship and sexual satisfaction (Wood et al., 2018) as those in monogamous relationships and in some cases even report greater levels of individual happiness, and health and happiness in their marriages compared to those in monogamous marriages (Cox et al., 2021). However, while high sexual satisfaction with primary partners is related to sexual satisfaction with secondary partners for men in hierarchical CNM relationships (i.e., relationships are ranked in terms of importance, precedence, and privilege), when women experience increased sexual satisfaction with secondary partners this may negatively influence their perceptions of sexual satisfaction with their primary partner (Muise et al., 2019). Thus, while all romantic and/or sexual
relationships are complex, balancing multiple sexual and/or romantic partnerships presents unique challenges for those in CNM relationships.

Several studies have addressed the rules and boundaries that individuals construct to manage the complexity of CNM relationships. Commonly, the content of these rules focuses heavily on sex safety (Gusakova et al., 2021), sexual health risk (Stewart et al., 2021), and use of protection or contraceptives (Grov et al., 2014). However, couples also construct rules and boundaries around who are (not) acceptable extradyadic partners (Grov et al., 2014; Stewart et al., 2021) and communication about extradyadic sexual and/or romantic encounters (Grov et al., 2014; Purtell & Dillow, 2022). Couples may also construct rules and boundaries related to their unique concerns regarding relational maintenance in light of extradyadic activity (Stewart et al., 2021). While active, sensitive communication has been named as a strategy for success among CNM partners (Hangen et al., 2020), it has also been noted that male CNM couples who do not have explicit, clear, and direct communication regarding their arrangements and agreements about extradyadic sexual encounters still often report congruent perceptions about what is considered acceptable behavior in regard to other romantic and sexual partners (Dellucci et al., 2021). Thus it is possible that implicit agreements may also be functional for some CNM relationships (Dellucci et al., 2021). Although past research has used the terms rules and boundaries interchangeably, it is important to note their distinction in the CNM community whereby rules are restrictive in terms of partners’ behavior and boundaries are individuals’ articulations of their own limits in the practice of CNM (Veaux & Rickert, 2014). It is also worth noting that many of the studies examining rules and boundaries have done so with populations of gay and bisexual men, specifically, rather than the entirety of the broader CNM community.
Researchers often differentiate between swingers (i.e., committed couples that engage in CNM by “swapping” partners during or collectively engaging in recreational sex), open relationships (i.e., partners are permitted to have sexual—but not romantic—encounters with people outside the relationship), and polyamory (i.e., a CNM relationship structure characterized by multiple committed, loving relationships), yet study them concurrently (Conley & Piemonte, 2021) and ignore a variety of other forms of CNM. Hangen and colleagues (2020) sought to address this issue by differentiating forms of CNM based on level on extradyadic sexual activity (i.e., monogamous with minimal recent extradyadic sexual activity, monogamous with low rates of extradyadic sexual activity, open-CNM relationships, partially open relationships, and relationships with primarily one-sided extradyadic sexual activity) but yet this still ignores individuals identifying as asexual or demisexual who engage and are satisfied in CNM relationships for reasons unrelated to sex (Moors, Ramos, et al., 2021) as well as differences between hierarchical and non-hierarchical CNM relationship structures (Flicker, Sancier-Barbosa, et al., 2021). However, these distinctions are relevant as they are often associated with different individual and relational outcomes. For example, relational satisfaction and attachment security tend to be higher in non-hierarchical CNM relationships compared to hierarchical CNM relationships (Flicker, Sancier-Barbosa, et al., 2021) and people in more open forms of CNM relationships tend to report higher levels of relationship functioning compared to relationships with a more monogamous orientation with lower rates of extradyadic sexual activity (Hangen et al., 2020).

In addition to navigating the complex functioning, structure, and sexual arrangements in a given CNM relationship (Rossman et al., 2019), individuals must overcome a variety of additional challenges to CNM practices and lifestyle in mononormative society. One popular
research focus in the context of CNM relationships is jealousy. Although the nature of CNM relationships can certainly be jealousy-inducing (Rubinsky, 2019), researchers have also become increasingly interested in compersion, or the ability to experience joy in light of a partner’s happiness in other romantic or sexual relationships (Flicker, Vaughan, et al., 2021). Compersion is often thought of as the opposite of jealousy, but researchers are increasingly recognizing that jealousy and compersion can co-occur in CNM relationships and that compersion is positively associated with relationship satisfaction in CNM relationships where jealousy may not emerge as a significant predictor of satisfaction in this context (Balzarini et al., 2021). However, there are often challenges in discussing jealousy in CNM relationships in relationship therapy when practitioners endorse mononormative ideologies and engage in unconscious bias rendering treatment of CNM individuals ineffective (van Tol, 2017). CNM individuals may also experience acts of discrimination, harassment, and violence due to their relationship status contributing to minority stress which in turn leads to increased depression and anxiety (Witherspoon & Theodore, 2021). CNM individuals will also likely have to develop at least functional relationships with metamours (i.e., partners’ partners) which have their own unique dynamics and challenges and remain understudied in social scientific research (Watson & Stein Lubrano, 2021).

Sex and sexual health may also be heightened concerns for CNM partners given the lack of sexual exclusivity. Although CNM individuals do have higher lifetime rates of (Lehmiller, 2015) and often increased risk of (Lima et al., 2018) sexually transmitted infections (STIs), they also report more frequent use of protection with both committed partners and extradyadic partners and more frequent testing for STIs (Lehmiller, 2015) and HIV (Levine et al., 2018) compared to monogamous individuals. However, improved communication regarding sexual
agreements about extradyadic encounters has been shown to mitigate risk of contracting and transmitting HIV among male partners (Jin et al., 2021). Sexual compliance (i.e., consenting to sexual activity that is not necessarily desired or wanted) has also been cited as an issue negatively predicting mental health in some forms of non-normative relationships including polyamory (Rubinsky, 2020).

Additionally, despite above average ratings on measures of relationship satisfaction and no significant differences between individuals in monogamous vs. CNM relationships on the same measures (Garner et al., 2019) and commonplace CNM practices like mixed-gender threesomes among college students (Thompson et al., 2021), stigma surrounding CNM relationships pervades. Those in CNM relationships claim stigmatized identity resulting from their non-monogamous orientation (Valadez et al., 2020) and may experience stress from anticipated stigma or actual experiences with enacted stigma (Stults et al., 2022), such as hate speech and incivility in online discourse (Cardoso et al., 2021), and may even internalize this stigma themselves (Moors, Schechinger, et al., 2021).

Generally, young people demonstrate strong preference for monogamy (Thompson et al., 2018) and monogamous couples are perceived more favorably than polyamorous, open, and swinging couples (Grunt-Mejer & Campbell, 2016). Consistent with these trends, when asked to define CNM, people in CNM relationships report definitions focused on potential new ways of relating, emotions, and ethics as well as the non-centrality and optional aspects of sex (Cardoso, Pascoal, et al., 2021). Conversely, monogamous individuals without interest or experience in CNM provide definitions focused on behaviors (or lack thereof) related to commitment and cohabitation and deemed sex as a requirement in CNM relationships (Cardoso, Pascoal, et al., 2021) and are more likely to dehumanize those in CNM relationships (Rodrigues et al., 2021b).
Taken together, the research on stigma and CNM suggests that individuals in CNM must navigate unique challenges to managing their relationships in a society that does not view them as valid forms of romantic and sexual relating. Thus, this dissertation hopes to answer the call to better serve this population through understanding their specific experiences in their committed relationships (Brewster et al., 2017) through the lens of Relational Turbulence Theory (Solomon et al., 2016) and as well as their identity gaps as CNM individuals with the LGBTQIA+ community aided by Communication Theory of Identity (Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2005).

**The Relational Turbulence Model**

Solomon and Knobloch (2004) first proposed the Relational Turbulence Model (RTM) to explain the unstable period during the transition from casually dating to a committed relationship and has since been expanded to examine a variety of transitions and overarching perceptions of quality in romantic relationships. While the RTM has received overwhelming empirical support (see Goodboy et al., 2020 for meta-analytic review), there were decades of research on uncertainty, a central concept of RTM, prior. Berger and Calabrese's (1975) Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) first conceptualized uncertainty as inherently negative and assumes that individuals are always motivated to reduce it in the context of initial interactions and that liking in interpersonal relationships would be negatively associated with uncertainty. Here, experiences of uncertainty rendered an individual unable to describe, predict, or explain social behavior of a communication interactant (Berger & Gudykunst, 1991).

A decade later, Sunnafrank (1986) introduced their own perspective on uncertainty in response to mixed findings which indicated that not all individuals are motivated to reduce uncertainty under all circumstances. Predicted Outcome Value Theory (POVT) reconceptualized uncertainty as having both behavioral and cognitive components and claimed that individuals
base their motivation to reduce uncertainty on the predicted outcome value of having an interpersonal relationship with their interactant with the goal of maximizing relational outcomes. Problematic Integration Theory (Babrow, 1992) also did not conceptualize uncertainty as inherently negative and suggested a wider variety of meaning related to the construct (e.g., divergence from expectations, ambiguity, ambivalence, impossibility) and noted that it is not always possible to reduce uncertainty. Similarly, Brashers' (2001) Uncertainty Management Theory (UMT) suggests that there are a range of behavioral and psychological responses as a function of individuals’ appraisals of uncertainty-inducing stimuli and subsequent emotions. Anxiety Uncertainty Management Theory (Gudykunst, 1983) offers a perspective on anxiety and uncertainty experienced in intercultural communication interactions. Currently, the two most dominant perspectives on uncertainty are the Theory of Motivated Information Management (TMIM; Afifi & Morse, 2009; Afifi & Weiner, 2004) in which emotions and appraisals drive uncertainty management strategies and the expansion of RTM into Relational Turbulence Theory (RTT; Solomon et al., 2016).

Despite the heuristic value of URT, Knobloch and Solomon (1999) asserted that Berger’s conceptualization of uncertainty (Berger, 1988; Berger & Bradac, 1982) failed to capture the full breadth of the construct. Thus, they articulated the construct of relational uncertainty as being comprised of self-uncertainty (i.e., “occurs when people are not able to describe, predict, or explain their own attitudes or behavior;” Knobloch & Solomon, 1999, p. 262), partner-uncertainty (i.e., “emerges from an inability to predict the other person’s attitudes and behaviors within interaction;” Knobloch & Solomon, 1999, p. 262), and relationship uncertainty (i.e., “doubt about the status of the relationship apart from either self or partner uncertainty;” Knobloch & Solomon, 1999, p. 262). In their initial investigation to develop the construct, they
found that self- and partner-uncertainties pertained to desire for the relationship, evaluation of the relationship, and goals for the relationship, while relationship uncertainties pertained to behavioral norms for the relationship, mutuality of feelings between the partners, current definition of the relationship, and future of the relationship. Furthermore, they reported that while self and partner uncertainty were empirically distinct, relationship uncertainty cross-loaded on both factors. However, there is considerable debate about the dimensionality of the construct. For example, Goodboy, Bolkan, et al. (2021) demonstrated the essential unidimensionality of relational uncertainty when subject to a bifactor-exploratory structural equation model (ESEM) in that, although the three sources of relational uncertainty can be modeled separately, relational uncertainty can be represented by a global latent variable as consistent with contemporary theorizing (Solomon et al., 2016).

After (re)conceptualizing uncertainty, researchers began testing their construct of relationship uncertainty alongside other variables. This led to the development and operationalization of key constructs like influence (i.e., in everyday routine and activities). As couples transitioned from casually dating into more serious relationships, they were thought to develop more interdependence (i.e., increased allowance for mutual influence such that typical behavioral sequences related to everyday routine are subject to more frequent disruptions, for better or worse). Both interference (i.e., disruptions in everyday activities) and facilitation (i.e., promotion of everyday activity), which are the consequences of this mutual influence and comprise partner interdependence, were first examined in college students’ dating relationships (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). This approach to conceptualizing interdependence was grounded primarily in Berscheid's (1983) emotional investment perspective. They also sought to understand how uncertainty influenced certain behaviors and experiences in romantic
relationships. They found that relational uncertainty was positively associated with experiencing cognitive jealousy (Knobloch et al., 2001), and negatively associated with directness of information seeking strategies in close relationships (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002a). Relational uncertainty was also positively associated with negative emotions (e.g., anger, sadness) and withdrawal, distancing, and distributive communication behaviors while negatively associated with positive emotions (e.g., happiness) and avoidance (Knobloch & Solomon, 2003). Increased relational uncertainty was also linked to negative cognitive appraisals of specific events triggering episodic uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 2002b). This scholarship led to the first attempt to model relational turbulence based on relationship parameters of uncertainty and influence (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004).

*Relational turbulence* was originally conceptualized as specific, tumultuous experiences within dating relationships, with particular interest in the negotiation of interdependence when transitioning from casually dating to a committed relational unit (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004). This transition is characterized by high uncertainty due to questions about the nature of the relationship, high interference as partners are beginning to learn how they influence each other’s routines, and high perceptions of turmoil due to the former (Knobloch, 2007). Thus, Solomon and Knobloch (2004) described this transition as a unique period of relating fraught with gradual changes in both relational uncertainty and interdependence as well as frequent relational irritations. Accordingly, the RTM has been used to investigate interactions like date request messages (Knobloch, 2006) and evaluations of emotional support following stressful situations (Solomon & Priem, 2016) in early dating relationships. In a cross-sectional study, individuals evaluated the severity and threat to their relationships as a result of such irritations and found that these negative appraisals were curvilinearly associated with intimacy and positively associated
with uncertainty and interference somewhat contrary to previous studies demonstrating a
curvilinear association between intimacy and reports of interference (Knobloch & Solomon,
2004; Solomon & Knobloch, 2001). Yet another study found topic avoidance in close
relationships was highest at moderate levels of intimacy (a relationship mediated by relational
uncertainty such that topic avoidance was even more pronounced when uncertainty was high)
and a positive direct association between relational uncertainty and topic avoidance (Knobloch &
Carpenter-Theune, 2004).

Knobloch and Solomon (2005) also found that relational uncertainty interferes with
individuals’ ability to process relational cues and information (e.g., perceptions of relationship
talk) due to the information deficit they possess in regard to the nature of their relationship,
which was also observed in videotaped conversations among married couples (Knobloch, Miller,
Bond, et al., 2007). Positive associations between both uncertainty and inference with threat of
relationship talk were also demonstrated cross-culturally (Theiss & Nagy, 2013). Similarly,
relational turbulence processes were also found to impact individuals’ appraisals of network
members’ behaviors in regard to their help and hinderance to individuals’ romantic relationships
suggesting turmoil pervades beyond the relationship in which it occurs (Knobloch & Donovan-
Kicken, 2006).

The first longitudinal investigations employing the RTM also revealed the ability of its
key constructs to predict communicative directness about relational irritations (Theiss &
Solomon, 2006a) as well as the importance of uncertainty reduction leading to increased
relational intimacy (Theiss & Solomon, 2008). However, another longitudinal investigation in
sample of college students revealed significant relationships between intimacy, uncertainty, and
partner interference which challenged those hypothesized by the RTM (Solomon & Theiss,
2008). The first test of the RTM on dyadic data though demonstrated actor and partner effects of relationship parameters on individuals’ appraisals of irritations in relationships (Theiss & Knobloch, 2009). However, partner interference seems to be less critical among romantic couples in collectivistic cultural contexts compared to those in highly individualistic cultures like the U.S. (Theiss & Nagy, 2012).

To more deeply understand responses to specific episodes increasing relational uncertainty, Knobloch (2005) developed a contextual model featuring intimacy instead in the distal context and appraisals leading to emotions in the proximal context. She found that emotions both predicted communicative responses to uncertainty over and above appraisals and also mediated the association between appraisals and behaviors. A later investigation also revealed positive associations between relational uncertainty and partner interference with negative emotions such as anger, sadness, fear, and jealousy and a negative association between partner facilitation and these emotions (Knobloch et al., 2007b). Additionally, as scholars increasingly shifted attention from *when* turbulence occurs in relationships to understanding the mechanisms which cause it, intimacy was no longer considered a key construct of the model and cognitions and emotions were prioritized as the mechanisms contributing to perceptions of turbulence (Knobloch & Theiss, 2010).

Knobloch (2008b) and Knobloch and Schmelzer (2008) also began to investigate how RTM constructs might impact message production in their investigations extending and applying the Emotion-in-Relationships Model (ERM; Berscheid, 1983, 1991). Taken together, they found that partner interference predicted decreased fluency of messages, uncoordinated conversation, and disaffiliative messages while partner facilitation predicted politeness and affectionate messages. Accordingly, Knobloch and Satterlee (2009) advanced six propositions about
relational uncertainty and communication in romantic relationships. In regard to message production, they proposed positive associations between relational uncertainty and severity of face threats, difficulty in planning messages, and indirect communication about sensitive issues. For message processing, they proposed that relational uncertainty would be associated with decreased ability to draw accurate conclusions from partner’s messages, confidence, and perceptions of their partner and relationship. Ivy and Gleason (2022) also provided a review of research suggesting that relational turbulence may impact several codes of nonverbal communication in romantic relationships (i.e., touch/affection, proxemics, oculistics, and vocalics).

Several studies have also demonstrated the influence of relationship parameters specified in the RTM on sexual intimacy, revealing that partner interference predicted increased challenges regarding sexual intimacy (Delaney, 2019). Relationship uncertainty also negatively predicted sexual satisfaction (Delaney, 2021) while relational uncertainty and partner interference led to decreased sexual satisfaction and more negative reactions to sexual activity (Theiss & Nagy, 2010) and increased perceptions of threat of engaging in sexual communication (Theiss & Estlein, 2014). Relational uncertainty also impacted sexual communication such that increased uncertainty is positively associated with indirect communication about sexual intimacy (Theiss, 2011) and about introducing a new sexual behavior (Harris et al., 2014). Additionally, while decreased perceptions of partner interference increased the likelihood of disclosing a positive HPV status, receiving such a disclosure was predictive of increased perceptions of partner interference (Harvey-Knowles & Faw, 2016). Relatedly, sex safety in extradyadic encounters (Lehmiller, 2015), rates of STI infection and testing (Levine et al., 2018), increased risk of STI infection (Lima et al., 2018), and sexual compliance (Rubinsky, 2020) present unique
concerns to individuals in CNM relationships. However, engaging in CNM relationships for more self-determined reasons is also associated with increased sexual need fulfillment and, in turn, sexual satisfaction (Wood et al., 2018). Interestingly, individuals in CNM relationships also report greater comfort and frequency in using internet pornography together compared to individuals in monogamous relationships (Rodrigues et al., 2021a).

Although there is no known published academic research to date investigating relational turbulence processes in consensually non-monogamous relationships, an unpublished thesis did provide some support for the relationships specified within RTT among couples who were transitioning from a monogamous relationship structure to some form of CNM (Bond, 2020). Specifically, Bond (2020) found that relationship uncertainty negatively predicted participants’ communication valence, partner facilitation positively predicted participants’ communication valence, communication valence for both participants and their partners negatively predicted relational turbulence, and relational turbulence was negatively associated with communication satisfaction. There have, however, been some published investigations of turbulence in other forms of alternative dating relationships. For example, in long distance relationships, it was found that partner interference mediated the relationship between geographic distance and relational turbulence such that turbulence was actually reduced as partner interference increased (Ellis & Ledbetter, 2015). One study also demonstrated that the accumulation of on-off relationship cycling transitions led to added turmoil for individuals in same-sex and different-sex relationships (Monk et al., 2018) while another showed that increased uncertainty as a result of turning points in on-again/off-again relationships was related to changes in communication quality (Dailey et al., 2016). These results are interesting in the context of this investigation given that CNM relationships are structured in variety of ways, as previously discussed (e.g.,
Conley & Piemonte, 2021; Flicker, Sancier-Barbosa, et al., 2021; Hangen et al., 2020), each likely with their own unique sources of, and implications for, relational uncertainty.

Also relevant is the wealth of scholarship investigating turbulence within military families and spouses as they transition post-deployment to reintegration with their loved ones (see Knobloch & Theiss, 2018 for review of relevant literature). Service members often experience depressive and posttraumatic stress symptoms during this transition which may lead to decreased relationship satisfaction; this relationship has been demonstrated to be exacerbated by both relational uncertainty and partner interference (Knobloch et al., 2013; Knobloch, Knobloch-Fedders, et al., 2019; Knobloch & Theiss, 2011a). Furthermore, there is evidence of both actor and partner effects of depressive symptoms on appraisals of turmoil during reunion following deployment (Knobloch et al., 2016).

Issues related to uncertainty during this transition include commitment, reintegration and daily life, household stressors, personality changes, sexual behavior and infidelity, health, and communication while partners interfered with everyday routines, household chores, sense of control and autonomy, parenting, social networks and activities, and quality time (Knobloch & Theiss, 2012). Relational uncertainty and partner interference have also negatively predicted openness and positively predicted aggressiveness for military personnel (Theiss & Knobloch, 2013), while positively predicting turbulence markers (Theiss & Knobloch, 2014), perceptions of children’s difficulty with reintegration (Knobloch et al., 2017), and topic avoidance (Knobloch & Theiss, 2017) for service members and partners during post-deployment reintegration. It is possible that some similar communication dynamics might be present in consensually non-monogamous couples as they reintegrate after extradyadic sexual or romantic encounters,
especially perhaps in poly-mono (i.e., one partner is polyamorous, and one partner is monogamous) relationship structures (Veaux & Rickert, 2014).

Conflict episodes and relational transgressions have also been the focus of a number of investigations framed by the RTM. For example, relational turbulence predicted intensity of hurt for women and men’s perceptions of their partner’s hurt following hurtful messages exchanged in heterosexual romantic couples (McLaren & Solomon, 2014). Self-uncertainty has been found to mediate the relationships between hurt and rumination, nonverbal forgiveness, and forgiveness after hurtful events by means of minimization of the hurtful event (Malachowski & Frisby, 2015). Relational uncertainty and interference from partners also predicted increased intensity of hurt, perceptions of intentionality, and damage to a relationship caused by hurtful episodes by romantic partners (Theiss et al., 2009). Turbulence, positively predicted by interference and negatively predicted by facilitation, also predicted intensity of hurt feelings, negative emotions, and perceived intentionality of hurt in response to hypothetical hurtful messages in premarital relationships (McLaren et al., 2011), and interpretations of hurtful messages from romantic partners as dominating or disaffiliative (McLaren et al., 2012).

Yet another study demonstrated that participants’ testosterone levels were negatively associated with self, partner, and relationship uncertainty during partner’s disclosures of severe relational transgressions (Crowley et al., 2018). Somewhat relatedly, relational uncertainty was also negatively associated with frequency and comfort in conversations with romantic partners about religious and/or spiritual topics, especially when partners had dissimilar religious affiliations (McCurry et al., 2012). Destructive communication patterns like demand/withdraw (Delaney & Sharabi, 2020) and serial arguments (Morrison & Schrodt, 2017) have also been linked to mechanisms of relational turbulence in couples.
Perhaps particularly relevant to this study, several scholars have also investigated RTM constructs as they relate to jealousy in romantic relationships, also a popular topic among CNM researchers as noted above (e.g., Balzarini et al., 2021; Flicker, Vaughan, et al., 2021; Rubinsky, 2019). Theiss and Solomon (2006b) found that self, partner, and relationship uncertainty were all positively associated with both cognitive and emotional experiences of jealousy in romantic relationships and that relationship uncertainty negatively predicted directness of communication about jealousy. Bevan (2011) discussed the importance of self-uncertainty as it relates to jealousy expression while Worley and Samp (2014) noted that self and partner uncertainty were directly related to communicative responses to jealousy.

The RTM has also been heuristic for investigating couples’ transitions into and related to married life like cohabitation (Steuber et al., 2014) and depressive symptoms in engaged and newly married women (Scott & Stafford, 2018). Categories of major transitions within marriage identified by participants include health issues, death of a loved one, birth of a child, relocation, job loss/change, crises involving children, empty nest, caring for elderly parents, and retirement (Brisini et al., 2018) while relational uncertainties within marriage are related to things like children, communication, career issues, finances, health, commitment, extended family, sex, retirement, religious beliefs, leisure time, and household chores (Knobloch, 2008a). Relational turbulence has been predicted by relational uncertainty and partner interference in early years of marriage (Farooq & Fatima, 2018) and has also been found to be associated with communication behaviors like counterarguing, source derogation, and negative affect when evaluating network support in light of marital conflict (Brisini, Solomon, & Tian, 2022).

Other researchers have focused on how relational turbulence impacts topic avoidance with in-laws (Mikucki-Enyart & Caughlin, 2018) and larger sociopolitical contextual
uncertainties for those in marginalized relationships (i.e., same-sex couples) entering the sanctity of marriage (Monk & Ogolsky, 2019). Individuals in CNM relationships may be similarly hesitant to disclose the nature of their relationship structure with family members and may even do so selectively with certain family members only or not at all, citing discrepancies between their lifestyles and family-of-origin cultures as well as concerns for social and financial security as reasons for withholding disclosures from their families (Rubinsky, 2018). Although polyamorous parents report several benefits to raising children with multiple partners (e.g., having more caregivers, improved communication and sensitivity in their children), they also experience unique parenting concerns in the face of mononormative culture and stigma associated with CNM (Landry et al., 2021).

Health-related transitions and changes in children’s lives are often significant stressors and relational uncertainty-inducing experiences for couples in committed relationships. Major health events, like a stroke, are often associated with changes in and/or renegotiation of interdependence (Abendschein et al., 2021). Likewise, one study also employed the RTM to investigate the unique stressors for couples in which one partner is a breast cancer survivor (Weber & Solomon, 2008). Ongoing turbulent conditions like depression have also been found to create uncertainty related to the depression as well as partner, self, and relationship uncertainty as well as partner interferences with personal well-being related to health, safety, and treatment in addition to interference with daily routines and the relationship (Knobloch & Delaney, 2012). Issues of infertility also present unique sources of uncertainty, like implications of blame, and interference, like violations for expectations in treatment involvement (Steuber & Solomon, 2008) and have studied alongside processes like privacy boundary turbulence while employing the RTM (Steuber & Solomon, 2012).
Regarding children, entering the empty-nest phase induces relational uncertainty predicting avoidant conflict behaviors and partner interference leading to indirectness, topic avoidance, withdrawal, and criticism in conflict episodes between spouses (King & Theiss, 2016). Sources of relational uncertainty during this transition have been identified by participants as new roles/identities, dependency anxiety, love/intimacy, and growing older as a result of relational changes like increased couple time, reduced structure providing increased freedom, increased communication, increased privacy, and new beginnings due to their status as empty nesters (Nagy & Theiss, 2013). New sources of partner interference were also identified in the midst of the empty nest transition including guilt, forced activity, and fulfilling household chores left vacant by absent children (Nagy & Theiss, 2013). In new parents, however, the RTM revealed that the combined impact of relational uncertainty and partner interference after the birth of the first child negatively predicted relationship satisfaction (Theiss et al., 2013).

The RTM has also been used to examine transitions in parent-child relationships like late-life parental divorce (Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2017) as well as in-law relationships. Investigations of parent-in-law relationships revealed links between relational uncertainty, topic avoidance, perceptions of in-group inclusion in the family, and relationship satisfaction for parents-in-law (Mikucki-Enyart, 2011). Relational uncertainty and partner influence have also been linked with interaction goals pursued for topic avoidance by parents-in-law (Mikucki-Enyart, 2018) while children-in-laws’ relational uncertainty is positively associated with biased appraisals of parents-in-law’s communication behaviors (Mikucki-Enyart, 2019). There were also negative associations between children-in-law’s relational uncertainty and their relationship satisfaction in their marriage and the parent-child-in-law dyad (Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2015).
Relational uncertainty has also been studied from a turbulence perspective within friendships. For example, everyday talk on Facebook among friendships in older adults mediated the negative relationship between relational uncertainty and closeness because everyday talk on Facebook allowed participants to manage their interdependence online (Ledbetter & Keating, 2015). In cross-sex friendship dyads, desire for romance increased relationship uncertainty, especially when desire for romance was moderate (i.e., moderate levels of desire for romance predicted high levels of uncertainty), and also decreased performance of common maintenance behaviors and increased third-party inquiries about their friends’ romantic interests for women (Weger & Emmett, 2009). Relatedly, scholars have also examined the nature of conversations among friends about uncertainty within their romantic relationships and discovered that participants shared more information about their relationship and that information was more accurate and positively valenced when they expected positive outcomes and efficacy related to their uncertainty (McManus et al., 2019).

Relational uncertainty defined by Knobloch and Solomon (1999) as comprised of self, partner, and relationship uncertainty has also been applied as a key construct in many other investigations of communication dynamics in close relationships. In the case of affection deprivation in romantic relationships, relational uncertainty moderates the relationships between deprivation and closeness and commitment (Hesse & Mikkelson, 2017). Another study found that relational uncertainty was positively associated with trait alexithymia (i.e., decreased ability to identify and articulate one’s own emotions) and that alexithymia and relational uncertainty jointly negatively predict intended levels of self-disclosure (Hesse et al., 2012). Relatedly, relational maximization was positively related to relational uncertainty (Mikkelson et al., 2016). Van Kelegom and Wright (2013) also argued that imagined interactions can be used to manage
relational uncertainty while relationship-specific-rumination was positively associated with one’s own relationship and partner uncertainty as well as partner’s relationship and self uncertainty (Imai et al., 2016). Finally, relationship uncertainty has a negative association with sexual desire in online encounters and established relationships (Birnbaum et al., 2018). Taken together, the implications of this extensive body of literature investigating and applying the RTM provided far more than enough evidence to merit the extension of the RTM into Relational Turbulence Theory (RTT; Solomon et al., 2016).

**Relational Turbulence Theory**

As the focus of relational turbulence scholarship continued to shift from viewing relational turbulence as discrete tumultuous experiences during relational transitions to a more global assessment of the quality of the relationship based on relational uncertainty and interference which may shape subjective experiences, Solomon et al. (2016) advanced Relational Turbulence Theory (RTT). RTT advanced the RTM (Solomon & Knobloch, 2001, 2004) in three key ways: 1) the RTM treated relational uncertainty and interference as forces shaping experiences in relationships whereas RTT articulates the processes through which these parameters shape cognitions and emotions during these experiences; 2) RTT elaborates on the causal relationships between these cognitions and emotions as they relate to communication behaviors and outcomes; and 3) RTT clarifies how the accumulation of specific experiences may lead to global perceptions of a relationship as tumultuous and how classifying a relationship as such influences resultant communication and outcomes. Thus, the heuristic value of relational turbulence scholarship was enhanced by advancing theoretical claims for more specific empirical testing, that can be more precisely applied to specific episodes and contexts, and, again, reconceptualizing relational turbulence as a global quality of romantic relationships. Please see
Table 1 for a complete list of RTT’s theoretical axioms and propositions, to be discussed further below.

Table 1

Axioms and Propositions of RTT from Solomon et al. (2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Axiom</th>
<th>Proposition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I)</td>
<td>I) Relational uncertainty undermines comprehension of specific episodes (p. 513). Through its effect on comprehension, relational uncertainty causes people to form more biased cognitive appraisals of specific episodes (p. 513).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II)</td>
<td>II) Interruptions from a partner, particularly those that interfere with everyday routines, heighten affective arousal (p. 515). Through their effect on affective arousal, interruptions from a partner, particularly those that interfere with everyday routines, cause people to experience more intense emotions in response to specific episodes (p. 515).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III)</td>
<td>III) Biased cognitive appraisals inform conceptions of specific episodes (p. 517). Through their effect on conceptions of specific episodes, biased cognitive appraisals cause people to respond with communication that is more or less engaged and positively or negatively valenced (p. 517).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV)</td>
<td>IV) Emotions elicited by specific episodes have action tendencies (p. 517). Through their effect on action tendencies, intense emotions cause people to respond with communication that is more or less engaged and positively or negatively valenced (p. 517).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V)</td>
<td>V) Experiences of specific episodes characterized by biased cognitive appraisals, strong emotions, and polarized communication coalesce into a sense of chaos within the relationship (p. 519). Through their effect on perceptions of chaos within the relationship, experiences of specific episodes characterized by biased cognitive appraisals, strong emotions, and polarized communication cause global evaluations of the relationship as turbulent (p. 519).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI)</td>
<td>VI) Global evaluations of the relationship as turbulent decrease the psychological distance for construals (p. 522). Through their effect on the psychological distance for construals, global evaluations of the relationship as turbulent affect a variety of personal, relational, and social outcomes (p. 522).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII)</td>
<td>VII) Global evaluations of the relationship as turbulent disrupt dyadic synchrony (p. 522). Through their effect on dyadic synchrony, global evaluations of the relationship as turbulent affect a variety of personal, relational, and social outcomes (p. 522).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is important to note that, although not included as a core construct in RTT, transitions in relationships are unique periods of discontinuity in an otherwise stable relationship that present opportunities for relational reorganization, growth, or decay due to the possibly heightened salience of relational uncertainty and interdependence processes. Thus, Solomon and colleagues (2016) acknowledged the relevance of transitions—or changes in the relational environment—to RTT, but do not define transitions as necessary nor a scope condition due to the difficulty in falsification and operationally defining them as a construct. RTT instead proposes that relational uncertainty undermines interactants ability to process specific episodes (i.e., discrete communication experiences) in the context of romantic relationships because these individuals lack insight to the nature of the relationship and make judgments about the relationship in relation to the episode without complete information (Axiom I). Such ambiguity leads individuals to form biased cognitive appraisals (i.e., distortions in information processing) of these episodes (Proposition I) that can be positively or negatively valenced. Concurrently, RTT assumes that interference from partners leads to increased affective arousal (Axiom II) leading to increased intensity of emotions felt during specific episodes (Proposition II).

Building off the logic of the previous axioms and assumptions of RTT, the next sets of axioms and propositions unite constructs of cognitive appraisals, emotions, and communication. Specifically, as biased cognitive appraisals guide individuals’ conceptions of specific episodes (Axiom III), they influence the degree of communication engagement (i.e., decisions to communicate vs. withdraw or avoid; also degree of communicative directness) and whether it is positively (i.e., characterized by integrative and constructive communication behaviors) or negatively (i.e., characterized by distributive and destructive communication behaviors) valenced (Proposition III). Similarly, as emotions are linked to particular action tendencies (Axiom IV),
emotions will also influence *communication engagement* and *valence* (Proposition IV). These experiences characterized by high biased cognitive appraisals, intense emotion, and (usually negatively) polarized communication accumulate to inform global perceptions of a relationship as turbulent (i.e., “tumultuous, unsteady, fragile, and chaotic” Solomon et al., 2016, p. 518; Proposition V) due to frequent challenges and depletion associated with the relationship (Axiom V).

Perceptions of relationships as turbulent are theorized to impact processes of *relational construal* and *dyadic synchrony*. Specifically, as relationships are characterized as turbulent, individuals become preoccupied with such negativity and decrease psychological distance for construals causing them to think about the relationship in more concrete, pragmatic, and instrumental ways (e.g., vs. idealistically; Axiom VI) which in turn drive personal, relational, and social outcomes (Proposition VI). Similarly, perceptions of relationships as turbulent disrupt dyadic synchrony (i.e., highly coordinated interaction patterns; Axiom VII) which in turn also influences personal, relational, and social outcomes (Proposition VII). Additionally, RTT notes the imperality of reciprocal effects of communication such that communication between partners, itself, can also influence cognitions and emotions resulting from specific episodes as well as the relationship parameters (i.e., relational uncertainty and interference from a partner) which in turn influence these responses. Specifically, RTT expects that engaged and positively valenced communication likely reduces relational uncertainty and increases facilitation whereas disengaged and negatively valenced communication likely exacerbates relational uncertainty and partner interference.

RTT has enhanced scholarship in various contexts explored through the lens of RTM and has also prompted some scholars to investigate relational turbulence processes in new territories.
For example, RTT has been particularly heuristic in the context of military service members’ and couples and their experiences with turbulence during and post-deployment and has provided support for the theory’s predictions about relationship parameters, turbulence, and communication outcomes. Partner uncertainty negatively predicted partner support (Knobloch, Basinger, & Theiss, 2018), relational turbulence negatively predicted verbal and nonverbal affectionate communication over time (Knobloch et al., 2022), while self and partner uncertainty were positively associated with perceptions of turbulence for both service members and at-home partners (McAninch et al., 2021).

RTT has been employed in qualitative investigations of turbulence in this context as well. One study explored National Guard couples’ perceptions of communication approaches that led to positive outcomes (i.e., planning and established expectations, routine and regularity, addressing problems in the moment, flexibility and realistic expectations, extra effort, and consistency and connection) and those that led to negative outcomes (i.e., observation of home life, passive social media use, and shallow communication) through an RTT lens (Blow et al., 2022). These findings are in line with RTT’s claims about communication engagement and valence as leading to positive vs. negative outcomes for partners. Knobloch, Basinger, and colleagues (2018) also investigated how individuals manage relational uncertainty in military life, particularly how they sought support online in response to intense emotional experiences in light of suspected deception or changes in the relationship. Researchers have suggested that suspicions of infidelity and perceived changes in the relationship may lead to a cycle of turmoil for military couples characterized by frequent conflict, psychological distress, and (re)appraisals of turbulence leaving individuals feeling conflicted about their relationships (Monk et al., 2020).
Relatedly, suspicion regarding partner deception and trust predicted relational uncertainty over time during the post-deployment transition (Knobloch et al., 2021).

Exploration of married life has also been a focus of turbulence scholarship as RTT theorists claim the merit of unique operationalization of its key constructs within the context of marriage (Solomon & Brisini, 2017). Although, RTT constructs have also been operationalized in the context of college students’ romantic relationships (Brisini & Solomon, 2019) and their theoretical relationships investigated with rigorous longitudinal methods (i.e., latent growth curve modeling; Shin et al., 2022). Tests of RTT in marriage have provided some support for many of the propositions of RTT in that relational uncertainty was positively associated with taking conflict personally, cognitive jealousy, emotional jealousy, and negative affect (Solomon & Brisini, 2019). Partner interference was also linked to negative affect for wives and avoidance for men while partner facilitation was associated with directness of communication about hurt as well as negative affect and topic avoidance for men, but was surprisingly also associated with cognitive jealousy (Solomon & Brisini, 2019). Another study examining college dating relationships also found that partner interference and facilitation predicted biased appraisals and that relational uncertainty predicted negative emotions, further highlighting the utility of assessing less restrictive models of the constructs specified within RTT (Bolkan et al., 2023). Evidence of moderating effects of partner interdependence have also been found in a recent study, such that increased partner facilitation may lessen the negative impact of partner interference on relational turbulence, especially in seriously committed couples compared to those casually dating (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2022).

A study operationalizing dyadic synchrony as comprised of conversational comfort/ease and coordinated communication and authenticity found direct effects of both relational
uncertainty and relational turbulence on dyadic synchrony as well as an indirect effect of relational uncertainty on dyadic synchrony through relational turbulence (Blalock & Bartle-Haring, 2022). Interestingly, though, a recent study did demonstrate that the mechanisms predicting turbulence differed based on spouses’ attachment style such that those with high attachment avoidance and anxiety experience more turbulence compared to securely attached individuals (Goodboy et al., 2022b).

RTT also was used to continue exploring turbulence processes in familial relationships outside of romantic partnerships (e.g., in-law relationships; Mikucki-Enyart & Reed, 2020). Transitions in parent-child relationships also continued to be a subject of interest for turbulence scholars (e.g., transition to college; Scheinfeld & Worley, 2018). One qualitative investigation of turbulence in parent-child relationships focused on transitions like the death of a spouse and parent where relational uncertainties concerned the relational context, future well-being, family functioning, communication about the loved one’s death, support, grief, and a general lack of certainty while interference manifested as shifting roles and responsibilities, changes in internal and external independence, expressive capacity, expectations, and how to avoid interference and increase facilitation (Droser, 2020).

Some scholars have explored turbulence alongside family communication patterns among parents and adult children in the wake of late-life divorce (Leustek & Theiss, 2020) and as they relate to topic avoidance among siblings (Miczo et al., 2021). These studies found that relational turbulence was positively linked to parents’ conformity orientation, adult children’s depressive symptoms, and negatively linked to adult children’s resilience following divorce (Leustek & Theiss, 2020) and that conversation orientation predicted increased facilitation and decreased interference while conformity orientation predicted increased interference among siblings.

Health-related transitions also remained an area of interest for turbulence scholars with the advancement of RTT, although attention shifted somewhat to family caregiving burdens and their impact on romantic relationships (see Knobloch et al., 2019 for review). Investigated alongside psychological reactance, increased partner interference led to increased perceptions of freedom threat causing reactance which in turn, surprisingly, decreased directness of communication about irritations in the context of providing care to aging family members (Ball et al., 2022). Interestingly, caregiving burden was linked with relational uncertainty, partner facilitation, and relational turbulence in their romantic relationship for caregivers, but not partner interference (Bevan et al., 2021). For spouses where one partner is diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, participants demonstrated greater concerns about future uncertainty after death rather than that which may be created by relational changes in interdependence as revealed in in-depth interviews (Cooper & Pitts, 2022). Relatedly, researchers have also begun to qualitatively explore dyadic dissolution as caregivers adapt to relational uncertainty and partner interference that which is caused by the death of their care partner (Buck et al., 2022).

Other chronic conditions such as type 2 diabetes (Leustek & Theiss, 2018) and infertility (Yoon & Theiss, 2022) has also been examined through the lens of RTT as well as the relationships between turbulence processes and health-compromising behaviors (Weigel & Shrout, 2020) and support marshalling as individuals strive to meet weight loss goals (Crowley et al., 2020). Also, intuitively, in couples where at least one partner has been diagnosed with
some chronic health condition, perceptions of relational turbulence have been shown to influence performance of a variety of maintenance behaviors (McAninch, Basinger, et al., 2022) and both actor and partner relational uncertainty was negatively associated with validating communication (McAninch, Delany, et al., 2022). However, among women post-miscarriage, partner interference did not influence the intensity of negative emotions and partner support was positively associated with relational uncertainty and partner interference, contrary to the relationships hypothesized by RTT (Tian & Solomon, 2020).

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was a particularly productive period for RTT scholars to explore how external transitions in the relational environment impacted turbulence processes among romantic couples. A longitudinal investigation of RTT during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated its theoretical utility providing support for many of its propositions as well as the reciprocal effects of communication and relationship parameters as romantic partners navigated the early stages of the pandemic (Jones & Theiss, 2021) and increased interference from partners also led to increased sadness and anger towards partners which in turn independently predicted perceptions of turbulence in marriages (Knoster et al., 2020). Relatedly, romantic partners reported that the pandemic caused changes in their relationships in regard to interdependence, intimacy, negative emotions, and communication forcing them to develop a variety of coping strategies (Jones et al., 2021) including resilience communication to facilitate dyadic coping (Lillie et al., 2021). However, stress from the pandemic also contributed to relational turbulence over time which undermined both dyadic coping and communal coping (Jones et al., 2023). The pandemic also directly predicted relational turbulence among college students in romantic relationships and negative emotions generally increased and were positively associated with partner interference and negatively associated with partner facilitation, effects
which exacerbated the impact of the pandemic on perceptions of the relationship (Goodboy, Dillow, et al., 2021).

Over time, relational uncertainty and interdependence also reliably predicted psychological distress manifested as somatization, anxiety, and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic (Estlein et al., 2022) and relational turbulence predicted depression among engaged women whose wedding planning was disrupted by the pandemic (Scott & Stafford, 2021) and interfered with ability to process communication with others in their social network and the communication valence of these interactions in turn impacted perceptions of relational turbulence over time (Brisini & Solomon, 2022). In parent-child relationships, college students’ support seeking communication and perceptions of received support from parents decreased as self uncertainty, interference from parents, and relational turbulence increased while parent facilitation was associated with increases of both which in turn were negatively associated with mental health symptoms and distress (Worley & Mucci-Ferris, 2021). After the pandemic, as college students transitioned back to in-person learning, communication engagement about the move back led to decreased relational uncertainty, partner interference, and increased partner facilitation (Brisini, 2022).

There is also a growing body of scholarship investigating relational turbulence among parents who have a child diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). When children with ASD went through life transitions (i.e., diagnosis and/or professional/medical intervention, starting school and other school-related transitions, puberty and adulthood, developmental transitions, geographic relocation) increased communication engagement from spouses about the transition negatively predicted partner uncertainty, while one’s own engagement positively predicted partner uncertainty, which in turn predicted relationship uncertainty leading to
perceptions of relational turbulence, in line with RTT (Brisini & Solomon, 2018). Spouses with children with ASD may also be classified as resilient, getting by, or asymmetrically engaged as they navigate high and lows resulting from their child beginning school (Brisini, Tian, & Solomon, 2022).

Similar results were achieved among spouses whose children with neurotypical development (NTD) were navigating major life events in addition to communication engagement’s positive and negative associations with partner facilitation and interference, respectively (Brisini & Solomon, 2020a). Relational turbulence has also been linked to negative perceptions of network support in regard to marriage and parenting for husbands and for parenting for wives among spouses with children with ASD (Brisini & Solomon, 2020b). Additionally, self uncertainty, in particular, appears to be more predictive of taking conflict about children personally for parents with children with ASD compared to those whose children have NTD (Brisini & Solomon, 2020c) and increased relational turbulence is strongly associated with ineffective arguing among spouses with children with ASD (Brisini & Solomon, 2021).

Additional recent turbulence scholarship has primarily focused on operationalization of constructs articulated within (e.g., relational construal level; Li & Solomon, 2022) and related to RTT. A line of research by Stein and colleagues has developed and validated measures of network interdependence (Stein, 2019; Stein & Davidson, 2019) and network-based relational uncertainty (Stein, 2021; Stein et al., 2020) towards the goal of moving beyond dyads to examine turbulence processes among social networks. There has also been greater interest in giving attention to the power of partner facilitation predicting emotion as studies have both shown equivalent (Quaack et al., 2022) and greater (Stein, 2020) predictive ability of facilitation on positive emotions compared to partner interference predicting negative emotion. An alternative,
person-centered (vs. variable-centered) approach to studying RTT in marriage also demonstrated full support for axioms and propositions within the RTT using latent variable mixture modeling techniques (Goodboy et al., 2022a). Spouses in this study were classified as Uncertain/Disruptive, Certain/Independent, Moderate, Certain/Helpful, or Uncertain/Influential based on relational uncertainty and interdependence parameters and spouses classified other than Certain/Helpful experienced relatively and varying increased threat of relationship talk, negative emotions, and relational turbulence, in line with RTT (Goodboy et al., 2022a). Application of such rigorous quantitative methodologies show promising avenues for continued development and theorizing on relational turbulence.

**Communication Theory of Identity and Identity Gaps**

While other identity theories (e.g., Social Identity Theory; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) consider communication as a means to enact identity, Communication Theory of Identity (CTI; Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2005) claims that individuals internalize communication as identity itself. The basic premise of CTI states that identity is an inherently communicative process to be understood via communication rituals and message transaction where messages represent symbolic linkages among/between people used to enact identity. That is, an individual’s sense of self guides their social behavior and is emergent, (re)defined, formed, maintained, and modified through social and communicative interactions to externalize one’s internal sense of identity.

CTI was originally derived out of interest to explain ethnic and cultural similarities and differences in what is considered successful (i.e., effective and competent) communication (e.g., Collier et al., 1986; Hecht et al., 1990, 1993) but has since been used to study ethnic labeling and ethnicity (e.g., Jung, 2020; Warren et al., 2010) and (cultural) identity negotiation (e.g., Catalano et al., 2016; Daniels & Rittenour, 2018; Faulkner & Hecht, 2011). CTI has also been applied in
health communication contexts to understand illness identity (e.g., Paige et al., 2019; Voorhees, 2022), health decision-making (e.g., Krieger et al., 2015; Palmer-Wackerly et al., 2018; Weaver et al., 2021), how individuals use healthcare technologies (e.g., Upshaw, 2021; Warren & Sukumar, 2013), and health message design (see Hecht & Choi, 2012). Scholars have also explored issues related to gender through the lens of CTI including transgender identities (e.g., Nuru, 2014; Wagner et al., 2016), gendered professional identity work (e.g., Compton, 2016; Compton & Brandhorst, 2021; Riemenschneider et al., 2019), and gender identity performance in sports (e.g., Bush, 2016; Zanin et al., 2022). One study also used CTI as a framework to investigate how individuals’ identities intersect with dialogical wisdom to inform their decisions whether or not to engage in social protest (Compton, 2019).

Most notably though, the theory has been extended to more deeply understand the gaps between CTI’s proposed layers of identity (e.g., Maeda & Hecht, 2012). CTI posits four interpenetrating (i.e., juxtaposed, not separate, and having dialectical tensions) layers or frames of identity: personal, enacted/enactment, relational, and communal. The personal layer of identity refers to one’s internal sense of, and expectations for, oneself and according motivations for social behavior including cognitions, feelings, and spiritual sense informing self-concept/image. The enactment layer of identity refers to emergent social behavior and messages exchanged through communication, regardless of whether any part of the content of the message directly addresses identity or not. Because communication has both content and relational levels of meaning, the relational layer of identity refers to the mutual construction of identity through social interaction as people define themselves in relation to, and as part of, their relationships with important others, those of which also take on identities themselves. Finally, the communal layer of identity refers to collective identities, histories, and values that are jointly held,
(re)produced, and taught to new members. Each layer or frame of identity has a single or set of corresponding theoretical propositions along with CTI’s ten basic propositions (see Table 2 for all propositions of CTI).

### Table 2

**Propositions of CTI from Hecht et al. (2005)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Propositions (p. 263–264)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identities have individual, social, and communal properties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities are both enduring and changing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities are affective, cognitive, behavioral, and spiritual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities have both content and relationship levels of interpretation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities involve both subjective and ascribed meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities are codes that are expressed in conversations and define membership in communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities have semantic properties that are expressed in core symbols, meanings, and labels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities prescribe modes of appropriate and effective communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities are a source of expectations and motivations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities are emergent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposition for the Personal Layer (p. 264)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identities are hierarchically ordered meanings attributed to self as an object in a social situation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Proposition for the Enactment Layer (p. 264)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identities are enacted in social behavior and symbols.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Propositions for the Relational Layer (p. 264)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identities emerge in relationship to other people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities are enacted in relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships develop identities as social entities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities are meanings ascribed to the self by others in the social world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identities are hierarchically ordered social roles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposition for the Communal Layer (p. 264)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identities emerge out of groups and networks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Identity gaps were thus developed as one theoretical construct to describe one aspect of the interpenetrative nature of the personal, enactment, relational, and communal layers of identity, a weakness theorists claim was present in the original articulation of CTI (Jung &
Hecht, 2004). Identity is dynamic and fluid and while its four layers (i.e., personal, enacted, relational, and communal) coexist, they are not always wholly consistent with each other making identity gaps unavoidable and even, arguably, always present in some form, but it is the degree and types of gaps which implicate socio-relational processes (Jung & Hecht, 2004).

Jung and Hecht (2004) first operationally defined the *personal-relational identity gap* and the *personal-enacted identity gap* as discrepancies between personal identity and ascribed relational identity (internalizations of how others view them) and discrepancies in self-view and aspects of identity expressed in communication, respectively. They also found that both personal-relational and personal-enacted identity gaps were negatively associated with communication satisfaction, feeling understood, communication appropriateness, and communication effectiveness, but that the associations were stronger with personal-enacted identity gaps. Subsequent studies found that both personal-enacted and personal relational identity gaps also were predicted by acculturation and perceived discrimination among international college students (Jung et al., 2007; Wadsworth et al., 2008) and the personal-enacted identity gap positively predicted their depression (Jung et al., 2007) and negatively predicted their educational satisfaction (Wadsworth et al., 2008).

Among Korean immigrants, personal-enacted identity gaps were negatively predicted by intercultural communication competence and both personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps positively predicted depression (Jung & Hecht, 2008). Among college students in the U.S., personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps were also negatively predicted by communication competence and assertiveness, positively predicted by communication apprehension, and positively predicted depression (Jung, 2013). It is also possible to intentionally create personal-relational identity gaps by distancing oneself and dissociating from
family and friends (Goode et al., 2021) and can arise when personal views and behaviors of authority figures emerge in organizational contexts (Widiyanti et al., 2020).

*Relational-enacted identity gaps* describe discrepancies by which individuals perform identity in ways that are inconsistent with identities ascribed to them by others (e.g., displaying stereotypes inconsistent behavior as a person of color; Kam & Hecht, 2009). Relational-enacted identity gaps were positively associated with topic avoidance and negatively associated with communication satisfaction and relationship satisfaction with grandparents among college students (Kam & Hecht, 2009) and communication satisfaction with frequently contacted acquaintances (Jung, 2011). Relational-enacted identity gaps were also negatively predicted by communication competence and assertiveness, positively predicted by communication apprehension, and led to increased depressive symptoms (Jung, 2013). *Personal-communal identity gaps* (i.e., discrepancies between perceptions of oneself and perceptions of a community) negatively predict college students’ communication satisfaction, motivation, and general affect and positively predict intentions to leave their university (Murray & Kennedy-Lightsey, 2013), but there is also evidence to suggest that identity gaps in higher education contexts can be reduced through communication with instructors (Ramsey et al., 2019).

CTI has also been employed to study identity and identity gaps in family relationships. Adopted children revealed a relational-relational identity gap as they tried to navigate challenges and contradictions between their relationships with adopted parents and with birth parents and also experienced personal-relational identity gaps due to challenges within each of these parental relationships (Colaner et al., 2014). On the other hand, one case study also highlighted challenges and turning points associated with stepfather identity and the importance of enacted identity through their parental communication with their stepchild (Pettigrew, 2013).
enacted identity gaps have also been found to negatively predict relational intentions with family members among emerging adults (Phillips et al., 2018). Similarly, identity gaps negatively predicted communication satisfaction among grandparent-grandchild relationships which in turn decreased perceptions among grandparents that their grandchildren would provide care for them in the future and actual caregiving intentions among grandchildren (Pusateri et al., 2016).

Most relevant to this investigation though, is the growing body of literature investigating identity gaps within, and related to, romantic relationships in their various forms and contexts. In fact, CTI has been used to study couple identities in heterosexual relationships in the midst of conflict episodes and how they may affect stress and the ability to manage it during conflict (Merrill & Afifi, 2017). Intrarelationship couple identity gaps (i.e., discrepancies in how partners viewed their own relationship) predicted anxiety and stress among men and negativity among women (Merrill & Afifi, 2017) while extrarelationship couple identity gaps (i.e., discrepancies between how a couple views its identity and communicates it to others) were associated with heightened cortisol, salivary-alpha-amylase (sAA) reactivity, and delayed recovery from a conflict-inducing discussion task in a laboratory setting (Merrill & Afifi, 2017). Relatedly, couple-enacted identity gaps have also been examined in how they influence public performances by married couples (Kennedy-Lightsey et al., 2015). CTI has also been used as lens to examine how international graduate students and their spouses see themselves, communicate with each other, and navigate their social roles in a new country (de la Serna, 2021).

Most notably, the work of Rubinsky and colleagues speaks directly to the impact of identity and identity gaps in romantic relationships that defy heteronormativity (Rubinsky, 2021, 2022; Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018) as well as mononormativity (Rubinsky, 2019) via the
Some women and gender minorities define sexuality—and even sex itself—as an enacted identity in the context of relationships with others, but this narrow definition of sexuality as enactment may also function to strain communal identity negotiation for those whose current sexual and romantic partnerships do not necessarily reflect the full scope of their sexuality (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018). Building on this logic, Rubinsky (2021) sought to create a typology of identity gaps in communication among sexual partners defying hetero- and mononormativity.

According to this typology, gaps related to personal identity were a consequence of conversations about and communicative behaviors like using sex as relational maintenance, engaging sexual compliance, faking pleasure, sexual fantasy discourse, sharing traumatic histories, sexual jealousy, insecurity, and sexual safety. Gaps with communal identity stemmed from viewing sex as sexual and gender identity confirmation or invalidation, bi/pansexual erasure, gender diverse and transitioning gender identities, stereotypes about women, role switching, polyamorous perceptions of promiscuity, communal identity sexual compliance, and racialized experiences in romantic and sexual relationships for participants of color. Similarly, personal-enacted, personal-relational, and relational-enacted identity gaps negatively predicted sexual communication satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction for participants who identified as LGBTQ or practiced either polyamory or BDSM (Rubinsky, 2022) and communication satisfaction in polyamorous individuals (Rubinsky, 2019). Thus, CTI scholarship provides fruitful ground for the continued investigation of identity as a relational and communicative process which impacts and is simultaneously impacted by involvement in romantic relationships.
Rationale

A noteworthy limitation of RTT identified by seminal authors is the lack of the theory’s attention to issues of identity (Solomon et al., 2016). Concurrently, CTI theorists (Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2005) argued for its application alongside other major communication theories in order to generate a more complete picture of how communication influences identity and vice versa. Because identity and identity performance are fraught with dialectical tensions between individuals, society, and relationships, Hecht (1993) advocated that, to paint a more complete picture of identity, it is necessary to creatively combine CTI with other theories (e.g., RTT) and for methodological layering in investigations of identity to account for each method’s biases and blind spots thus warranting the merit of this study’s mixed methodological approach.

Additionally, CTI has also been employed previously to study conflict in romantic couples (Merrill & Afifi, 2017), identity gaps related to discrepancies between behaviors in romantic relationships and community membership and practices (i.e., religion and chastity; Leonard et al., 2022), romantic processes like attachment (Kennedy-Lightsey et al., 2015), and to studying jealousy and satisfaction within polyamorous relationships (Rubinsky, 2019), further meriting its inclusion in this investigation of relational turbulence processes in CNM relationships.

Friends with benefits have been noted as one type of relationship characterized by higher levels of uncertainty and lower levels of interdependence compared to exclusive romantic relationships but with only partner uncertainty being negatively related to satisfaction with the relationship (Stein et al., 2019). It is possible the unique nature of CNM relationships in regard to uncertainty and interdependence may similarly buffer the effects of self and relationship uncertainty or that perhaps individuals in CNM relationships are more adept in adapting to chronic uncertainty. Additionally, as partners navigate interdependence, emotions, love, and
stress in new relationships (King & La Valley, 2019) it is possible that turmoil experienced in
early dating relationships could have a ripple effect amongst the larger polycule (i.e., network of
relationships associated with a given CNM partnership). Both closing and intentionally
maintaining gaps between personal, relational, or enacted layer of identity have also been noted
as strategies to manage uncertainty regarding family members’ illness (Thompson et al., 2022).
So, it is possible that identity gap management as a coping mechanism may extend to CNM
partners as they encounter uncertainty related to their partners’ extradyadic romantic and sexual
relationships and encounters given that they are not within the individual’s control much like in
the case of an ill family member.

Notably, experiences of racial/ethnic discrimination have also recently been linked to
relational uncertainty in a sample of Latino/a young adults (Ogan et al., 2022). Although
individuals in CNM relationships are often highly satisfied relationally (Garner et al., 2019) and
sexually (Muise et al., 2019), they are still perceived negatively (Grunt-Mejer & Campbell,
2016) and dehumanized (Rodrigues et al. 2021b) within larger mononormative culture. Thus,
CNM individuals recognize that they are stigmatized (Valadez et al., 2020) and may withhold
disclosures about their relationship from important others such as family members (Rubinsky,
2018) and even internalize this stigma themselves (Moors, Schechinger, et al., 2021). Because
perceptions of CNM stigma may be internalized this way and also influence communication
behaviors with family members, it logically follows that experiencing uncertainty and/or
turbulence within CNM relationships may yield consequences to communication within them as
well as perceptions of the relationship as being stigmatized. Following the logic of RTT’s first
five propositions (see Table 1), this study posits the following hypotheses.
H1: Among individuals in CNM relationships, (a) self uncertainty and (b) partner uncertainty will positively predict relationship uncertainty which will in turn positively predict (c) biased cognitive appraisals which will also be positively predicted by (d) self uncertainty.

H2: Among individuals in CNM relationships, (a) partner interference will positively predict intensified emotions and (b) partner facilitation will negatively predict intensified emotions.

H3: Among individuals in CNM relationships, (a) biased cognitive appraisals and (b) intensified emotions will negatively predict communication engagement and valence with partners and (c) biased cognitive appraisals and intensified negative emotions will be positively associated with each other.

H4: Among individuals in CNM relationships, (a) biased cognitive appraisals, and (b) intensified emotions will positively predict perceptions of relational turbulence and (c) communication engagement will negatively predict perceptions of relational turbulence.

H5: Among individuals in CNM relationships, (a) anticipated CNM stigma, (b) personal-enacted identity gaps, and (c) personal-relational identity gaps will be positively predicted by perceptions of relational turbulence.

Minority stress, or the tensions that are uniquely associated with membership in a marginalized social group and related experiences of stigmatization, is commonly experienced by members of the LGBTQIA+ community and considered a defining characteristic of relationships among sexual and gender minorities (Meyer, 2003). More recently, researchers
have called for a more intersectional perspective on minority stress (Cyrus, 2017) and have even investigated minority stress among those engaged in CNM, specifically (Mahar et al., 2022). Additionally, members of the LGBTQIA+ community may be more likely to engage in CNM compared to heterosexual peers. Approximately 45% of bisexual men and 32% of gay men (compared to 25% of heterosexual men) and 35% of bisexual women and 21% of lesbian women (compared to 16% of heterosexual women) report engaging in CNM at some point in their lifetime (Haupert et al., 2017). Those who identify as heterosexual but still practice CNM may or may not consider themselves members of the LGBTQIA+ community, but experience similar stigma in that their romantic and sexual relationships are viewed as alternative, non-normal, or even problematic (Stults et al., 2022). Stigma for those in these alternative relationships can manifest in many forms, including threatened or actual violence, discrimination, and rejection from loved ones (Diamond & Blair, 2018). Accumulation of these adverse experiences has led to negative physical and mental health outcomes, risky sexual behavior, substance use and abuse, and even self-harm and suicide (Diamond & Blair, 2018). Those with LGBTQIA+ identities may also have difficulty coming out to family members and may even feel the need to do so repeatedly (Denes & Afifi, 2014) or may even reject identities that align with their enacted sexualities altogether (Rosik et al., 2021). Even when couples do successfully defy heteronormativity, they may still (implicitly) compensate and display both gender and wedding normativity in commitment ceremonies upon marriage (Kimport, 2012). It is likely that many of these experiences suffered by members of the LGBTQIA+ community extend to those who are in CNM relationships.

While personal-enacted, personal-relational, and enacted-relational identity gaps are thought to occur as a direct result of communication experiences (Jung & Hecht, 2004), this
study argues that communal identity gaps—an understudied phenomena in the identity gap literature—are a result of communication experiences as well. According to Social Identity Theory (SIT), an individual’s social identity is comprised of the groups (i.e., collectives of individuals who perceive themselves to belong to the same category) to which they belong, have emotional attachment to, and want to perceive and be perceived positively despite possibly low positions in social hierarchies (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). However, it is also important to recognize that while many CNM individuals do describe CNM as an important aspect of personal identity (Castro, 2021), still others describe it as relationship beliefs or preference, relationship status, or relationship agreements (Rubel & Burleigh, 2020).

CTI has been used to study reasons related to staying in romantic relationships characterized by abuse and intimate partner violence related to social stigma (Eckstein, 2019) and thus may be used to study other types of differently stigmatized relationships like those characterized as CNM in relevant communities like those who identify as LGBTQIA+. Further, I argue that communal-communal identity gaps may arise from a community not viewing CNM as an LGBTQIA+ identity in and of itself; communal-relational identity gaps may arise from denial of membership as LGBTQIA+ or negative relationships with others in the group; communal-enacted identity gaps in the context of LGBTQIA+ identity may arise as a result of intimate communication experiences, nonverbal expressions of identity through use of artifacts (or lack thereof), and participation (or lack thereof) in LGBTQIA+ group functions and/or collective action; and finally, communal-personal identity gaps may arise as individuals question their own group membership.

Because collective identity is difficult to observe, rendering operational definition of communal identity gaps challenging (Jung et al., 2007; Jung & Hecht, 2004; Wadsworth et al.,
2008), this study will investigate communal identity gaps using an emic approach (vs. etic) to studying gaps among CNM individuals and their identification with the LGBTQIA+ community. Thus, this study will gain an understanding of communal identity gaps among CNM individuals and the LGBTQIA+ community through analyzing participant responses to open-ended questions about their own views of their identities (e.g., Brooks & Pitts, 2016; Urban & Orbe, 2010). Given that various identity gaps have been reliably predicted by negative experiences like discrimination (Jung et al., 2007; Wadsworth et al., 2008) and communication traits and behaviors like communication competence (Jung, 2013; Jung & Hecht, 2008), assertiveness, and communication apprehension (Jung, 2013), it seems logical to examine the influence of relationship parameters and processes as outlined by the RTT. Thus, this study raises the following research questions. Please see Figure 2 for a visual representation of all hypotheses and research question two.

RQ1: What identity gaps are revealed by participant responses regarding their LGBTQIA+ identification as CNM individuals?

RQ2: Do perceptions of relational turbulence for individuals in CNM relationships positively predict (a) personal-communal, (b) enacted-communal, (c) relational-communal, or (d) communal-communal identity gaps?
Figure 1

*Conceptual Model of Hypotheses and Research Question 2*
Summary

This chapter provided an exhaustive overview of the RTM and its advancement to RTT. Consistent with its propositions, this dissertation hypothesizes that relationship parameters (i.e., relational uncertainty and partner interdependence) will influence experiences within CNM relationships (i.e., emotions, cognitive appraisals, communication engagement, and communication valence) which will in turn contribute to perceptions of relational turbulence influencing identity gaps and anticipated CNM stigma. This chapter also reviewed CTI with particular attention to identity gaps with empirical interest and research questions targeted towards gaps among CNM individuals regarding their identification as a member of the LGBTQIA+ and if perceptions of relational turbulence in CNM relationships predict the emergence of any particular forms of these identity gaps.
CHAPTER II

Method

Participants

Participants were 528 adults who are currently in a self-defined committed CNM relationship with at least one partner (e.g., primary partner, nesting/cohabiting partner, life partner) and that partner has added a new sexual or romantic partner within the past 12 months, ranging from less than one month to exactly 12 months ($M = 5.04, SD = 3.27$). Participants 18 years or older were eligible to voluntarily participate in this study with ages ranging from 18 to 90 ($M = 30.27, SD = 8.12$). Participants had been in a relationship with their committed partner ranging between less than one month and 456 months ($M = 39.68, SD = 59.55$). Participants characterized their relationships with their committed partner as an open relationship where non-monogamy is practiced separately ($n = 237$), an open relationship where non-monogamy is practiced together ($n = 177$), primarily one partner engages in non-monogamy ($n = 99$), monogamous ($n = 78$), not committed ($n = 9$), and other ($n = 38$). When asked if their partner’s beginning of their most recent partnership was the first time that the participant had personally been a part of a relationship structure where some form of CNM was practiced by either them or a partner, approximately half ($n = 280, 53.0\%$) of the participants answered yes, $n = 224$ (42.4%) answered no, and $n = 24$ (4.5%) participants elected not to answer this question.

Participants indicated that their partner’s most recent sexual encounter with someone other than themselves ranged from less than a month to 96 months prior ($M = 7.47, SD = 11.73$) to their participation in the survey. Participants’ own most recent sexual encounter with someone other than the committed partner that they identified at the beginning of the survey ranged from less than a month to 300 months prior to their participation in the survey ($M = 11.21, SD = $
Participants indicated that their committed partners had between 0 and 310 partners ($M = 3.17, SD = 14.28$) other than themselves and that they themselves had between 0 and 51 partners ($M = 2.56, SD = 3.70$) other than their committed partner that they identified at the beginning of the survey. Finally, participants characterized their overall relationship structure as polyamory ($n = 190$), open relationship ($n = 172$), non-hierarchical polyamory ($n = 133$), hierarchical polyamory ($n = 120$), monogamish ($n = 72$), relationship anarchy ($n = 69$), ambiamorous ($n = 53$), solo polyamory ($n = 48$), cheating ($n = 44$), swinging ($n = 37$), polyaffective ($n = 32$), monogamous ($n = 31$), vee ($n = 31$), triad ($n = 31$), polyfidelity ($n = 12$), polygyny ($n = 9$), quad ($n = 7$), polygamy ($n = 7$), polyandry ($n = 6$), and other ($n = 18$). Participants were able to select multiple options in order to fully capture their represented relational network amongst all their CNM partnerships.

Participants in this study identified as cisgender women ($n = 233, 44.1\%$), cisgender men ($n = 193, 36.6\%$), nonbinary ($n = 49, 9.3\%$), transgender men ($n = 10, 1.9\%$), transgender women ($n = 10, 1.9\%$), and other ($n = 20, 3.8\%$) with 13 participants (2.5\%) electing not to answer this question. Participants were primarily white ($n = 404, 76.5\%$), and Black/African American ($n = 36, 6.8\%$), Asian/Asian American ($n = 28, 5.3\%$), Hispanic/Latinx/Latine ($n = 15, 2.8\%$), Indigenous/Native American ($n = 12, 2.3\%$), Middle Eastern ($n = 2, 0.4\%$), and other ($n = 19, 3.6\%$) with 12 participants (2.3\%) electing not to answer this question. In terms of sexual orientation, participants were able to select multiple categories and identified as heterosexual ($n = 169$), polyamorous ($n = 149$), bisexual ($n = 140$), queer ($n = 108$), pansexual ($n = 98$), demisexual ($n = 50$), ambiamorous ($n = 46$), androsexual ($n = 40$), lesbian ($n = 31$), aromantic ($n = 27$), gay ($n = 21$), asexual ($n = 19$), monogamous ($n = 17$), gynesexual ($n = 9$), skoliosexual ($n = 7$), and other ($n = 18$) with three participants indicated that they preferred not to disclose their
sexual orientation. Participation in this study was voluntary. Please see Appendices A, B, and C for study advertisement and recruitment materials and cover letter.

**Procedures**

After IRB approval, participants completed an anonymous online survey administered via Qualtrics. Participants were recruited via snowball sampling via the author’s personal network, on social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, and Instagram), listservs and other professional resources for researchers interested in CNM, and correspondence with self-identified polyamory-friendly professionals. Participants were entered in a raffle to win one of eight $100 Amazon gift cards as incentive to participate. Participants were first asked to identify a single, committed partner (e.g., primary partner, nesting partner, life partner) so that this partner and relationship would be salient while responding to survey questions. Participants were then asked how many months ago their committed partner added a new sexual or romantic partner. They were also asked to respond to this open-ended question: “Please describe the nature of your committed partner’s most recent sexual or romantic partnership with someone other than yourself. Please provide as much detail as you are comfortable about how their transition of adding a new partnership affected your relationship. This impact can be positive, negative, or neutral, we want to understand your experience within this transition.”

To assess identity gaps with LGBTQIA+ identity towards the goal of the first research question, participants also answered the following open-ended question: “Do you identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community? Why or why not? Do you consider the form of consensual non-monogamy which you currently practice and/or identify with a sexual orientation in and of itself? Why or why not?” As detailed below, the survey was designed to measure variables from Relational Turbulence Theory (RTT; Solomon et al., 2016) as well as outcome
variables like anticipated CNM stigma (Stults et al., 2022) and identity gaps (Jung & Hecht, 2004), and demographic data including their self-identified relationship structure and extradyadic sexual and romantic activity (Hangen et al., 2020).

Instrumentation

Relational uncertainty. The Relational Uncertainty Scale (Solomon & Brisini, 2017) is an 18-item, three factor (i.e., self uncertainty, partner uncertainty, and relationship uncertainty) measure that asks participants to rate on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) their agreement with each statement about their relationship. The measure were adapted slightly to reflect all dating relationships rather than marriage. Sample items include, “I am sometimes unsure whether or not I want the relationship to last,” “I sometimes wonder how important the relationship is to my partner” and “I sometimes question how I should or should not behave around my partner.” Higher scores on these scales indicated increased uncertainty for all three subscales: self uncertainty ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.49$, $\omega = .941$), partner uncertainty ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.53$, $\omega = .951$), and relationship uncertainty ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.37$, $\omega = .916$).

Partner facilitation. The Facilitation from a Partner Scale (Solomon & Brisini, 2017) is a 5-item measure that asks participants to rate on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) their agreement with each description of their partner facilitating everyday goals or activities. The measure was adapted slightly to reflect all dating relationships rather than marriage. Sample items include, “My partner helps me in my efforts to make plans,” “My partner helps me to achieve the everyday goals I set for myself,” and “My partner helps me to use my time well.” Higher scores on this scale indicated increased facilitation ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.13$, $\omega = .906$).
**Partner interference.** The Interference from a Partner Scale (Solomon & Brisini, 2017) is a 5-item measure that asks participants to rate on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) their agreement with each description of their partner interfering with everyday goals or activities. The measure was adapted slightly to reflect all dating relationships rather than marriage. Sample items include, “My partner interferes with the plans I make,” “My partner interferes with whether I achieve the everyday goals I set for myself,” and “My partner disrupts my daily routine.” Higher scores on this scale indicated increased interference ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.41$, $\omega = .921$).

**Biased cognitive appraisals.** The Loneliness Scale (Afifi et al., 2020; adapted from Hughes et al., 2004) is a 4-item measure that asks participants to rate on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*) their agreement with each statement. Sample items include, “I feel alone in my romantic relationship(s)” and “I feel isolated from my romantic partner(s).” Higher scores on this scale indicated increased loneliness ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.47$, $\omega = .930$).

**Intensified emotions.** The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988) is a 20-item scale. This study asked participants to rate on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*extremely*) to what extent they felt each emotion. The 10-item negative affect subscale was used in this study. Sample items include, “Indicate to what extent you have felt this way during the past two weeks…” “(a) distressed,” “(b) irritable,” and “(c) afraid.” Higher scores on this scale indicated increased negative affect ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.11$, $\omega = .956$).

**Communication engagement/valence.** Knobloch and Theiss’s (2011b) measure of Enacted Relationship Talk is a 3-item measure that asks participants to rate on a 6-point Likert-
type scale ranging from 1 (actively avoided) to 6 (actively discussed) how much they have actively avoided discussing or actively discussed with their partner several topics about their relationship. The items are “During the past two weeks, we have actively avoided discussing or actively discussed…” (a) “our view of this relationship,” (b) “our feelings for each other,” and (c) “the future of the relationship.” Higher scores on this scale indicated increased enacted relationship talk ($M = 4.40, SD = 1.22, \omega = .824$).

**Relational turbulence.** The Relational Turbulence Scale (Solomon & Brisini, 2017) is a 4-item, 6-point, semantic differential scale asking participants to describe their relationship. The items are “Stable—Chaotic,” “Calm—Turbulent,” “Running Smoothly—Tumultuous,” and “Peaceful—Stressful.” Higher scores on this scale indicated increased perceptions of turbulence ($M = 2.97, SD = 1.43, \omega = .918$).

**Identity gaps.** The Personal-Relational and Personal-Enacted Identity Gap Scales (Jung & Hecht, 2004) are 12-item and 11-item measures, respectively, that ask participants to rate on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) their agreement with each statement. Shorter, 6-item versions of each scale were ultimately used in the final data analyses involving these variables because the negatively worded items in the scales led to model misspecification as detailed in the results section below. Items were adapted slightly to reflect the participant’s relationship with their committed partner, only. Sample items for the Personal-Relational Identity Gap Scale include, “I feel that my partner sees me as I see myself” (reverse-coded), “I feel that my partner stereotypes me,” and “I feel that my partner has wrong images of me.” Sample items for the Personal-Enacted Identity Gap Scale include, “I express myself in a certain way that is not the real me when communicating with my partner,” “I do not reveal important aspects of myself in communication with my partner,” and “I do not express the
real me when I think it is different from my partner’s expectation.” Higher scores on these scales indicated larger identity gaps for both personal-relational identity gaps ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.09$, $\omega = .920$) and personal-enacted identity gaps ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.17$, $\omega = .939$).

**Anticipated CNM stigma.** The CNM-Related Stigma Measure (Stults et al., 2022) is a 14-item, two factor (i.e., enacted stigma and anticipated stigma) measure that asks participants to rate on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) their agreement with each statement. This study employed the anticipated stigma subscale. Sample items include, “I worry that people will judge me because of my CNM relationship(s) and/or identity,” “I am afraid to tell potential partners about my CNM relationship(s) and/or identity,” and “I am afraid to tell my employer or colleagues about my CNM relationship(s) and/or identity.” Higher scores on this scale indicated increased anticipated stigma ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.91$, $\omega = .836$). Please see Appendix D for a complete list of measures and corresponding scale items included in this study.

**Data Analyses**

To test this study’s first four hypotheses, I conducted a latent variable path model in Mplus Version 8.9 using maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors (MLR) to handle abnormality of the data and full-information maximum likelihood (FIML) to handle missing data. To test my hypotheses, I tested a structural regression model employing a two-step approach (Kline, 2016; Mueller & Hancock, 2018). In the first step, I respecified the fully latent structural regression model as a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) measurement model to assess whether measurement model fit was acceptable. After finding acceptable model fit, I moved on to step two in which I reinserted the hypothesized structural relations between latent factors and examined direct and indirect effects posited by RTT. This approach was also used to
evaluate hypothesis five, assessing relational turbulence positively predicting (a) anticipated CNM stigma, (b) personal-enacted identity gaps, and (c) personal-relational identity gaps, via a separate latent path model.

To assess the first research question, responses to the second open-ended question (see above and Appendix D) were subject to content analysis using the phronetic iterative approach (Tracy, 2018) drawing upon Communication Theory of Identity (CTI; Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2005) and previous research exploring communal identity gaps (e.g., Murray & Kennedy-Lightsey, 2013; Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018). Codes were determined a priori and the responses first underwent a preliminary round of in vivo coding by the author towards the goal of revising the initial codebook. Two independent coders blind to the purpose of the study indicated that further revisions to the codebook were not required (see Appendix E for the final version of the codebook) and subsequently coded all responses. Intercoder reliability was assessed using Cohen’s kappa (i.e., kappa for communal-personal identity gaps = 0.713, substantial; kappa for communal-enacted identity gaps = 0.164, slight; kappa for communal-relational identity gaps = 0.351, fair; kappa for communal-communal identity gaps = 0.800, substantial). The two coders met to discuss any discrepancies in their coding in order to determine the final codes for all four variables (i.e., personal-communal identity gaps, enacted-communal identity gaps, relational-communal identity gaps, and communal-communal identity gaps) for each response. Each identity gap was coded as a dichotomous variable to be included in statistical analyses to address the second research question as noted above.
Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodological procedures that were employed in this dissertation. First, this chapter outlined the requirements for eligibility to participate in this study and participant recruitment efforts. The chapter also provided the procedures that individuals followed to participate in the study and the procedures for entering a raffle for one of eight $100 Amazon gift cards as incentive for participation. Additionally, this chapter summarized the measures which operationalized the study’s variables. Finally, this chapter outlined the data analysis procedures that the researcher used to test the study’s five hypotheses and evaluate research question two as well as the qualitative analysis used to evaluate the first research question.
CHAPTER III

Results

See Table 3 for bivariate correlations between unit-weighted composite scores and correlations between latent factors. The study’s first four hypotheses predicted relationships among constructs as specified in the first five propositions of RTT, that relational uncertainty (self uncertainty, partner uncertainty, and relationship uncertainty) would predict biased cognitive appraisals (loneliness); that partner interference and facilitation would predict intensified emotions (negative affect); that biased cognitive appraisals and intensified emotions would predict communication engagement and valence (enacted relationship talk); and that biased cognitive appraisals, intensified emotions, and communication engagement and valence would predict perceptions of relational turbulence among individuals in CNM relationships. To test these hypotheses, a structural regression model was conducted in Mplus Version 8.9 using a two-step approach (Kline, 2016; Mueller & Hancock, 2018) by first testing a measurement model to assess its fit to the data followed by a structural regression model specified according to the study’s hypotheses.
### Table 3

*Correlation Matrix*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Self Uncertainty</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>.858**</td>
<td>.897**</td>
<td>.819**</td>
<td>-.073</td>
<td>.768**</td>
<td>.772**</td>
<td>-.231**</td>
<td>.797**</td>
<td>.634**</td>
<td>.846**</td>
<td>.841**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Partner Uncertainty</strong></td>
<td>.816**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.951**</td>
<td>.725**</td>
<td>-.079</td>
<td>.792**</td>
<td>.727**</td>
<td>-.206**</td>
<td>.747**</td>
<td>.576**</td>
<td>.792**</td>
<td>.736**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Relationship Uncertainty</strong></td>
<td>.834**</td>
<td>.887**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.802**</td>
<td>-.062</td>
<td>.839**</td>
<td>.779**</td>
<td>-.224**</td>
<td>.804**</td>
<td>.604**</td>
<td>.830**</td>
<td>.775**</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4. Partner Interference</strong></td>
<td>.763**</td>
<td>.685**</td>
<td>.746**</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.084</td>
<td>.778**</td>
<td>.812**</td>
<td>-.130**</td>
<td>.794**</td>
<td>.702**</td>
<td>.859**</td>
<td>.868**</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5. Partner Facilitation</strong></td>
<td>-.070</td>
<td>-.074</td>
<td>-.057</td>
<td>-.077</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.108*</td>
<td>-.065</td>
<td>.694**</td>
<td>-.120*</td>
<td>.097</td>
<td>-.092</td>
<td>-.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Loneliness</strong></td>
<td>.718**</td>
<td>.749**</td>
<td>.772**</td>
<td>.714**</td>
<td>-.102*</td>
<td></td>
<td>.867**</td>
<td>-.221**</td>
<td>.797**</td>
<td>.625**</td>
<td>.804**</td>
<td>.773**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7. Negative Affect</strong></td>
<td>.733**</td>
<td>.696**</td>
<td>.735**</td>
<td>.766**</td>
<td>-.062</td>
<td>.809**</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.182**</td>
<td>.822**</td>
<td>.643**</td>
<td>.809**</td>
<td>.811**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. Enacted Relationship Talk</strong></td>
<td>-.199**</td>
<td>-.180**</td>
<td>-.185**</td>
<td>-.105*</td>
<td>.595**</td>
<td>-.186**</td>
<td>-.155**</td>
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<td>-.157*</td>
<td>-.047</td>
<td>-.224**</td>
<td>-.237**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9. Relational Turbulence</strong></td>
<td>.745**</td>
<td>.705**</td>
<td>.744**</td>
<td>.735**</td>
<td>-.114**</td>
<td>.738**</td>
<td>.776**</td>
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<td></td>
<td>.575**</td>
<td>.821**</td>
<td>.770**</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>10. Anticipated CNM Stigma</strong></td>
<td>.505**</td>
<td>.477**</td>
<td>.482**</td>
<td>.569**</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.496**</td>
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<td>-.035</td>
<td>.457**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.676**</td>
<td>.702**</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>11. Personal-Relational Identity Gaps</strong></td>
<td>.789**</td>
<td>.748**</td>
<td>.762**</td>
<td>.792**</td>
<td>-.086</td>
<td>.745**</td>
<td>.759**</td>
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<td>.755**</td>
<td>.538**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.933**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12. Personal-Enacted Identity Gaps</strong></td>
<td>.797**</td>
<td>.706**</td>
<td>.723**</td>
<td>.804**</td>
<td>-.078</td>
<td>.714**</td>
<td>.763**</td>
<td>-.196**</td>
<td>.717**</td>
<td>.564**</td>
<td>.866**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* *p* < .05. **p** < .01. Estimates above the diagonal represent correlations between latent variables. Estimates below the diagonal represent correlations between unit-weighted composite scores.
Regarding the measurement model, global fit was assessed using a robust chi-square test of model fit, which is asymptotically equivalent to the Yuan-Bentler T2* test statistic ($\chi^2_{YB}$), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) with its associated 90% confidence interval, comparative fit index (CFI), and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR). Contemporary recommendations for interpreting model fit indices differ among varying models (Chen et al., 2008; Hu & Bentler, 1999; Mueller & Hancock, 2018), so the following cutoffs were used as guidelines for the current study rather than a universal set of “golden rules” (Marsh et al., 2004, p. 321): an RMSEA value $\leq .08$ and $\leq .05$ was considered acceptable and excellent, respectively; a CFI value of $\geq .95$ and $\geq .90$ was considered excellent and acceptable, respectively; and an SRMR $< .08$ was considered acceptable. Local fit was assessed by examining correlation residuals for values exceeding $|.10|$ (Kline, 2016). Results of a CFA (i.e., the measurement model) fit the data reasonably well: $\chi^2_{YB}(1,091) = 2,002.233, p < .001$; RMSEA = .040, 90% CI [.037, .043]; CFI = .952; SRMR = .036. A further examination of correlation residuals did not indicate any patterns or major sources of model misspecification. Only a very small number of absolute correlation residuals exceeded .10 (i.e., 14, about 1% of the total correlation residuals with the highest being .15). Given that the model passed both global and local fit inspections, I proceeded to step two in which I reinserted the hypothesized structural relations between latent factors to examine the direct and indirect effects posited by RTT and the study’s first four hypotheses.

Results of the structural regression model fit the data reasonably well: $\chi^2_{YB}(1,109) = 2,379.892, p < .001$; RMSEA = .047, 90% CI [.044, .049]; CFI = .934; SRMR = .075. The first hypothesis was fully supported with (a) self uncertainty and (b) partner uncertainty positively predicting relationship uncertainty, which in turn predicted (c) biased cognitive appraisals, and
was also positively predicted by (d) self uncertainty. Hypothesis two was partially supported in that (a) partner interference positively predicted intensified emotions while (b) partner facilitation failed to predict intensified emotions. Hypothesis three was also partially supported in that (a) biased cognitive appraisals negatively predicted enacted relationship talk and (c) biased cognitive appraisals and intensified emotions were positively associated with each other, but (b) intensified emotions failed to predict communication engagement and valence.

Hypothesis four was also partially supported in that (a) biased cognitive appraisals and (b) intensified emotions positively predicted perceptions of relational turbulence, but (c) communication engagement and valence failed to predict perceptions of relational turbulence. Figure 2 and Table 4 summarize the results of the direct and indirect effects, respectively, among constructs outlined in the first five propositions of RTT and the first four hypotheses of this dissertation.
Figure 2

Original Structural Regression Model

Note. Unstandardized estimates with lower-limit and upper-limit confidence intervals represent 95% percentile bootstrap confidence intervals derived from 10,000 bootstrap samples. $R^2$ = Relationship Uncertainty (.93), Loneliness (.69), Negative Affect (.68), Enacted Relationship Talk (.05), Relational Turbulence (.70).
Table 4

Unstandardized Indirect Effects for Original Structural Regression Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indirect Effects</th>
<th>Est.</th>
<th>LLCI</th>
<th>ULCI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>SU → LON → RT</td>
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<td>-.007</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PF → NA → ERT → RT</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SU = Self Uncertainty. PU = Partner Uncertainty. RU = Relationship Uncertainty. PI = Partner Interference. PF = Partner Facilitation. LON = Loneliness. NA = Negative Affect. ERT = Enacted Relationship Talk. RT = Relational Turbulence. Lower-limit (LLCI) and upper-limit confidence intervals (ULCI) represent 95% percentile bootstrap confidence intervals derived from maximum likelihood estimations with 10,000 bootstrap samples.

Although the hypothesized structural regression model fit the data reasonably well and provided some support for the relationships among constructs specified RTT’s first five propositions, an examination of modification indices suggested that the model could be significantly improved. It is important to note, however, that modification indices are entirely data-driven suggestions and therefore should be interpreted with caution so to not improve the model based on chance, alone. Therefore, I conducted alternative model testing by respecifying parameters based on recent theoretical arguments. Recent applications of the theory have reported certain departures from RTT’s originally theorized relationships and have examined the predictive utility of parameters of relational uncertainty for intensified emotions as well as partner interdependence parameters for biased cognitive appraisals (Bolkan et al., 2023; Solomon & Brisini, 2019). Among the suggested modifications were adding paths from uncertainty to negative affect and from interference and/or facilitation to loneliness. Specifically,
in a stepwise pattern, I added paths from partner interference to loneliness, from partner facilitation to loneliness, and from relationship uncertainty to negative affect.

After adding the first path (i.e., partner interference predicting loneliness), results indicated that the model fit the data well: $\chi^2_{1, 108} = 2,311.410, p < .001$; RMSEA = .045, 90% CI [.043, .048]; CFI = .937; SRMR = .071. Furthermore, a scaled $\chi^2$ difference test indicated that the new model fit the data better than the previous model: scaled $\chi^2_{1}(1) = 45.436, p < .001$. Notably, though, the path from self uncertainty to loneliness became nonsignificant after adding this modification. Next, I added the path from partner facilitation to loneliness and results indicated that the model fit the data well: $\chi^2_{1, 107} = 2,307.610, p < .001$; RMSEA = .045, 90% CI [.043, .048]; CFI = .937; SRMR = .069. Furthermore, a scaled $\chi^2$ difference test indicated that the new model fit the data better than the previous model: scaled $\chi^2_{1}(1) = 4.169, p = .041$. I then added the path from relationship uncertainty to negative affect and, again, results indicated that the model fit the data well: $\chi^2_{1, 106} = 2,265.519, p < .001$; RMSEA = .045, 90% CI [.042, .047]; CFI = .939; SRMR = .062. Furthermore, a scaled $\chi^2$ difference test indicated that the new model fit the data better than the previous model: scaled $\chi^2_{1}(1) = 31.624, p < .001$.

The modification indices indicated that the chi-square value could be improved to a large degree by adding a path from partner interference to enacted relationship talk. While the previous three modifications had justification based on recent studies (Bolkan et al., 2023; Solomon & Brisini, 2019), because there was no theoretical rationale or justification for adding this modification, and there was no way to discern whether this was an idiosyncrasy of data or not, I refrained and alternative model testing ended here. Figure 3 summarizes the direct effects of the final structural model for the constructs specified in the first five propositions of RTT.
Figure 3

Final Structural Regression Model

Note. Unstandardized estimates with lower-limit and upper-limit confidence intervals represent 95% percentile bootstrap confidence intervals derived from 10,000 bootstrap samples. $R^2 = \text{Relationship Uncertainty} (.94), \text{Loneliness} (.76), \text{Negative Affect} (.72), \text{Enacted Relationship Talk} (.51), \text{Relational Turbulence} (.73)$.
Hypothesis five predicted that increased perceptions of relational turbulence would positively predict (a) anticipated CNM stigma, (b) personal-enacted identity gaps, and (c) personal-relational identity gaps. To test this final hypothesis, a structural regression model was conducted. The first attempt to run the model as specified in hypothesis five was unsuccessful and the model failed to converge. I examined the correlation residuals and the misfit appeared to be coming from all the negatively worded items in the model. I then implemented an orthogonal method factor to account for variance due to wording effects from these negatively worded items (DiStefano & Motl, 2006). Although the model converged successfully, model fit was poor: scaled $\chi^2 (509) = 1,551.478, p < .001$; RMSEA = .063, 90% CI [.059, .066]; CFI = .901; SRMR = .104.

Further examination of the correlation residuals indicated that there was still a pattern of high correlation residuals (e.g., -.312) isolated among the negatively worded items in the identity gap scales, even after implementing the orthogonal method factor. CTI theorists themselves have noted problems with their own personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gap measures and argued for using—and have implemented themselves—more parsimonious versions of the scales without the inclusion of these negatively worded items (Jung & Hecht, 2008). Given these considerations, I removed all negatively worded items from these two measures and ran the model again. This resulted in a better-fitting model $\chi^2_{YB} (224) = 697.500, p < .001$; RMSEA = .064, 90% CI [.058, .069]; CFI = .935; SRMR = .066, with only a few correlation residuals exceeding |.10| remaining. Measurement model fit and structural model fit were the same because there were no specified constraints in this model. Hypothesis five was supported with perceptions of relational turbulence positively predicting (a) anticipated CNM stigma, (b) personal-enacted identity gaps, and (c) personal-relational identity gaps (see Figure 4).
This study’s first research question inquired about which identity gaps were revealed by participant responses regarding their LGBTQIA+ identification as CNM individuals and the second research question sought to determine if perceptions of relational turbulence would predict communal-personal, communal-enacted, communal-relational, and/or communal-communal identity gaps. Although there was evidence of communal-communal identity gaps (i.e., gaps between participants’ identity as a member of the CNM community and identity as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community) in a significant portion of the responses, evidence of communal-personal, communal-enacted, and communal-relational identity gaps among our participants were scant. Given this, I determined that the second research question examining the ability of perceptions of relational turbulence to predict the emergence of these gaps could not
ethically or meaningfully be assessed (to be discussed in depth in the limitations section of this dissertation). Please see Table 5 for frequencies and examples of evidence of communal-personal, communal-enacted, communal-relational, and/or communal-communal identity gaps in participants’ responses to open-ended questions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communal Identity Gap</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communal-Personal Identity Gaps</td>
<td>n = 20, 3.8%</td>
<td>“I don't identify as a member [of the LGBTQIA+ community], although I am probably somewhere on the asexual spectrum.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I am ... constantly questioning my gender identity and my sexual orientation.”</td>
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<td>“I’m not sure what label works for me.”</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>“This is a question I have always struggled with.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I more identify as heteroflexible, which is interesting to me and something I'm starting to question a little.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communal-Enacted Identity Gaps</td>
<td>n = 19, 3.6%</td>
<td>“I personally feel like a fraud in the community as I lean towards hetero tendencies.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I have been read as queer my whole life but have mostly dated cis straight men, which has meant I haven't wanted to identify as queer and still retain all that privilege.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I've slept with a few women and kissed more than that. I think the reason I don't is because I don't really have any dating inclinations to the same sex, just purely casual sexual relationships, and I don't feel the same level of core attraction to the same sex as I feel towards men.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I am bisexual but generally don't tell people that because I come off as a stay at home married mom of three that most people just think I'm trying to get attention.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“I am queer but I don’t feel like I’m queer enough for many overtly queer spaces or to be a part of the LGBTQIA+ community since I mostly just look like a regular nerd.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communal-Relational Identity Gaps</td>
<td>n = 12, 2.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I am mixed (mainly Afro-Latino and Irish), and have been told many times that I'm not Black/Spanish/white enough, so I've always felt displaced. You can say the feeling is a bit similar to putting the Poly identity under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella.”</td>
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<td>“I want polyamory to be accepted by the LGBTQIA+ community, as we often feel like outliers, however I do not want to take away from those within the community when I know that many polyamorous people are heterosexual.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I am bisexual and I consider myself only partly welcome in the LGBTQIA+ community. I consider myself a bit of an outsider because there are a lot of misconceptions about being Bisexual. People assume you are a cheater always playing the field.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I consider myself a bit bisexual ... I have lived a hetero normative life as a cis woman in a (until recently) monogamous marriage with a cis husband, never living out that other side of me.”</td>
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<tr>
<th>Communal-Communal Identity Gaps</th>
<th>n = 177, 33.5%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I am a member of LGBTQIA+ but this is just a coincidence and has nothing to do with polyamory. There is no reason why a queer person would automatically be poly and a cis person who is also poly is still a cis person, not a queer person.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Of course polyamory is not a sexual orientation. It has nothing to do with sexuality or sexual attraction (gay, lesbian, straight, bi, pan, allosexual, asexual...) nor gender (cis, trans, non-binary, intersex...).”</td>
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<td>“I identify as member of the LGBTQIA+ community because I am a bisexual transgender woman and find my closest relationships and friendships among other trans people. I do not consider my current relationship practices to be a sexual orientation in and of itself.”</td>
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<td>“I don't consider non monogamy an orientation, it's a chosen relationship style.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“As far as polyamory goes, I'm not sure. I know for me, it's just how I've always been I just didn't have a word for it before ... but I also know for many people it isn't that way.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I don’t view non-monogamy as a sexual orientation in and of itself however I am queer and trans and my non-monogamy is an extension of my queer approach to relationships.”</td>
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</table>
Summary

The results from this dissertation provide some support for the first five propositions of RTT among a sample of committed consensually non-monogamous partners during the pivotal transition of participants’ partners adding a new committed partner to their polycule. Specifically, self uncertainty and partner uncertainty positively predicted relationship uncertainty, which in turn predicted biased cognitive appraisals, and was also positively predicted by self uncertainty. Partner interference positively predicted intensified emotions but partner facilitation failed to predict intensified emotions. Biased cognitive appraisals negatively predicted enacted relationship talk and was linked to intensified emotions, but intensified emotions failed to predict communication engagement and valence. Finally, biased cognitive appraisals and intensified emotions positively predicted perceptions of relational turbulence, but communication engagement and valence failed to predict perceptions of relational turbulence.

This dissertation also found evidence that parameters of uncertainty and partner interdependence may also be predictive of intensified emotions and biased cognitive appraisals, respectively. Additionally, perceptions of relational turbulence also positively predicted anticipated CNM stigma, personal-relational identity gaps, and personal-enacted identity gaps. Evidence of communal-personal ($n = 20, 3.8\%$), communal-enacted ($n = 19, 3.6\%$), communal-relational ($n = 12, 2.3\%$), and communal-communal ($n = 177, 33.5\%$) identity gaps with their identities as members of the LGBTQIA+ community were also found among a smaller portion of the participants’ responses to open-ended questions.
CHAPTER IV

Discussion

The primary goal of this dissertation was to test the first five propositions of RTT (Solomon et al., 2016) in a sample of committed CNM partners as they were navigating the transition of their own partner starting a committed relationship with a partner other than themselves. This dissertation successfully provided support for the first five propositions of RTT. Self uncertainty and partner uncertainty positively predicted relationship uncertainty, which in turn predicted biased cognitive appraisals (Proposition I), and was also positively predicted by self uncertainty. Partner interference positively predicted intensified emotions (Proposition II) but partner facilitation failed to predict intensified emotions. Biased cognitive appraisals negatively predicted communication engagement and valence (Proposition III) and was linked to intensified emotions, but intensified emotions failed to predict communication engagement and valence (Proposition IV). Finally, biased cognitive appraisals and intensified emotions positively predicted perceptions of relational turbulence (Proposition V), but communication engagement and valence failed to predict perceptions of relational turbulence.

The second purpose of this dissertation was to integrate CTI (Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2005) with RTT (Solomon et al., 2016) to explore the ability of relational turbulence to predict personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps (Jung & Hecht, 2004) as well as anticipated CNM stigma (Stults et al., 2022). Results indicated that relational turbulence positively predicted all three variables. Additionally, this dissertation found evidence of communal-personal, communal-enacted, communal-relational, and communal-communal identity gaps with participants’ identities as members of the LGBTQIA+ community among a smaller portion of the participants’ responses to open-ended questions. The theoretical
implications of these results for RTT and CTI scholarship as well as practical implications for those who are a part of and/or supportive of the CNM community will be discussed.

**Theoretical Implications**

The primary contribution of this dissertation to RTT (Solomon et al., 2016) scholarship is its demonstration of support for the theory’s propositions in a new context, specifically romantic relationships that defy the typical, dominant hetero- and mononormative perspectives in which this theory has been applied. RTT and the preceding RTM (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004) have been applied cross-culturally (e.g., Theiss & Nagy, 2012, 2013) and in early dating relationships (e.g., King & La Valley, 2019; Solomon & Priem, 2016), college dating relationships (e.g., Goodboy, Dillow, et al., 2021; Shin et al., 2022), and marriages (e.g., Brisini, Solomon, et al., 2022; Solomon & Brisini, 2019). Scholars have also investigated turbulence processes during conflict episodes (e.g., Crowley et al., 2018; Theiss et al., 2009), among military couples and families in the post-deployment transition (e.g., Knobloch & Theiss, 2017, 2018), among parents with children with autism spectrum disorder (e.g., Brisini, Tian, et al., 2022; Brisini & Solomon, 2018), and during health-related transitions (e.g., Knobloch & Delaney, 2012; McAninch, Delaney, et al., 2022) such as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Jones et al., 2023; Jones & Theiss, 2021).

Although RTT (Solomon et al., 2016) has also been applied to some non-traditional relationship structures like on-again/off-again relationships (e.g., Dailey et al., 2016), long distance (e.g., Ellis & Ledbetter, 2015), friends with benefits (e.g., Stein et al., 2019), and same-sex relationships (e.g., Monk et al., 2018), this study is among the first to examine RTT in romantic relationships that are not dyadic (e.g., Bond, 2020). Although transitions are not a scope condition of RTT, theorists have highlighted the relevance of changes in the relational
environment to turbulence processes (Solomon et al., 2016). Not only is the context of this dissertation novel to RTT scholarship, this investigation is also embedded in the midst of participants’ experience of an important transition specific to this relational context (i.e., the addition of a new committed partnership by a committed CNM partner).

In addition to its application in a unique context and context-relevant transition, this dissertation also—in part—addresses what theorists note as a limitation in the original articulation of RTT: its lack of attention to issues of identity (Solomon et al., 2016). With CTI (Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2005) positioning identity as an inherently communicative process to be understood as the transaction of symbolic linkages among/between people, such as romantic partners, RTT can be used to understand how disruptions in important relationships (e.g., caused by transitions) or perceptions of relationships as turbulent can have detrimental consequences for one’s identity as it relates to and includes those relationships. This dissertation provided evidence that relational turbulence can reliably predict substantial personal-enacted (i.e., discrepancies in self-view and aspects of identity expressed in communication) and personal-relational (i.e., discrepancies between one’s personal identity and internalizations of how their partners view them) identity gaps (Jung & Hecht, 2004) among committed CNM partners whose partners are exploring a new committed relationship. Similarly, turbulence also predicted anticipated CNM stigma (Stults et al., 2022). Although actual experiences of discrimination and/or stigma were not assessed (c.f. Ogan et al., 2022), this dissertation also contributes to a growing body of work that relates turbulence processes to experiences associated with stigmatized identities (e.g., autism spectrum disorder; Brisini, Tian, et al., 2022) and relationships (e.g., same-sex relationships; Monk & Ogolsky, 2019).
This dissertation also joins recent scholarship which more deeply explores the influence of relationship parameters of uncertainty and interdependence on specific episodes than originally theorized in RTT’s (Solomon et al., 2016) propositions (e.g., Bolkan et al., 2023; Solomon & Brisini, 2019). After finding initial support for the relationships specified in the propositions of RTT among relationship parameters of uncertainty and partner interdependence with constructs operationalizing experiences in specific episodes of biased cognitive appraisals (i.e., loneliness) and intensified emotions (i.e., negative affect), modification indices suggested several improvements to the model which were supported by chi-square difference tests. Specifically, adding paths to the model from relationship uncertainty to negative affect, from partner interference to loneliness, and from partner facilitation to loneliness resulted in a better fitting model to the data than the relationships specified within RTT’s propositions, alone. In other words, relationship uncertainty predicted increased negative affect and partner interference predicted increased loneliness whereas partner facilitation negatively predicted loneliness.

These results are in line with the recent work of relational turbulence scholars such Solomon and Brisini (2019) and Bolkan and colleagues (2023). Specifically, these studies have also added paths allowing interference and facilitation to predict cognitive jealousy (Solomon & Brisini, 2019) and threat of relationship talk (Bolkan et al., 2023) as well as for relational uncertainty predicting negative emotions. These researchers argued for relaxing the specification for modeling constructs with RTT (Solomon et al., 2016) such that they are still consistent with the propositions of RTT but do not strictly adhere to them and allow for crossed paths predicting biased cognitive appraisals and intensified emotions from relationship parameters. Previous research by theorists employing the RTM has also provided evidence of self uncertainty (Knobloch, Miller, & Carpenter, 2007) and relational uncertainty (Knobloch, Miller, Bond, et al.,
predicting negative emotions as well as partner interference predicting biased cognitions in the form of negative appraisals of irritations in relationships (Solomon & Knobloch, 2004).

Like Bolkan and colleagues (2023), this dissertation also did not find evidence of partner facilitation predicting negative affect nor negative affect predicting enacted relationship talk. Notably, in their original articulation of RTT, Solomon and colleagues (2016) suggested that partner interference may be more strongly linked to intensified emotions compared to partner facilitation. They also did not specify constructs characterizing experiences within specific episodes—rather the experiences that constitute specific episodes are represented by families of constructs. For example, in this dissertation, biased cognitive appraisals were operationalized as loneliness in line with previous studies (e.g., Goodboy et al., 2022b), but biased cognitive appraisals have also been operationalized as cognitive jealousy (e.g., Solomon & Brisini, 2019), threat of relationship talk (e.g., Stein, 2021), and perceptions of partner support (e.g., Knobloch, Basinger, & Theiss, 2018) among other variables. Intensified emotions were operationalized as negative affect in line with previous studies (e.g., Brisini, Solomon, et al., 2022), but have also been operationalized as discrete emotions (e.g., Tian & Solomon, 2020).

Although negative affect and negative emotions have been employed interchangeably in turbulence research to operationalize intensified emotions, they are distinct constructs. The lack of findings evidencing the predictive utility of negative affect may indicate the importance of a more nuanced consideration of the role of affect versus emotions as they impact experiences of specific episodes according to RTT (Solomon et al., 2016). In general, it is possible that researchers’ choices among the variety of constructs employed to operationalize these experiences in close relationships may impact the nature the precise predictability of relationship parameters of uncertainty and interdependence. Relatedly, although this dissertation did not
proceed beyond adding the aforementioned paths, modification indices suggested that adding paths from relationship uncertainty as well as partner interference and facilitation to enacted relationship talk would improve model fit. Thus, future researchers may wish to assess the influence of relationship parameters of uncertainty and interdependence on communication engagement and valence amid relational events.

Additionally, communication engagement and valence was operationalized as enacted relationship talk in this dissertation and in line with previous studies (e.g., Boklan et al., 2023), but communication engagement and valence has also been operationalized as topic avoidance (e.g., Knobloch & Theiss, 2017), affectionate communication (e.g., Knobloch et al., 2022), and communication about irritations (Ball et al., 2022). Interestingly, enacted relationship talk did not significantly predict turbulence. This may be due to aforementioned concerns about operationalization of communication engagement and valence, or it could also be a unique feature of the CNM population and sample employed in this study. Those in CNM relationships frequently construct rules and boundaries around extradyadic partnerships (Grov et al., 2014; Purtell & Dillow, 2022), explicitly communicate expectations for relational maintenance in light of extradyadic activity (Stewart et al., 2021), and generally emphasize the importance of sensitive communication (Hangen et al., 2020). Given this body of research, it is possible that those in CNM relationships may more actively and explicitly discuss their relationships with their partners regardless of how they may be experiencing the transition of their partner’s commitment to a new relationship.

This dissertation yields interesting theoretical implications for CTI (Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2005) scholarship, as well. First, this dissertation joins scholarship exploring identity gaps in the context of romantic relationships (e.g., Kennedy-Lightsey et al., 2015; Merrill & Afifi,
and in non-hetero- and mononormative romantic relationships specifically (e.g., Rubinsky, 2021, 2022; Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2018). Previously, personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps were negatively associated with sexual communication satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction (Rubinsky, 2022) and communication satisfaction in polyamorous (i.e., a particular form of CNM characterized by multiple, loving, committed partnerships) individuals (Rubinsky, 2019). CTI theorists have also found negative associations between both personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps with feeling understood (Jung & Hecht, 2004) and positive associations with depression (Jung et al., 2007; Jung & Hecht, 2008) and communication apprehension (Jung, 2013). This dissertation established the ability of perceptions of relational turbulence among committed CNM partners in the midst of a major relational transition to positively predict both personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gaps, adding to our understanding of how identity may be implicated such that these interpenetrative layers may not be wholly consistent with each other during socio-relational processes (Jung & Hecht, 2004).

CTI theorists (Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2005) have highlighted the theory’s flexibility and the utility of integrating it with other communication theories, such as RTT (Solomon et al., 2016). Hecht and colleagues (2005) even argued that, because identity and identity performance are fraught with dialectical tensions between individuals, society, and relationships, it is necessary to creatively combine CTI with other theoretical perspectives in order to generate a more complete picture of how communication influences identity and vice versa. This dissertation takes a step towards achieving such understanding of how disruptions in highly stigmatized (Mahar et al., 2022; Stults et al., 2022; Valadez et al., 2020) CNM relationships due to changes in the relational environment (Solomon et al., 2016) may lead to detrimental effects
on aspects of individuals’ identities when those relationships are perceived as highly turbulent in
the midst of such transitions.

Relatedly, jealousy has also previously been studied alongside personal-enacted and
personal-relational identity gaps in a sample of polyamorous adults (Rubinsky, 2019). Although
jealousy was not measured in this dissertation, it is possible that participants’ partners’ addition
of a new committed partnership may have been a jealousy-inducing experience—particularly for
the slight majority of participants who indicated that their partner’s beginning of their most
recent partnership was the first time that they had personally been a part of a relationship
structure where some form of CNM was practiced by either them or a partner—thus contributing
to their experiences of the transition, perceptions of the relationship as turbulent, and, in turn,
identity gaps and anticipated stigma. However, future researchers may wish to more fully
integrate CTI (Hecht, 1993; Hecht et al., 2005) and RTT (Solomon et al., 2016) by exploring the
roles of identity gaps in the experiences of specific episodes rather than simply as outcomes of
relational turbulence.

This dissertation also attempted to follow previous scholarship which introduced new
identity gaps via its application to identities previously unexplored in CTI scholarship (Colaner
et al., 2014). Specifically, this dissertation sought to illuminate aspects of collective identities of
participants as part of both the CNM community and the LGBTQIA+ community and address a
gap in CTI literature by exploring communal identity gaps. Although this dissertation failed to
uncover much evidence for communal-personal, communal-enacted, and communal-relational
identity gaps among CNM participants related to their identities (or lack thereof) as members of
the LGBTQIA+ community, there was some evidence of communal-communal identity gaps
(i.e., gaps between participants’ identity as a member of the CNM community and identity as a
member of the LGBTQIA+ community) in a significant portion of participants’ open-ended responses.

Although many participants identified as queer irrespective of their CNM relationship(s), many also noted discrepancies between CNM and LGBTQIA+ identity, with responses ranging from discomfort or uncertainty including CNM under the umbrella of LGBTQIA+ to outright denial and lack of acceptance of CNM as an LGBTQIA+ identity in and of itself. Similar attitudes of exclusivity have been examined among some members of the LGBTQIA+ community in regard to bi/pansexuality, transgender identities, and aspects of identity performance by gay men (Sellnow-Richmond et al., 2022). However, minority stress (Meyer, 2003), often experienced in relationships among sexual and gender minorities, has also been examined in the context of CNM relationships (Mahar et al., 2022).

Although many CNM individuals do describe CNM as an important aspect of personal identity (Castro, 2021), this is not a consensus in the CNM community as still others describe CNM as relationship beliefs or preference, relationship status, or relationship agreements (Rubel & Burleigh, 2020). Relatedly, previous research also reveals that some individuals may reject their LGBTQIA+ identities in some circumstances (Rosik et al., 2021). CNM stigma is often internalized due to pervasive dominant ideologies strongly favoring mononormativity (Moors, Schechinger, et al., 2021). A recent application of CTI revealed that the dominant cultural narratives related to heterosexual romantic relationships may be internalized such that they contribute to victims of domestic violence maintaining relationships with their abuser (Eckstein, 2019). Future researchers may wish to explore how dominant ideologies of mononormativity, heteronormativity, and gender essentialism may contribute to the hesitancy of individuals
practicing CNM to identify as LGBTQIA+ and/or their denial of membership in the LGBTQIA+
community based on sole identification as CNM.

**Practical Implications**

CNM relationships are prevalent, with one in five people in the United States engaging in
some form of CNM at some point in their lifetime and about 4-5% reporting that they are
currently engaged in a CNM relationship (Haupert et al., 2017; Rubin et al., 2014). Interest in
CNM is also rising, with one in ten Americans indicating that CNM constitutes their ideal
relationship (Fairbrother et al., 2019; Moors, Schechinger, et al., 2021). Despite this prevalence
and above average ratings on measures of psychological well-being, relational quality, and
sexual satisfaction (Garner et al., 2019; Muise et al., 2019; Rubel & Bogaert, 2015) among those
engaged in CNM, CNM relationships remain highly stigmatized (Mahar et al., 2022; Stults et al.,
2022; Valadez et al., 2020) and underserved by social scientific research at large (Brewster et al.,
2017; Conley et al., 2017; Sakaluk et al., 2021), especially within the field of communication
studies (Rubinsky & Niess, 2021). Thus, we know little about how these unique, multi-faceted
relationships function in and of themselves (Sakaluk et al., 2021). This dissertation contributes to
our understanding of this population and how experiences unique to CNM relationships (e.g., a
partner’s addition of a newly committed partner to a polycule) may lead to identity gaps and
anticipated CNM stigma through the lens of RTT (Solomon et al., 2016).

Understanding these experiences in CNM relationships, and how they may lead to
perceptions of the relationship as turbulent, is useful for therapeutic responses to CNM clients
who may be navigating similar transitions in their relationships. Unfortunately, those in CNM
relationships often encounter barriers to appropriate healthcare due to ignorance and/or
discrimination from service providers (Levine et al., 2018) which has led to inaccurate screening
and diagnoses (Moors, Ramos, et al., 2021). Fortunately, though, research has also revealed that CNM clients whose clinicians demonstrate awareness experience strong therapeutic rapport and positive outcomes in therapy compared to those with therapists who demonstrate bias toward CNM and assumptions by which they pathologize these relationships (Moors & Ramos, 2021). Individuals who engage in or identify as CNM may also terminate therapy prematurely when working with a therapist who is ignorant about CNM, refuses to learn about CNM, or cast judgment toward and is dismissive of CNM (Schechinger et al., 2018). The inability of clinicians to properly assess and treat mental health of CNM clients (Girard & Brownlee, 2015) and the resultant damaged therapeutic relationships do not result in much longevity and are related to clients’ poor mental health outcomes (Horvath & Luborsky, 1993; Martin et al., 2000). Thus, contributions such as this dissertation are useful for informing CNM education and training for therapists and other healthcare providers.

Although this dissertation only assessed anticipated CNM stigma (Stults et al., 2022), enacted stigma and various forms of discrimination are frequently endured by those engaged in CNM. Monogamy is generally preferred among young people (A. E. Thompson et al., 2018) and monogamous relationships are evaluated more positively than various forms of CNM relationships (Grunt-Mejer & Campbell, 2016) while those in CNM relationships are dehumanized by those preferring monogamy (Rodrigues, Lopes, & Huic, 2021). CNM relationships are widely assumed to be sexually riskier (Lehmiller, 2015), motivated by an unnatural desire for sex (Scoats & Campbell, 2022), inherently immoral, and fraught with conflict (Cunningham et al., 2022), compared to monogamous relationships. Those in CNM relationships are even subject to harsher judgments on arbitrary characteristics such as how likely they are to walk their dog or pay their taxes on time compared to those in monogamous
relationships (Conley et al., 2013). With participants scoring, on average, below the midpoint on measures of loneliness, negative affect, relational turbulence, and identity gaps, this study adds to a body of empirical research which challenges the assumption that CNM relationships are inherently highly negative for the individuals involved (e.g., Garner et al., 2019; Muise et al., 2019; Rubel & Burleigh, 2020). Future researchers should seek to contribute additional findings to dispel these myths and others such as those concerning increased sexual risk (e.g., Lehmiller, 2015; Levine et al., 2018) and strictly sexual motivations for engaging in CNM (e.g., Hnatkovičová & Bianchi, 2022; Moors et al., 2017).

Somewhat ironically, according to a YouGov (2022) survey of 2,000 Americans on cheating, which behaviors constitute non-consensual non-monogamy (i.e., infidelity) is not clear. The following behaviors were not considered cheating by a percentage of American adults: forming an intense emotional attachment to another person (27%), lying about spending time with another person (20%), flirting with another person (45%), sending suggestive online messages to another person (17%), sharing your most private thoughts and feelings with another person (54%), falling in love with another person (18%), sending nude photos to another person (10%), holding hands with another person (36%), kissing another person (19%), and even having sex with another person (7%).

Despite this debate about what constitutes infidelity, 33% of Americans report that they have cheated in a monogamous relationship in their lifetime and 12% reported that they were cheating on their current partner (YouGov Survey: Cheating, 2022). Of those who had cheated, 20% had cheated in more than one relationship and 35% cheated on their partner with more than one person. Although 57% percent of those that cheated reported that their partner did not find out about the infidelity, 25% wanted their partners to find out. Of those who reported having
cheated in a relationship, only 29% were broken up with by their partner due to the cheating—of whom 58% got back together—and 43% chose to end the relationship themselves due to their own infidelity. Additionally, 54% of American adults reported that they had been cheated on in a monogamous relationship in their lifetime (81% reported that they were happy that they found out), 21% had been cheated on in more than one monogamous relationship, and 15% were being cheated on by their current partner (YouGov Survey: Cheating, 2022). Of those who had been cheated on, 75% broke up with their romantic partner due to the infidelity—39% of whom got back together with their partner—and 52% were broken up with by their partner due to the partner’s infidelity. Additionally, 41% of American adults also reported that someone else had cheated on their partner with them with 41% of whom having known about their preexisting relationship.

Despite social taboo surrounding infidelity, it is unfortunately common, and often forgiven (Dillow & Denes, 2022). Moreover, people who engage in infidelity report a variety of motivations for doing so (see Tsapelas et al., 2011 for review). Regardless of the type of infidelity (e.g., emotional versus sexual) and whether forgiveness is achieved, infidelity is often damaging to relationships and distressing to all parties involved, regardless of gender or sexual orientation (Carpenter, 2012; Frederick & Fales, 2016; Sabini & Green, 2004). Considering how common non-consensual non-monogamy (i.e., infidelity) is, it is no wonder that recent research has shown some evidence for biological predisposition to certain non-monogamous behaviors (Hamilton & Meston, 2017). This is not to excuse those who commit infidelity, but rather to highlight additional challenges to assumptions of mononormativity as right, natural, and morally superior to CNM (e.g., Cunningham et al., 2022; Grunt-Mejer & Campbell, 2016; A. E. Thompson et al., 2018). It is worth noting that it is still possible to commit infidelity in the
context of CNM relationships when mutually agreed upon restrictions for the relationship are violated (Veaux & Rickert, 2014). Future researchers may wish to more deeply explore what constitutes infidelity in various forms of CNM and the unique challenges and perceptions of turbulence which may be associated with different CNM relationship structures and practices (Conley & Piemonte, 2021).

Pervasive and widespread social stigma around CNM may escalate to hate speech (Cardoso, Pascoal, et al., 2021) and other more active forms of discrimination in various spheres of life. In addition to aforementioned issues of discrimination for CNM individuals in healthcare, those in CNM relationships have also reported experiencing discrimination in services and accommodations in family, corporate, and legal realms (Cardoso, 2014; Sheff & Hammers, 2011; Witherspoon & Theodore, 2021). Although polyamorous parents report several benefits to raising children with multiple partners (e.g., having more caregivers, improved communication and sensitivity in their children), they also experience unique parenting concerns in the face of mononormative culture and stigma associated with CNM (Landry et al., 2021). Thus, parents in CNM relationships may only selectively disclose the true nature of their intimate relationships to family members or withhold these disclosures completely (Rubinsky, 2018).

Discriminatory language in child-custody law also construes CNM families as harmful to children (Rhoten et al., 2021). Challenges to custody for those in CNM relationships may occur in a variety of circumstances such as: “(a) ex-spouses from previously monogamous unions seek or contest custody on moral grounds; (b) families of origin, for example, grandparents, feel the need to intervene, break up poly families, and arrange alternative childcare for the children; and (c) Child Protective Services (CPS) [who typically do not have experience with or knowledge about CNM] investigate and intervene” (Klesse, 2019, p. 636). Relatedly, CNM individuals are
often denied rights and responsibilities associated with marriage and domestic partnership (Klesse, 2019).

Those in CNM relationships experience discrimination in the corporate sector as well. One case study demonstrates that a polyamorous-identified plaintiff was denied an unlawful termination by discrimination verdict in a court of law because polyamory was not considered a sexual orientation nor determined a protected attribute or status in relevant legislation (Cross, 2015). There is currently only one city in the U.S.—Sommerville, MA—that has passed legislation which explicitly protects CNM families and relationships from discrimination. As such, two-thirds of the CNM community has reported experiencing discrimination and approximately 70% who have not experienced discrimination actively hide their status as a member of the CNM community (Mahar et al., 2022). Given that this dissertation only examined anticipated stigma, future researchers should evaluate turbulence processes in light of one of these many experiences of discrimination commonly endured by the CNM community.

Finally, this dissertation does provide some practical guidance to individuals in CNM relationships who are going through the transition which contextualized this investigation (i.e., a partner’s newly committed relationship with a partner other than oneself). Given that transitions represent unique periods of discontinuity in otherwise stable relationships (Solomon et al., 2016), uncertainty is a natural response. According to RTT (Solomon et al., 2016), though relational uncertainty is normal, it does undermine one’s ability to comprehend specific episodes in romantic relationships (Axiom I) and can result in more biased cognitive appraisals about the relationship (Proposition I) like perceptions of loneliness. Individuals in CNM relationships experiencing uncertainty due to their partner(s)’s extradyadic relationship should engage in both dyadic and communal coping communication to deal with uncertainty and subsequent biased
cognitions (e.g., Jones et al., 2023; Lillie et al., 2021). Interruptions from a partner also tend to exacerbate negative emotions during specific episodes (Proposition II), so partners who are engaging in a new relationship themselves should attempt to minimize disruptions in their existing partnerships and perhaps engage in increased helping behaviors (Goodboy, Dillow, et al., 2021) and active discussions about the future and status of their relationship (Bolkan et al., 2023) in order to combat their partner(s)’s uncertainty and related emotions and cognitions which in turn contribute to perceptions of the relationship as turbulent.

Given that perceptions of turbulence in CNM relationships led to identity gaps and anticipated CNM stigma, it may be tempting for individuals who have difficulty as they experience this transition to question whether CNM is right for them. It is important to remember that these perceptions and contributing cognitions and emotions are linked to specific episodes and the related assessments of the global quality of one’s relationship(s) may in fact be temporary. Thus, CNM partners are encouraged to stay the course, actively communicate about their relationship, and co-construe their own reality which continues to defy sociologically dominant ideologies of mononormativity which so often traduce their relationships and identity.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

This dissertation has several limitations, the first of which concern recruitment of participants. First, participants were asked to self-define their own committed relationships and were not asked whether or not they were married. Although many forms of CNM (e.g., relationship anarchy, solo polyamory) outright reject formalized commitment rituals such as marriage (Veaux & Rickert, 2014), it may have been interesting to evaluate the intersection of nontraditional relationship structures and practices associated with CNM with more traditional institutions, like marriage, especially given the prevalence of discrimination in marriage and
domestic partnership for CNM individuals (Klesse, 2019). Future researchers may wish to explore this dynamic and incorporate other intersectional approaches to studying CNM which more purposefully account for other marginalized identities such as race, gender, and sexuality (e.g., Robles et al., 2021; St. Vil et al., 2021, 2022) among participants.

Next, the recruitment materials for this dissertation specified that participants’ partners had to have started a new committed relationship within the past six months, however, many participants indicated that their partners started their new relationships prior to this six month cutoff. It is possible that participants’ partners may have met or had an initial sexual or romantic partner with their newly committed partner upwards of six months ago, but affirmed their commitment to the relationship within the past six months and that participants reported based on the date of this initial encounter rather than an explicitly stated commitment. Additionally, many participants provided feedback that the six month cutoff was unreasonable and that their relationship with their partner was still actively being impacted by this transition. Thus, data from all participants whose partners started a new committed relationship with someone else within the past year were retained for analysis.

The next set of limitations concern the quantitative analyses in this dissertation. Unfortunately, outcomes of turbulence measured as identity gaps and anticipated CNM could not be included in the same model as the rest of RTT’s (Solomon et al., 2016) constructs because the sample size was not large enough given the complexity of the model which would have included these outcome variables. Additionally, given that the path from self uncertainty to loneliness became non-significant during alternative model testing, it may have been helpful to model relational uncertainty using a bi-factor ESEM in order to account for the essential unidimensionality of the relational uncertainty construct (Goodboy, Bolkan, et al., 2021).
Additionally, although this dissertation followed the guidance of CTI theorists who constructed these measures (Jung & Hecht, 2008), the problematic psychometric properties of the personal-enacted and personal-relational identity gap measures (Jung & Hecht, 2004)—particularly among the negatively worded items—should not be ignored. Future researchers should be cautious to select valid and reliable measures for quantitative analyses using latent variables. Additionally, this dissertation did not test any moderated relationships explored in previous turbulence scholarship (Goodboy & Bolkan, 2022).

This dissertation is also limited by its cross-sectional nature. RTT (Solomon et al., 2016) has been studied longitudinally (e.g., Jones & Theiss, 2021; Knobloch, Knobloch-Fedders, et al., 2019; Shin et al., 2022) and dyadically (e.g., Knobloch et al., 2016; McAninch, Delaney, et al., 2022). Future research which employs similar approaches and methodologies to examine turbulence processes within committed CNM relationships will be more impactful for our understanding of this population and the functioning of the unique, multi-faceted romantic relationships. Network approaches to turbulence (Stein, 2019, 2021; Stein et al., 2020; Stein & Davidson, 2019) may also be interesting if such measures and logic can be adapted and applied holistically to study entire polycules and metamour collaboration (B. M. Watson & Stein Lubrano, 2021) in the wake of relational transitions exclusive to CNM.

Perhaps the most obvious limitation of this dissertation is its lack of qualitative findings. As noted by CTI theorists, collective identity is difficult to observe (Jung et al., 2007; Jung & Hecht, 2004; Wadsworth et al., 2008) and this dissertation was unfortunately no exception. Thus, examining communal identity gaps via survey methods and open-ended questions was not a successful approach in this study and more rigorous qualitative methods are needed to produce quality data to answer this research question. Semi-structured interviews could be useful for
exploring CNM individuals’ uncertainties about their identity (or lack thereof) as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, but focus groups may be particularly fruitful as this structure would allow for the debate about whether CNM is an important aspect of personal identity (Castro, 2021) or simply a set of relationship beliefs or preference, relationship status, or relationship agreements (Rubel & Burleigh, 2020), to actually play out among members of the CNM community.
Summary

This chapter summarized the results of this dissertation and discussed the theoretical implications for RTT and CTI as well as practical implications for those in or supportive of CNM relationships. The results generally supported the first five propositions of RTT in a sample of committed CNM partners whose partner recently started a new committed relationship, but supported additional structural regression paths allowing parameters of uncertainty and partner interdependence to predict intensified emotions and biased cognitive appraisals, respectively. These results deviated slightly from the relationships specified within RTT’s propositions but still were consistent with more recent applications of RTT. Relational turbulence also predicted personal-enacted identity gaps, personal-relational identity gaps, and anticipated CNM stigma. There was also some evidence for communal-communal identity gaps among CNM participants in relation to their identification (or lack thereof) with the LGBTQIA+ community, a phenomenon relatively unexplored by CTI scholarship. Practical implications to those who are engaged or interested in CNM and for informing education and training for healthcare providers were also discussed along with the dissertation’s limitations.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Study Advertisement/Cover Letter

Dear Participant,

This letter is a request for you to take part in a research project examining your communication with a committed partner during times when they have begun a new sexual or romantic partnership with someone other than yourself. Specifically, you will be asked about your relationship(s), your committed partner’s relationship(s), and your emotions and experiences in the past two weeks. This project is being conducted by R. E. Purtell, M.A. and Matthew M. Martin, Ph.D. in the Department of Communication Studies at West Virginia University (WVU). Please note that R. E. Purtell is a member of the polyam community and identifies as pansexual.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey asking about your relationships and communication behaviors during the period of your relationship noted above. Your participation in this project will take approximately 20-30 minutes. To participate in this research project, you must currently be in a self-defined committed consensually non-monogamous relationship with at least one partner (e.g., primary partner, nesting partner, life partner) and that partner has started a new sexual or romantic partnership with someone other than yourself in the past six months. You must be 18 years or older to participate in this study. By participating, you will have an opportunity to enter a raffle to win one of eight $100 Amazon gift cards.

Your involvement in this project will be kept as confidential as legally possible. All data will be reported in the aggregate. You will not be asked any questions that could lead back to your identity as a participant. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer and you may discontinue at any time. West Virginia University's Institutional Review Board approval of this project is on file. Your email address will be requested so that we may contact you in the event that you win the drawing for one of the eight gift cards. However, it will be stored separately from any data collected in the study.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me at 304-293-3905 or by e-mail at rep0027@mix.wvu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the WVU Office of Human Research Protection by phone at 304-293-7073 or by email at IRB@mail.wvu.edu.

We hope that you will participate in this research project, as it could help us better understand how people in committed consensually non-monogamous relationships communicate about important transitions in their relationships. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

R. E. Purtell, M.A. Matthew M. Martin, Ph.D.
Appendix B

Email/Flyer Recruitment Script

Hello,

We are working on a dissertation that examines communication with a committed partner during important transitions in consensually non-monogamous relationships. If you are 1) 18 years or older and 2) currently in a self-defined committed consensually non-monogamous relationship with at least one partner (e.g., primary partner, nesting partner, life partner) and 3) that partner has started a new sexual or romantic partnership with someone other than yourself in the past six months you are eligible to voluntarily participate. Specifically, you will be asked about your relationship(s), your committed partner’s relationship(s), and your emotions and experiences in the past two weeks. As incentive for your participation in this study, you may choose to be entered in a raffle to win one of eight $100 Amazon gift cards. Please note that the co-investigator is a member of the polyam community and identifies as pansexual.

This anonymous online survey will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete and is conducted by co-investigator R. E. Purtell and principal investigator Dr. Matthew M. Martin from WVU’s Department of Communication Studies in 108 Armstrong Hall, P.O. Box 6293, Morgantown, WV, 26505. If you wish to participate in this voluntary research study, you can follow the link below to learn details of the study and complete the survey. This survey will in no way identify you to your survey responses.

Survey Link: https://wvu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6mN5M6bhPfPjVqe

If you would like more information about this research project, feel free to contact co-investigator R. E. Purtell at rep0027@mix.wvu.edu. West Virginia University’s Review Board acknowledgment of this project is on file (Protocol #2301698499). Thank you in advance for your participation!

Respectfully,

Dr. Matthew M. Martin  
Professor  
Principal Investigator  
mmmartin@mix.wvu.edu

R. E. Purtell  
Ph.D. Student  
Co-Investigator  
rep0027@mix.wvu.edu
Appendix C

Social Media Recruitment Scripts

Direct Message Recruiting

Hi,

R. E. Purtell, a member of the polyam community and identifying as pansexual, is working on her dissertation for her doctoral program at West Virginia University.

Her anonymous research study examines communication among committed partners during important transitions in consensually non-monogamous relationships. In order to participate, you must currently be in a self-defined committed consensually non-monogamous relationship with at least one partner (e.g., primary partner, nesting partner, life partner) and that partner has started a new sexual or romantic partnership with someone other than yourself in the past six months. Specifically, you will be asked about your relationship(s), your committed partner’s relationship(s), and your emotions and experiences in the past two weeks. This anonymous online survey will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. You must also be 18 years or older to participate in this study. By participating, you will have an opportunity to enter a raffle to win one of eight $100 Amazon gift cards.

Would you be willing to review the information on the project, and if comfortable, help with the anonymous survey? If so, here is the link to the survey, which includes the cover letter you can read to learn more about the research study:

https://wvu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6mN5M6bhPfPjVqe

She hopes that you will participate! She would also greatly appreciate if you would share the opportunity with anyone else who may be eligible to participate (i.e., is in a self-defined committed consensually non-monogamous relationship with at least one partner and that partner has started a new sexual or romantic partnership with someone other than yourself in the past six months).

West Virginia University's Institutional Review Board acknowledgment of this project is on file (Protocol #2301698499).

Thank you so much in advance!

Social Media Post

Hello everyone! My name is Rachael and I am a member of the polyam community, who also identifies as pansexual, working on my dissertation for my doctoral program at West Virginia University to investigate some relational communication behaviors in consensually non-monogamous relationships.
My anonymous research study examines communication among committed partners during important transitions in consensually non-monogamous relationships. In order to participate, you must currently be in a self-defined committed consensually non-monogamous relationship with at least one partner (e.g., primary partner, nesting partner, life partner) and that partner has started a new sexual or romantic partnership with someone other than yourself in the past six months. Specifically, you will be asked about your relationship(s), your committed partner’s relationship(s), and your emotions and experiences in the past two weeks. This anonymous online survey will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. You must also be 18 years or older to participate in this study. By participating, you will have an opportunity to enter a raffle to win one of eight $100 Amazon gift cards.

To read more information about the research study, and to participate in the survey, click on the following link:

https://wvu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6mN5M6bhPfPjVqe

Thank you very much for adding to the research on communication in consensually non-monogamous relationships! Also, please share this post with your family and friends who meet the aforementioned criteria. Thank you in advance!

West Virginia University's Institutional Review Board acknowledgment of this project is on file (Protocol #2301698499).
Appendix D

Survey

Open-Ended Questions

Instructions: Please identify a single, committed partner, including (but not limited to) a primary partner (i.e., if you have a hierarchical polyamorous relationship structure which differentiates between primary and secondary partners), nesting/cohabiting partner, life partner, boyfriend, or girlfriend. You do not have to provide any of your partner’s personal information, but please keep this partner specifically in mind as you answer questions throughout this survey.

“Approximately how many months ago did your committed partner that you identified begin a new sexual or romantic partnership with someone other than yourself?”

“Please describe the nature of your committed partner’s most recent sexual or romantic partnership with someone other than yourself. Please provide as much detail as you are comfortable about how their transition of adding a new partnership affected your relationship. This impact can be positive, negative, or neutral, we want to understand your experience within this transition.”

“Do you identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community? Why or why not? Do you consider the form of consensual non-monogamy which you currently practice and/or identify with a sexual orientation in and of itself? Why or why not?”
Relational Uncertainty Scale Items

Instructions: Thinking about your relationship over the past two weeks with the partner whom you identified at the beginning of the survey, please rate how much you agree or disagree with each statement about your relationship on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

1. I sometimes wonder whether or not I want the relationship to work out in the long run.
2. I am sometimes unsure whether or not I want the relationship to last.
3. I sometimes wonder how much I like my partner as a person.
4. I am sometimes unsure how important my relationship is to me.
5. I sometimes question how much I am sexually or romantically interested in my partner.
6. I sometimes wonder whether or not I am strongly committed to my partner.

1. I sometimes wonder whether or not my partner wants the relationship to work out in the long run.
2. I am sometimes unsure whether or not my partner wants the relationship to last.
3. I sometimes wonder how much my partner likes me as a person.
4. I am sometimes unsure how important the relationship is to my partner.
5. I sometimes question how much my partner is sexually or romantically interested in me.
6. I sometimes wonder whether or not my partner is strongly committed to me.

1. I am sometimes unsure about whether or not my partner and I feel the same way about each other.
2. I sometimes wonder whether or not my partner and I will stay together.
3. I sometimes question whether or not my relationship is a romantic one.
4. I am sometimes unsure about the boundaries for appropriate and/or inappropriate behavior in the relationship.
5. I sometimes wonder whether or not my partner loves me as much as I love them.
6. I sometimes question how I should or should not behave around my partner.
Facilitation and Interference from a Partner Scale Items

Instructions: Thinking about your relationship over the past two weeks with the partner whom you identified at the beginning of the survey, please rate how much you agree or disagree with each statement about your partner interfering with or facilitating everyday goals and activities on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

1. My partner interferes with the plans I make.
2. My partner makes it harder for me to schedule my activities.
3. My partner interferes with whether I achieve the everyday goals I set for myself.
4. My partner disrupts my daily routine.
5. My partner interferes with how much time I devote to my work.

1. My partner helps me in my efforts to make plans.
2. My partner helps me to do the things I need to do each day.
3. My partner helps me to achieve the everyday goals I set for myself.
4. My partner helps me in my efforts to spend time with my friends.
5. My partner helps me to use my time well.
Loneliness Scale Items

Instructions: Thinking about your relationship(s) as a whole, please rate how much you agree or disagree with each statement about your relationship(s) right now on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

1. I felt alone in my romantic relationship(s).
2. I felt isolated from my romantic partner(s).
3. I felt I lacked companionship with my romantic partner(s).
4. I felt left out from my romantic partner(s).
Negative Affect Schedule Items

Instructions: Thinking about your relationship with the partner whom you identified at the beginning of the survey, please indicate to what extent you have felt this way during the past two weeks on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely).

1. Distressed
2. Upset
3. Guilty
4. Scared
5. Hostile
6. Irritable
7. Ashamed
8. Nervous
9. Jittery
10. Afraid
Enacted Relationship Talk

Instructions: Thinking about your communication in the relationship with the partner whom you identified at the beginning of the survey, please rate how much you actively avoided discussing or actively discussed each of the following topics with this partner over the two weeks on a scale ranging from 1 (actively avoided) to 6 (actively discussed).

During the past two weeks, we have actively avoided discussing or actively discussed…

1. our view of this relationship.
2. our feelings for each other.
3. the future of this relationship.
Relational Turbulence Scale Items

Instructions: Thinking about your relationship over the past two weeks with the partner whom you identified at the beginning of the survey, please describe your relationship:

1. Stable—Chaotic
2. Calm—Turbulent
3. Running Smoothly—Tumultuous
4. Peaceful—Stressful
Anticipated CNM-Stigma Subscale Items

Instructions: Thinking about your own personal feelings about being in a consensually non-monogamous relationship over the past two weeks, please rate how much you agree or disagree with each statement on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

1. I worry that people will judge me because of my CNM relationship(s) and/or identity.
2. I avoid telling people that I am in a CNM relationship(s) and/or identity.
3. I am open with others about being in a CNM relationship(s) and/or identity (reverse coded).
4. I am afraid to tell potential partners about my CNM relationship(s) and/or identity.
5. I am afraid to tell my friends that I am in a CNM relationship(s) and/or identity.
6. I am afraid to tell my family that I am in a CNM relationship(s) and/or identity.
7. I am afraid to tell my employer or colleagues about my CNM relationship(s) and/or identity.
Personal-Relational Identity Gap Scale

Instructions: Thinking about your relationship over the past two weeks with the partner whom you identified at the beginning of the survey, please rate how much you agree or disagree with each statement on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

1. I feel that my partner sees me as I see myself. (reverse coded)
2. I am different from the way my partner sees me.
3. I agree with how my partner describes me. (reverse coded)
4. I feel that my partner has wrong images of me.
5. I feel that my partner has correct information about me. (reverse coded)
6. I feel that my partner portrays me not based on information provided by myself but information from other sources.
7. I feel that my partner stereotypes me.
8. I feel that my partner does not realize that I have been changing and still portrays me based on my past images.
9. I feel that my partner knows who I used to be when they portray me. (reverse coded)
10. When my partner talks about me, I often wonder if they talk about me or someone else.
11. I feel that there is no difference between who I think I am and who my partner thinks I am. (reverse coded)
12. My partner likes the things about me that I like about myself. (reverse coded)
Instructions: Thinking about your relationship over the past two weeks with the partner whom you identified at the beginning of the survey, please rate how much you agree or disagree with each statement on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

1. When I communicate with my partner, they get to know "real me." (reverse coded)
2. I feel that I can communicate with my partner in a way that is consistent with who I really am. (reverse coded)
3. I feel that I can be myself when communicating with my partner. (reverse coded)
4. I express myself in a certain way that is not the real me when communicating with my partner.
5. I do not reveal important aspects of myself in communication with my partner.
6. When communicating with my partner, I often lose sense of who I am.
7. I do not express the real me when I think it is different from my partner’s expectation.
8. I sometimes mislead my partner about who I really am.
9. There is a difference between the real me and the impression I give my partner about me.
10. I speak truthfully to my partner about myself. (reverse coded)
11. I freely express the real me in communication with my partner. (reverse coded)
Demographic Questions

Instructions: Please answer the following questions about yourself.

1. My age is ___ (in whole years).
2. My gender is:
   a. Man
   b. Woman
   c. Transgender Woman
   d. Transgender Man
   e. Nonbinary
   f. Other (please specify):
   g. Prefer not to answer
3. My sexual orientation is:
   a. Heterosexual
   b. Bisexual
   c. Pansexual
   d. Gay
   e. Lesbian
   f. Demisexual
   g. Asexual
   h. Other (please specify):
   i. Prefer not to answer
4. My ethnicity is:
   a. Asian/Asian American
   b. Black/African American
   c. Hispanic/Latinx/Latine
   d. Native American
   e. White/Caucasian
   f. Middle Eastern
   g. Other (please specify):
   h. Prefer not to answer
5. How long have you been in a relationship with the partner that you identified at the beginning of the survey (in whole months)?
6. How would you characterize your relationship with the partner that you identified at the beginning of the survey (check all that apply)?
   a. Monogamous
   b. Primarily one partner engages in non-monogamy
   c. Open relationship where non-monogamy is practiced together
   d. Open relationship where non-monogamy is practiced separately
   e. Not committed
   f. Other (please specify):
7. Is your partner’s beginning of their most recent sexual or romantic relationship the first time that you, personally, have been a part of a relationship structure where some form of consensual non-monogamy was actively practiced by either you or a partner?
   a. Yes
b. No  
c. Prefer not to answer
8. How many other partners do you have?  
9. How many other partners does your partner that you identified in the beginning of the survey have?  
10. How long ago (in months) did you personally start a relationship or have a romantic or sexual encounter with someone other than the partner you identified at the beginning of the survey?  
11. How long ago (in months) did your partner that you identified at the beginning of the survey start a relationship or have a romantic or sexual encounter with someone other than you?  
12. How would you characterize your relationship structure (including everyone that you are in a relationship with; check all that apply)?  
   a. Polyamory  
   b. Open Relationship  
   c. Swinging  
   d. Monogamish  
   e. Polyfidelity  
   f. Polygamy  
   g. Polygyny  
   h. Monogamous  
   i. Cheating  
   j. Polyandry  
   k. Polyaffective  
   l. Relationship Anarchy  
   m. Triad  
   n. Vee  
   o. Quad  
   p. Hierarchical Polyamory  
   q. Non-hierarchical Polyamory  
   r. Solo Polyamory  
   s. Other (please specify)
Appendix E

Codebook

Communal Identity Gaps: Extended Protocol

V1. Communal-Personal Identity Gap

Definitions and Directions

- If evidence of a communal-personal identity gap with the LGBTQIA+ community is present, please code Yes as “1” and No as “0.” If you are unsure if evidence of this identity gap is present, please code as No, “0.”

Purpose of Code

- Here we are noting whether or not participants appear to be experiencing a communal-personal identity gap. These might be evidenced by statements that indicate that participants are questioning or are otherwise uncertain about their own sexual orientation, broadly.

V2. Communal-Enacted Identity Gap

Definitions and Directions

- If evidence of a communal-enacted identity gap with the LGBTQIA+ community is present, please code Yes as “1” and No as “0.” If you are unsure if evidence of this identity gap is present, please code as No, “0.”

Purpose of Code

- Here we are noting whether or not participants appear to be experiencing a communal-enacted identity gap (i.e., participants seem to indicate that their behaviors somehow are not consistent with having identity as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community). These might be evidenced by statements about being in intimate relationships that appear heteronormative for those who identify as bi/pansexual; statements about the use (or lack thereof) of artifacts that signal LGBTQIA+ identity (e.g., fashion); statements about participation in (or lack thereof) in LGBTQIA+ group functions and/or collective action; and experiences (or lack thereof) of stigma associated with LGBTQIA+ identity.
V3. Communal-Relational Identity Gap

*Definitions and Directions*

- If evidence of a communal-relational identity gap with the LGBTQIA+ community is present, please code Yes as “1” and No as “0.” If you are unsure if evidence of this identity gap is present, please code as No, “0.”

*Purpose of Code*

- Here we are noting whether or not participants appear to be experiencing a communal-relational identity gap (i.e., their relationships with close others appear to influence their perception of themselves as not being included as members of the LGBTQIA+ community). These might be evidenced by statements about receiving pushback or some other denial from close others about their identity as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community or negative experiences and/or relationships with other members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Participants may also indicate that they are only participating in consensual non-monogamy to satisfy a partner rather than being interested in consensual non-monogamy themselves.

V4. Communal-Communal Identity Gap

*Definitions and Directions*

- If evidence of a communal-communal identity gap with the LGBTQIA+ community is present, please code Yes as “1” and No as “0.” If you are unsure if evidence of this identity gap is present, please code as No, “0.”

*Purpose of Code*

- Here we are noting whether or not participants appear to be experiencing a communal-communal identity gap (i.e., a gap between their identity as a member of the consensually non-monogamous community and identity as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community). These might be evidenced by statements that either explicitly (e.g., saying they identify as LGBTQIA+ solely on the basis of some other aspect of their gender identity or sexual orientation irrespective of consensual non-monogamy) or implicitly (e.g., describes consensual non-monogamy as a relationship structure/style/choice, romantic/relationship/relational orientation, behavior etc.) communicate that being consensually non-monogamous does not count as an LGBTQIA+ identity in and of itself; communicate conflicting views about whether consensual non-monogamy should or should not count as an LGBTQIA+ identity; or comment on a lack of acceptance or recognition of consensual non-monogamy by the broader LGBTQIA+ community.
Appendix F

Glossary of Consensual Non-Monogamy (CNM)-Related Terms

**ambiamorous** – “[comfortable with] both monogamous and polyamorous [relationships]” (Juliandino & Setiawan, 2021, p. 68)

**boundary** – “concern your self: what you alone own, and what others may access only with your permission … not … restrictions on another’s behavior except as their behavior regards access to you” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 148–149)

**compersion** – “a feeling of joy experienced when a partner takes pleasure from another romantic or sexual relationship” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 453)

**consensual non-monogamy (CNM)** – “relationships in which all people involved consent to engage in emotional and/or sexual intimacy with multiple partners” (Moors, Schechinger, et al., 2021, p. 1389)

**hierarchical polyamory** – “an arrangement in which one relationship is subject to control or rule-making by participants in another relationship; usually involves veto; may also involve restrictions on activities, commitment, entanglement, time, or emotions” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 455)

**metamour** – “a partner’s other partner” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 455)

**monogamish** – “[relationships] in which both [parties] have agreed that any sexual activity with casual partners must happen when both members of the couple are present and involved (e.g., ‘threeways’ or group sex)” (Parsons et al., 2013, p. 303)

**mononormativity** – “dominant assumptions of the normalcy and naturalness of monogamy, analogous to such assumptions around heterosexuality inherent in the term heteronormativity” (Pieper & Bauer, 2005 as cited in Barker and Langdridge 2010, p. 750)

**open relationship** – “any relationship that is not sexually monogamous; a relationship that permits ‘outside’ sexual entanglements, but not loving or romantic relationships” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 456)

**poly-mono** – “a relationship between someone who self-identifies as polyamorous and someone who self-identifies as monogamous” (Veaux & Rickery, 2015, p. 455)

**polyaffective** – “close, supportive relationship[s] involving more than friendship … intimacy differs from other friendships … are not sexually involved” (Henrich & Trawinski, 2016, p. 378)

**polyamory** – “having multiple loving, often committed, relationships at the same time by mutual agreement, with honesty and clarity” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 7–8)
polyandry – “one woman with multiple husbands, the less common type of polygamy” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 456)

polyrule – “a romantic network, or a particular subset of relationships within a romantic network, whose members are closely connected” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 456)

polyfidelity – “a group of people who are romantically or sexually involved with one another, but whose agreements do not permit them to seek additional partners, at least without the approval and consent of everyone in the group” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 457)

polygamy – “having multiple wedded spouses at the same time, regardless of the gender of those spouses” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 457)

polygyny – “one man with multiple wives—is the most common form of polygamy in societies that permit multiple spouses” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 457)

primary partner – “the partners that are higher in hierarchy [in hierarchical relationship structures]” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 457)

quad – “a polyamorous arrangement involving four people, each of whom may or may not be sexually or emotionally involved with all the other members; this arrangement often begins with two couples” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 457)

relationship anarchy – “a philosophy or practice in which people are seen as free to engage in any relationships they choose, spontaneity and freedom are valued, no relationship is entered into or restricted from a sense of duty or obligation, and any relationship choice is considered allowable; relationship anarchists often do not make a clear distinction between ‘partner’ and ‘non-partner’” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 457)

secondary partner – “partners who are higher in hierarchy are referred to as ‘primary’ and other partners are referred to as ‘secondary;’ sometimes used to describe non-hierarchical relationship structure in which partners are not equal to one another in terms of interconnection, emotional intensity, or entwinement in practical or financial matters” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 457)

solo polyamory – “may not want to live with any partner, or if they do, they may choose not to share finances or property” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 22)

swinging – “the practice of having multiple sexual partners outside of an existing romantic relationship, most often engaged in by couples as an organized activity, and with the understanding that the focus of those relationships is primarily sexual rather than romantic or emotionally intimate” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 458)

triad – “a polyamorous arrangement in which three people are involved with one another” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 458)
**vee** – “a polyamorous arrangement involving three people, in which one person is romantically or sexually involved with two partners who are not sexually or romantically involved with each other” (Veaux & Rickert, 2014, p. 458)