

A Comparative Analysis of Heterosexual and Homosexual Attitudes and Apprehensions Toward Consensual Non-Monogamy of College Students at the University of Mindanao Digos College

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Abstract

Consensual non-monogamy (CNM), is a relationship structure in which all partners mutually agree to consent each other to have multiple romantic and/or sexual relationships. This topic has received increasing scholarly attention however, empirical evidence from Southeast Asian contexts remains limited. This study compared the differences in apprehension and attitudes toward CNM between heterosexual and homosexual college students at the University of Mindanao Digos College. A quantitative comparative research design was employed involving 344 participants, equally divided between heterosexual (n = 172) and homosexual (n = 172) students. Data were collected using the CNM Apprehension Scale and CNM Attitude Scale. Due to non-normal data distribution, group differences were analyzed using the Mann–Whitney U test. Results indicated that participants generally exhibited high levels of apprehension and neutral attitudes toward CNM. A significant difference was observed in apprehension scores, with homosexual students reporting higher apprehension than their heterosexual counterparts ($Z = -3.24, p = .001, r = .24$), although the effect size was small. Conversely, no statistically significant difference in attitudes toward CNM between the two groups ($Z = -0.47, p = .63$). These findings suggest that while sexual orientation may be associated with how worried the students are about the perceived challenges related to CNM, the level of acceptance does not change. The study adds new insights about the literature on the diversity of relationship in the tertiary education in the Philippines and underscores the importance of considering sociocultural factors in understanding perceptions of non-traditional relationship structures.

Keywords: *Consensual Non-monogamy, CNM Apprehension, CNM Attitude, Mann-Whitney U test, Sexual Orientation*

INTRODUCTION

The global landscape of romantic relationships is shifting and yet, most societies' foundation is still rooted in mononormativity—the unspoken rule that treats monogamy as the only natural and moral structure in a relationship (Rodrigues et al., 2024a). In contrast, according Consensual Non-Monogamy (CNM) is a relationship style wherein all partners agree that they may have more than one romantic and/or sexual relationship at the same time, with openness and consent from everyone involved (Morar-Bolba et al., 2026). Unlike monogamy, this relationship arrangement is often misinterpreted, wherein it is treated as either immature phase or a personal failing (Rodrigues, 2024).

The long-established Catholic doctrines and traditional family values strongly reinforced the mononormativity in the Philippines, making conformity a social norm and a vital moral and religious expectation (Rodrigues et al., 2024). While the Philippine Family Code, strictly defines marriage between two individuals (Moors et al., 2021), the Code of Muslim Personal Laws permits a Muslim man to contract up to four wives, provided that the man can comply with the Islamic requirements like equitable support and equal treatment (Code of Muslim Personal Laws of the Philippines, 1977).

The main objective of this study is to compare the different apprehensions and attitudes toward sexual CNM between both sexual orientations. Heterosexual individuals are sexually or romantically attracted to the opposite gender, while homosexual individuals are attracted to the same gender (Lehmiller, 2014). Focusing on attitude, defined as the degree of favor or disfavor

an individual expresses toward CNM and apprehension is the perceived social risk and anxiety an individual feels regarding a highly stigmatized relationship structure. Currently a significant research gaps exist, as these cross-cultural findings have never been tested within the socio-cultural context of the UM Digos College. The categorization based on sexual orientations offer nuanced insights and foster accurate representations of CNM relationship structures.

Understanding these dynamics is particularly critical given the complex factors of the influence of public perceptions to non-traditional relationships. Although stigma toward consensual non-monogamy persists across diverse populations, individuals consistently exhibit greater acceptance toward the specific relationship styles with which they personally identify (Balzarini & Muise, 2020). Furthermore, direct personal contact with individuals in non-monogamous relationships, significantly reduces mononormative attitudes and fosters support for open relationship models, an effect that is especially pronounced among sexual minority groups (Morris et al., 2024) . These social and demographic influences highlight how local cultural contexts shape relationship boundaries, with traditional norms remaining strongest among strictly monogamous populations (Rye, 2024).

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study utilizes a quantitative research design, particularly a descriptive-comparative approach, to analyze the sexual orientation differences between heterosexual and homosexual college students, in terms of apprehension and attitude towards Consensual Non-Monogamy. Quantitative methods were selected as they allow for the systematic collection and analysis of the numerical data, enabling objective measurement of variables and statistical testing of hypotheses (Creswell & Creswell, 2023) . The design was selected to measure the correlation among student responses and assess the characteristics of the variables under the study.

Research Participants

The participants were 344 college students from the University of Mindanao Digos (UMDC), aged 18 years and above, with an equal representation of heterosexual and homosexual orientations, consisting of 172 respondents each. Purposive sampling is what we used to select participants who are eligible. They must have at least one prior romantic relationship to ensure the understanding of the relationship dynamics, and they must be willing to participate in our study. Purposive sampling was appropriate as it allowed the researchers to target individuals who could provide or share a perception based on the study's objectives/ goals (Memon et al., 2024).

The demographic profile of the respondents showed that the majority belonged to the 18 and 20 age group (n=303, 88.1%), followed by 21–23 years old (n=36 10.5%), 24–26 years old (n=4, 1.2%), and 27–29 years old (n=1, 0.29%). All of the participants were assured of their right to voluntarily participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Research Instruments

To gather the necessary data, this study utilized two standardized measurement tools. The first is the CNM Apprehension Scale, adapted from Cunningham et al. (2022) . This instrument consists of 23 items designed to measure participants' level of worry or concern regarding Consensual Non-Monogamy (CNM). Responses are scored using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = not at all worried to 5 = extremely worried. To confirm its suitability for the Philippine setting, the scale demonstrated strong psychometric properties, showing excellent validity and reliability with a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.986 and a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.94.

The second tool employed is the CNM Attitude Scale, developed from the work of Cohen and Wilson (2017) . It comprises 8 statements intended to assess participants' acceptance of CNM relationships, using a 7-point Likert scale where scores range from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Pilot testing confirmed the instrument's validity through Pearson r correlation analysis and established acceptable internal consistency, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.75.

The scoring ranges are interpreted as follows: 1.00–1.80 = Very Low, 1.81–2.60 = Low, 2.61–3.40 = Moderate, 3.41–4.20 = High, and 4.21–5.00 = Very High. Scores falling between 4.21 and 5.00 indicate higher levels of concern toward the subject. This same scoring framework is also applied to measure respondents' level of agreement with the scale statements.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to the collection of data for this study, permits from the University and from the research committee were obtained. The researchers invited respondents who met the criteria and had agreed to participate voluntarily, then provided a copy of the written questionnaire and an explanation of the purpose, description, approval, and ethical considerations involved in the study. Each respondent was given adequate time and opportunity to answer the survey questionnaire, and all responses were submitted anonymously to protect the confidentiality of all respondents.

IBM SPSS Version 25 was used to process the data for statistical analyses. The distribution of each of these three aspects of the data was examined using the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality ($p < .001$). The results for the data indicated that both groups and both variables did not meet the assumption of normality ($p < .001$). Therefore, the researchers concluded that the analyses needed to be conducted using non-parametric statistical analyses (Wienclaw, 2021).

Statistical Methods

All data in this research were analyzed through IBM's SPSS, version 25. Analyses for evaluating each hypothesis followed a Shapiro-Wilk's Test. This test was used to confirm normality. A significant p-value ($p < 0.001$) indicated that the distribution of scores was not normally distributed, and therefore non-parametric tests needed to be applied.

Mean and standard deviation Used to summarize the level of apprehension and attitude toward CNM. The mean provides the average score of all participants' responses. While the Standard deviation Indicates the dispersion of scores surrounding the mean. A Mann-Whitney U was used to compare the score between the two independent variables: Heterosexuals and Homosexual college students in UMD. This Test has been chosen because this data did not fulfill the requirements of parametric statistics This part should contain adequate detail to reproduce reported data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents data and findings, the interpretation, the discussion and the data analysis based on the respondents answers regarding their apprehension and attitudes towards consensual non-monogamy. The tables are organized under the following subheadings: The level of apprehension and attitudes toward consensual non-monogamy among adults, specifically among Heterosexual students and Homosexual students ($n=344$), Test of difference between Heterosexual and Homosexual individuals in terms of CNM Apprehension, Test of the difference between heterosexual and homosexual individuals in terms of CNM Attitude.

Results

The Level Of Apprehension And Attitudes Toward Consensual Non-Monogamy Among Adults, Specifically Among Heterosexual Students And Homosexual Students (N=344)

Table 1.

Level of Apprehension and Attitudes Toward Consensual Non-Monogamy (n=344)

Variable	Grouping Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Apprehension	Heterosexual	3.64	0.77
	Homosexual	3.85	0.69
Attitude	Heterosexual	3.69	1.13
	Homosexual	3.73	1.18

As shown in Table 1, homosexual individuals reported a higher apprehension (M= 3.85, SD= 0.69) than heterosexual individuals (M= 3.64, SD= 0.77). Meanwhile, in CNM attitudes heterosexual individuals reported a lower neutral attitude (M= 3.69, SD= 1.13) , than homosexual participants (M= 3.74, SD= 1.18).

Test Of Difference Between Heterosexual And Homosexual Individuals In Terms Of CNM Apprehension

Table 2.

Test of difference between Heterosexual and Homosexual individuals in terms of CNM Apprehension (n=344)

Variable	Grouping Variables	Z Statistics	p-value	Effect Size (r)	Remark
CNM Apprehension	Heterosexual	-3.24	.001	.24	Significant
	Homosexual				

Table 2 illustrates that there was a significant difference in the distribution of CNM Apprehension scores, ($Z = -3.24$, $p = .001$). Heterosexual individuals reported lower CNM Apprehension scores (M = 3.64, SD = .77) compared to homosexual individuals (M = 3.85, SD = .69). The magnitude of this difference was small, with the effect size calculated as $r = .24$. This shows that sexual orientation explains just a small part of the differences in apprehension scores.

The Significant Difference Between Heterosexual and Homosexual Individuals in Terms of CNM Attitude.

Table 3

Comparative Analysis between Heterosexual and Homosexual individuals in terms of CNM Attitude

Variable	Grouping Variables	Z Statistics	p-value	Effect Size	Remark
CNM Attitude	Heterosexual	- .47	.63	.03	Not Significant
	Homosexual				

As table 3 outlines, there was no significant difference in the distribution of CNM Attitude scores, $Z = -.47$, $p = .63$. Heterosexual individuals reported lower CNM Attitude scores (M = 3.69, SD = 1.13) compared to homosexual individuals (M = 3.73, SD = 1.18). The magnitude of this difference was small, with the effect size calculated as $r = 0.03$, this shows that only a small part of the differences in attitude scores is explained by sexual orientation.

Discussion

Collectively, these descriptive findings suggest that while both groups share similar, neutral attitudes regarding claims supporting CNM, they also exhibit a uniformly high level of personal apprehension about its potential consequences. This reveals a shift in generations:

young adults are more intellectually open enough not to outright condemn alternative relationship frameworks, yet personally constrained from taking chances because of the social conditioning of how they are raised. However, the existing body of literature emphasizes that sexual minorities typically exhibit a far more favorable disposition toward CNM (Ka et al., 2022). The results of CNM Attitude indicated neutral on both sexual orientations can be explained by the overwhelming, and prevalent influence of mononormativity-assumption that monogamous relationship is the ideal model for love and partnership- that pulls even the most accepting groups back to neutrality (Barker & Langdridge, 2010). Mononormativity operates as a pervasive socio-cultural framework that presumes exclusive, two-person romantic and sexual relationships to be the natural, default, and morally superior standard for human connection (Kean, 2025). This ideology is far from being a mere personal preference and is deeply rooted within state institutions, rigid religious doctrines and traditional family structures. Even the open-minded people compel to the safe, traditional lifestyles because of these heavy social pressures (Rodrigues et al., 2024).

Additionally, the neutral attitude among young adults comes from a mix of modern globalization and traditional local values. On the other hand, the global media, and different streaming platforms introduce the western perception of relationship freedom and the ethical consensual non-monogamy (Burtaverde et al., 2026). Conversely, these new ideas are immediately pushed back by the collectivistic, family-centric, and conservative society, which heavily discouraged people from choosing or supporting non-traditional relationship frameworks (Bernice Kuang, 2018).

In Western research, standard studies show that sexual minorities act as relationship pioneers, since they have already detached from the traditional heterosexual paths, hence they have more favorable, open attitudes towards consensual non-monogamy (Cannas Aghedu et al., 2024; Ka et al., 2022; Moors et al., 2021). However, when examined within the local context, this Western narrative reverses. Homosexual respondents do not report greater relationship freedom, instead there is a higher anxiety and hesitation toward consensual non-monogamy.

To explain why this reversal happens it is important to look at what life looks like to sexual minority students in a collectivist culture. Students may have used the psychological survival strategy called assimilationist politics or homonormativity (Maine, 2021). These individuals may feel forced to prove that their love is valid, because same-sex relationships lack legal recognition and face social judgement (Manalastas & Torre, 2016). As De Leon & Sevilla (2023) showed in their study on Filipino relationships, dating comes with complex stress that can hurt a person's standing with family and friends. To reduce social stress many sexual minority youth intentionally copy the traditional relationship ideals (Maine, 2021; Vaughan et al., 2019). Consequently, introducing non-monogamy risks crossing into double deviance and multi-layered stigma (Balzarini & Muise, 2020; Rodrigues, 2024).

This compounding anxiety is exactly what the Minority Stress Theory explains (Frost & Meyer, 2023; Mahar et al., 2024; Meyer & Frost, 2012). When looking about having multiple partners it feels like an exhausting work—a process that requires immense emotional labor, complex boundary-setting, and constant communication infrastructure to avoid jealousy (Borgogna et al., 2024; Mogilski et al., 2020a, 2020)—the perceived social and psychological risks quickly outweigh any theoretical benefits. The fear of "proving the critics right" about the assumed instability, promiscuity, or immorality of same-sex love turns personal apprehension into a defensive shield (Balzarini & Muise, 2020; Rodrigues, 2024; Rodrigues et al., 2024). Monogamy, therefore, ceases to be just a romantic preference; it becomes a tool for social survival, security, and validation. Ultimately, the global media makes it easy for students to think open-mindedly about relationship freedom, however living it out in real life is totally a different story. For some, deviating from societal expectation, and facing discrimination is not easy.

The statistically non-significant findings between heterosexual and homosexual individuals in terms of CNM attitude indicate a homogenization of attitudes toward consensual non-monogamy (CNM) between heterosexual and homosexual students at UM Digos College. This outcome diverges from the Western literature, which consistently demonstrates that heterosexual populations hold significantly more negative, stigmatizing views toward CNM than sexual minorities (Moors et al., 2021; Rye, 2024). Instead, both groups converged at a neutral baseline, indicating that the traditional orientation gap is narrowing within the Philippine college context. This convergence is driven by digital globalization, social media, and streaming platforms, which expose all students to non-traditional relationship scripts and influence relational attitudes more powerfully than internal sexual orientation (Burtaverde et al., 2026; Rodrigues, 2024; Wood et al., 2021). However, this neutrality presents a psychological conflict between modern openness and conservative local values.

While students no longer explicitly judge CNM due to global media exposure, collectivistic family norms and religious conservatism function as a cultural ceiling that block explicitly from approving (Bernice Kuang, 2018; Manalastas & Torre, 2016). This cognitive balancing act mirrors broader academic behavioral realities among Filipino students, who manage situational anxiety by actively attempting to adapt and meet high standards within strict cultural boundaries (Combong & Napil, 2025). Ultimately, sexual orientation is not a primary divider of opinion in this cohort; rather, students occupy a tolerant middle ground, exhibiting intellectual curiosity about relationship autonomy while remaining legally and socially anchored to monogamy as the singular standard for respectable adult life (Combong & Napil, 2025; Manalastas & Torre, 2016)

Ultimately, choosing the safe middle ground allows them to hold open-minded views without risking isolation from their families, religion, or community (Rodrigues, 2024). This shared neutrality proves that for today's youth, keeping the peace and staying close to family matters far more than differences in sexual orientation (Albarracin, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that among students at UM Digos College, levels of apprehension toward Consensual Non-Monogamy (CNM) vary according to sexual orientation, though overall attitudes remain largely similar across groups. While the higher apprehension observed among sexual minorities has a modest effect, it also highlights that for these individuals, the perceived social risks associated with CNM outweigh the advantages of open relationship structures.

Furthermore, the lack of substantial differences and the generally neutral attitudes toward CNM across sexual orientations indicate that students are growing increasingly open-minded regarding this relationship model. The heightened apprehension reported can be attributed to the legal and social context in the Philippines, where non-traditional relationships are still widely viewed as unsafe and socially unacceptable. This research demonstrates that while shifting attitudes is achievable, overcoming the social anxiety that comes with being perceived as different remains a significant challenge.

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