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SPECIAL SECTION: CONSENSUAL NON-MONOGAMY

(De)Politicizing Polyamory: Social Media Comments on Media Representations of Consensual Non-Monogamies

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Abstract

Our research sits at the intersection of communication studies, sociology, cyberculture, and political philosophy and theory. In 2014, a 10+-min segment on polyamory aired on Portuguese open-access national television, during the prime-time newscast, and was viewed by several million people, according to official reports. The news piece was also advertised and shared online, especially via Facebook, by the network's official page. Moreover, the piece was aired within the context of a segment that celebrated the 40-year anniversary of the 1974 liberal revolution that overthrew the right-wing dictatorial regime that ruled Portugal for more than half of the twentieth century. This context served to frame polyamory (alongside other topics) as explicitly political by presenting them as freedoms seized by that liberal revolution. This study used a mixed-method approach to the analysis of online comments on Facebook made with respect to the referred news piece, by deploying both content analysis and critical discourse analysis to try to understand how the political nature of polyamory is negotiated (affirmed or disavowed), and what ideal of the "political" is mobilized in that negotiation, in connection with other elements of intimate citizenship and modes of systemic discrimination. Through this analysis, we will deepen our understanding of how lay people construe the "political" and the (non-)politicalness of polyamory. It also helps advance contemporary understandings of how polyamory is represented in mainstream media, understood by audiences, and how media—and debates on online social networks—can both amplify and help fight against harmful stereotypes of minorities. Through this research, we contribute to political theory by opening up new ways of conceptualizing the realm of the political as an open-ended definition that must encompass changes in modes of sociality, including a politics of relating as a sub-field, likewise to the study of social movements, and their strategies, around consensual non-monogamies. Overall, results show that the recognition of the validity of polyamory is not the same as the realization that relationship orientation is a political issue in itself and that a privatized mode of understanding politics seems prevalent as well as the default framework used in the comments we analyzed. In addition to that, and as other research has already noted, incivility and hate speech was prevalent in online comments and discussions, further dampening the political potential of dissident modes of existence, especially given that incivility is also deployed by those speaking in favor of Othered identities and experiences.

Keywords Polyamory · Public sphere · Social networks · Consensual non-monogamy

Introduction

Within the wider field of sexualities studies, the politicalness of demands made by Othered subjects is a main concern, as it entails a strong potential for these Othered subjects to have their lives transformed, improved, and at last recognized as equally valid. Another important area of research has to do with social representations and, in particular, media representations, for the power that they have to frame political and social discourse on such topics, and the potential to both harm and empower communities of Othered subjects.

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This paper deals with the intersection of these two things—the demands of Othered subjects and the way media represent them-, as we hope to understand how, via online participation, lay people talk about and conceptualize consensual non-monogamies (CNMs), as something that can be considered political—and how the concept of "freedom" is defined and applied or applicable to CNMs. As Pitkin (1988), following Arendt (2005), notes, there is an argument for distinguishing between "freedom" and "liberty"—however, the two words do not have an exact correspondence in Portuguese (both would be normally translated by "liberdade"), and the same is true of other languages. Therefore, we will use the two terms interchangeably.

Our research sits at the intersection of communication studies, sociology, cyberculture and political philosophy and theory. In 2014, a 10+-min segment on polyamory aired on Portuguese open-access national television, during the prime-time newscast, and was viewed by several million people, according to official reports. The news piece was also advertised and shared online, especially via Facebook, by the networks' official Pages. Moreover, the piece was aired within the context of a segment that celebrated the 40-year anniversary of the 1974 liberal revolution that overthrew the right-wing dictatorial regime that ruled Portugal for more than half of the twentieth century. This context served to frame polyamory (alongside other topics) as explicitly political by presenting them as freedoms obtained by that liberal revolution.

The "Carnation Revolution," as it became known due to iconic images of soldiers carrying carnations on their rifles, took place on 25 April 1974, and deposed the "*Estado Novo*" ("New State") regime that had been in power since 1933. The Estado Novo regime was deeply connected to the Catholic Church, maintained all existing Portuguese colonies under military occupation, and had one of the most sophisticated censorship systems ever created (Cabrera, 2017; Garcia, 2009). Because of its connection to the Catholic Church, it implemented a very conservative sexual regime, with active persecution of LGBT people, and even mostly banning divorce, contraception, or any other form of sexual dissidence. The post-revolution period had the country in political turmoil, and changes in the cultural sexual landscape took some time to bear fruit, but it is especially worth noting that the military did not attempt to retain power after the coup and that immediately after the percentage of voter turnout hit historically high levels. This helped cement the Carnation Revolution as a harbinger of freedom and liberated expression.

This study uses a mixed-method approach to the analysis of online comments on Facebook made with respect to the referred news piece, by deploying both content analysis and critical discourse analysis to try to understand how the political nature of polyamory is negotiated (affirmed or disavowed), and what ideal of the "political" is mobilized in that negotiation, in connection with other elements of intimate citizenship and modes of systemic discrimination. We will first set up the theoretical framework in three different parts: (1) contextualizing polyamory within intimate citizenship and how social movements concerning it have developed; (2) contemporary changes in political thinking around the notion and praxis of the public sphere, especially as it pertains to online comments and incivility; (3) the intersection between political thinking, new forms of privatized liberty, and how intimate citizenship stands in tension with them.

Next, we will describe and contextualize the news piece that served as the motif for the online comments, as well as the methodological and ethical aspects of the research conducted, addressing both a more quantitative content analysis, and the choice to also perform discourse analysis. The results are presented and discussed in order to understand both the topics mobilized by online commenters about polyamory and liberty, from a thematic perspective (which themes can be identified), a quantitative perspective (how often are they used and how they cross-over with one another), and finally to understand the critical implications present in the comments. In the end, we reflect on how these results can help us advance our understanding of neoliberal challenges in the field of intimate citizenship.

Polyamory, Intimate Citizenship, and Social Movements

Polyamory is a relatively recent neologism, coined in the early 1990s, with two conflicting attributions being made about how the word came about, one to Zell-Ravenheart in May (1990), and the other to Wesp in May 1992 (Cardoso, 2011) and has arguably become the most visible face of a wider group—that of consensual non-monogamies (CNMs) (Moors, 2017).[1] Polyamory itself is defined as an intimate relationship practice and/or orientation based on "the assumption that it is possible, valid and worthwhile to maintain intimate, sexual, and/or loving relationships with more than one person" (Haritaworn, Lin, & Klesse, 2006, p. 518) with the informed consent of all involved. Unlike swinging, the focus is often placed in the emotional and interpersonal aspect of developing meaningful relationships which subvert customary expectations (Mint, 2008) around time management, sexual exclusivity, amorous exclusivity, and even parental arrangements.

Another term often deployed to name CNMs is "designer relationships" (even though designer relationships are not

[1] The original source was available through the Google Groups service after its acquisition of the Usenet mailing list service, but it has since been marked as containing spam and not readily available; its latest known URL was https://groups.google.com/d/topic/alt.config/xjKoQN_MWvs/discussion.

necessarily CNM)—since the intended social effect is not the substitution of one model of relationship with another, but rather the creation of possible spaces of interpersonal inventiveness that give rise to negotiating what individuals willfully and enthusiastically want for their lives (Barker, 2018). As Ferrer (2018) says, it is neither about creating a dichotomy between monogamy and CNMs, but rather to deny that very same dichotomy and appreciate that any relationship configuration can bring positive experiences to those who are in them and that no moral hierarchy is possible. In spite of the equanimity of all relationship configurations, subjects' lived experiences are also mediated through macrosocial and historical power structures that create what Rubin (2007) called the "Charmed Circle"—those inside it see their lives validated, while those on the outside of it are demonized, pathologized and generally discriminated against. In this specific case, the issue of mononormativity (Pieper & Bauer, 2005) or compulsory monogamy (Emens, 2004)—that is to say, social norms where monogamy is read as the only valid, valuable and de facto possible amorous and romantic relationship configuration—impinges on the lives of consensually non-monogamous people, who become outsiders of this circle. Current research supports this theoretical assertion, as several studies have pointed out, using both quantitative and qualitative methods, that polyamorous and other people in CNM relationships are subject to several forms of social and health discrimination (Cardoso, Martins, & Coelho, 2013; Cardoso, Pascoal, & Rosa, 2020; Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2013; Conley, Ziegler, Moors, Matsick, & Valentine, 2013; McCrosky, 2015; Rodrigues, Fasoli, Huic, & Lopes, 2018; Séguin, 2019). Global prevalence of CNM has not been established. Research in the U.S. estimates that 4–7% of the population is actively engaging in some form of CNM (Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Ziegler, 2011; Levine, Herbenick, Martinez, Fu, & Dodge, 2018; Rubin, Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, & Conley, 2014) and 21–22% of young U.S. adults have been in a CNM relationship in their lifetime (Haupert, Gesselman, Moors, Fisher, & Garcia, 2016); it can also be more than 20% if it is considered as a relationship agreement that an individual has been in at any point in their life (Rubel & Burleigh, 2020). In Portugal, no such estimates exist, but a non-peer reviewed study published in a newsmagazine in 2012 found that 10% of men and 2% of women were or had been in a CNM situation (Martins, 2012).

From a sociological point of view, polyamory and several other forms of CNM can be seen as the joint product of a Western psychologized, individualized and sexualized society—that is to say, that the notion of relationship configurations and relationship orientations as they are organized and conceptualized depends on contemporary Western subjects understanding themselves as being constituted as sexual individuals with a psyche (Cardoso, 2017). CNM relationships can also be thought of as one form of what Giddens (1993) termed the "pure relationship"—a relationship that aims to exist so long as it fulfills the intentions and well-being of those involved in it, and thus a burgeoning form of reconceptualizing intimacy, a new narrative around love, sexuality, and relationships.

Rather than being simply an expression of individual and subjective experiences, narratives constitute a moving political force behind a contemporary form of citizenship, one that Plummer (1995) terms "intimate citizenship." The confluence of intimacy and citizenship makes polyamory and CNMs more than just a "lifestyle"—it demonstrates that there is a specifically political side to relationship models, a politics of relating (Cardoso, 2019) that can extend the "borders of citizenship" (Pérez Navarro, 2017). This both means that the personal and private ways by which we conduct relationships are subjected to structural pressures, but also that they can serve as a basis on which the political can be reconceptualized, expanded, and modified; furthermore, that concrete political action (both formal and informal) is important to eliminate the stigma that polyamorous people endure, in spite of how there is a tendency to indeed reduce CNMs through the notion of (depoliticized) lifestyles (Cardoso, 2014; Cardoso et al., 2013), and the role they have within intimate privilege (Rambukkana, 2015).

People in CNM relationships have been organizing for decades in order to fight against perceived discrimination, to create communities and resources that might help them navigate their marginalized experiences and, more recently, to obtain formal rights. As listed elsewhere, there are several possible claims that touch upon formal political matters that can be made from a CNM perspective (Cardoso, 2014)—e.g., the repealing of anti-bigamy laws, the possibility of polyparenting, or the possibility of having multiple marriages. Several theoretical approaches have already been sketched out as to how these demands could be framed legally (Aviram, 2010; Aviram & Leachman, 2015; Klesse, 2016; Santiago, 2015), especially considering how the contemporary Western recognition of only some kinds of families is deeply rooted in colonialism (Bonthuys, 2016; Rambukkana, 2015).

This is another aspect of the political facet of CNMs—the deployment of an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 2008) brings into relief how gender, class, race, and sexual orientation play a role in upholding or contesting systems of power, and how monogamy is connected to all of them (Klesse, 2013; Schippers, 2016). Among other things, such intersections modulate the ways we relate to one another, both at the intimate and at the civic levels (Cardoso, 2015; Vasallo, 2018).

Nevertheless, media—both mainstream and via the internet—have been fundamental in bringing awareness about these emerging contemporary narratives of intimate citizenship (Policarpo, 2011; Santos, 2013). As we will explore ahead, political processes are not fundamentally redeemed

just because they shift to online spaces: the opportunities that online media permit in terms of diversifying the voices that are amplified and represented can equally uphold problematic representations that redeploy other modes of normativity, including polynormativity (Zanin, 2013). In spite of these potential fallbacks, the aforementioned rise in public awareness about polyamory is, in part, due to a focus by social movements on making themselves represented, even when such representation can be seen as problematic, as often several axes of privilege are reinscribed through discourse on polyamory in the media (Rambukkana, 2015). Overall, we agree that "the [polyamory] community and its networking have situated it in a politics of recognition rather than change" (Hurson, 2016, p. 292).

Such is the case in Portugal, where the sole group specifically dedicated to CNM activism—PolyPortugal, informally founded in 2004—has dedicated considerable time and resources to making itself available to mainstream media, among other activities of public outreach (Cardoso, 2019). One of the most highly visible media moments happened in 2014, when several then-members of the PolyPortugal group were featured in a news segment that ran on an open national TV channel. This segment was integrated into a series of news-stories that celebrated the 40-year anniversary of the 1974 liberal revolution that overthrew the right-wing dictatorial regime then ruling Portugal for more than half of the twentieth century.

The framing of the journalistic piece was explicitly political—connecting a revolution to several different modes of intimate citizenship, but that is not to say that the political nature of CNM relationships (and, by extension, of monogamy itself) was automatically acknowledged or recognized by viewers and commenters. Furthermore, owing to contemporary media practices surrounding social networks, the news-story was not just aired during the prime-time newscast, it was also archived online and disseminated through social networks, namely Facebook. According to a survey done by the Portuguese Communication Observatory (Obercom) in 2014, 70.6% stated that reading "news on Facebook" was one of the most performed activities on the internet. Social networks were the second most used source for news (66.2%), after television news bulletins or programmes (93%). At that date, Facebook was by far the most used social network when searching for the most recent information and updates (98.7%).

Rather than analyzing media representation of polyamory, our work explores how commenters on Facebook engage with this news piece, with its political framing, and how they contest, affirm, or reinterpret the politicalness (i.e., the political nature) of polyamory and CNMs in general. Its politicalness is here connected to how the idea of "liberty"—by which we mean the (political) freedom acquired via the 1974 Revolution—is engaged vis-a-vis polyamory, and how the specificity of online debate impacts this engagement. This is why we next look at the wider implications behind online political debate.

Internet, Public Sphere, and Incivility

Habermas' (1991) seminal work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* constitutes the most notable reflection about the public sphere, as well as a classic work of reference within the sociology of communication and democracy theory. Habermas explains the development of the bourgeois public sphere and its emancipatory potential (due to the rise of literary and political public spheres during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) along with the inner tensions and factors that led to its transformation and disintegration by the nineteenth century.

However, the Habermasian public sphere (conceptualized as a single, bourgeois, normative, universalized and idealized public sphere) became widely discussed, with its critics contending that Habermas' "official" public sphere was constituted by significant exclusions, namely ethnicity, class, popular culture, and gender. Feminist scholars such as Fraser (1992) or Eley (1992) have argued that women were excluded from the bourgeois public sphere and, in this sense, Habermas' account is partial. In this particular point, and according to Fraser (1992), the exclusion of women from public life (especially the casting of personal, familiar, or domestic matters as private issues and therefore excluded from public and political debate) turns out to be ideological, classifying the bourgeois public (essentially male, middle class, and white) as being *the* public.

Feminist studies have therefore persistently described how modern political thought is highly gendered in its structure and that the public sphere in its classical liberal/bourgeois guise "was constituted from a field of conflict, contested meanings, and exclusion" (Eley, 1992, p. 307). Furthermore, Fraser (1992) underlines the existence of subaltern counterpublics, alternative publics where members of subordinated social groups (e.g., women, workers, LGBTQIA) formulate oppositional interpretations of their interests, needs, and identities, reducing the extent of their disadvantage in official public spheres. Habermas' book has also received significant attention in its theories of public sphere and rational communication leading to reflections upon whether cyberspace could be an illustration of the Habermasian model of public sphere and its normative conditions such as discursive equality, inclusion, reflexivity, or sincerity, among others. However, scholars like Papacharissi (2002) remain firmly opposed to somewhat deterministic accounts of the Internet as an automatic enhancer of democracy and public deliberation. In her view, online digital technologies create a new public space (enabling greater participation and increasing

public engagement), but not exactly a public sphere that promotes a democratic exchange of ideas and opinions.

Additionally, online discussions constitute a sort of extension of the existing inequalities in offline political debates, reproducing class, gender, and race inequalities and dominated by elites (Papacharissi, 2011) or, as another author puts it, "cyberspace is merely another arena for the ongoing struggle for power, wealth, and political influence" (Tsaliki, 2002, p. 110). Indeed, the increase in online communication and participation does not automatically generate a debate that promotes democratic principles and ideals. On the contrary, online discussions have been constantly vulnerable to hostility, incivility, and hate speech. In particular, online comments (either in news organizations' websites or in social media fan pages) have been very prone to incivility.

Incivility, albeit having always been present in public communication and discourse, in today's media ecology spreads much more rapidly and widely than ever before, and is considered a central concern of scholars and citizens (Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014), as it can threaten the discussants' ability to engage in quality discourse (Zamith & Lewis, 2014). In this context, Papacharissi (2004) makes an important distinction between impoliteness or rudeness and incivility: while the first may not be necessarily uncivil or bear consequences to democracy and its basic principles, the second goes beyond poor manners and can be defined by the disrespect for the collective traditions of democracy, being "operationalized as the set of behaviors that threaten democracy, deny people their personal freedoms, and stereotype social groups."

Like gender or race, incivility also entails power relationships that aim to undermine the existence of certain social groups from the public sphere and political life. More specifically, in respect to hate speech, "it is not simply that the speech in question 'picks out' an oppressed group, it is that such speech enacts, and thus reinforces and perpetuates oppression" (Richardson-Self, 2018, p. 257). The use of hate speech against marginalized social groups is thus perhaps the most pervasive and intense discursive way of assuring that certain issues are rendered invalid as political issues.

Despite the distinction above made by Papacharissi, most empirical researches adopt a broader conception of incivility, as "features of discussion that convey an unnecessarily disrespectful tone toward the discussion forum, its participants, or its topics" (Coe et al., 2014, p. 660, emphasis in original removed), from name-calling and obscene language, to aggressive attacks on a person or social group and hate speech (Ksiazek, 2015; Prochazka, Weber, & Schweiger, 2018). From this point of view, a statement is uncivil when it denies and disrespects the justice of the opposing views, encompassing rhetorical and stylistic elements such as offensive and vulgar speech, exaggerated claims, or overgeneralizations (Ziegele & Jost, 2020).

Furthermore, it is important to underline contextually situated understandings of civility and incivility due to the socially constructed nature of online discussions (Ksiazek, 2015). Within this realm, empirical research has shown that certain topics are prone to higher levels of incivility—"posts about health or abortion were related to increased chances of uncivil and relevant [i.e., topical] comments, and lower probabilities of genuine questions" (Stroud, Scacco, Muddiman, & Curry, 2015). Other topics, as well as issues related to sexuality among specific groups (Gonçalves, 2018), are also more prone to incivility, as they can be related to group identities.

Defenders of incivility often appeal to the ideal of freedom, or liberty (as an act of free speech), just like those who fight for the rights of minorities. Although the use of freedom can be an abusive one, it still raises the question about what different ways of conceptualizing liberty there are, and about what kinds of potential paradoxes they raise, especially in the field of intimate citizenship.

The Privatization of Intimacy and the Limits of Freedom

As mentioned, the classical liberal guise of the public sphere is constituted by assorted axes of silencing and exclusion, which also has an impact on intimacy. According to Berlant and Warner (1998), intimacy, while privatized, it is also publicly mediated. As Rambukkana (2015) explains, interweaving Habermas and Berlant, the intimate public sphere places citizenship (and its recognition or unwillingness to recognize) in thrall of behaving in certain normative ways in one's everyday life, and more so in public spaces.

In a hetero(mono)normative context, intimacy is itself publicly mediated in several ways: (1) conventional spaces point out a clear distinction between personal life, work and politics and the public sphere; (2) the normativity of heterosexual culture links intimacy only to "institutions of personal life" with privileged roles on social reproduction and even personal development; (3) by making sex merely personal, heteronormative intimacy blocks the construction of public non-normative sexual cultures; (4) the domestic place is perceived as a prepolitical space; a refuge that distracts citizens from social and economic inequality while also being a space that shames them for any discrepancy between their public life and the intimate sphere (Berlant & Walter, 1998).[2]

Even though intimacy is publicly mediated, it is also privatized as a process of normalization. Non-normative,

[2] Quoting the authors defining heteronormativity: "(…) we mean the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent-that is, organized as a sexuality-but also privileged" (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 548).

insurgent and queer ways of expressing intimacy, thus, are considered criminal intimacies that have been privatized:

> Heteronormative forms of intimacy are supported, as we have argued, not only by overt referential discourse such as love plots and sentimentality but materially, in marriage and family law, in the architecture of the domestic, in the zoning of work and politics. Queer culture, by contrast, has almost no institutional matrix for its counterintimacies.

The construction of a privatized sexual culture can therefore be understood as a process of construction of rightness and normativity in public space, and a threat to the freedom to exist beyond the intimate sphere.

The concepts of freedom and liberty can be analyzed from several perspectives. According to Pitkin (1988), no other European language besides English makes the difference between the notions of "liberty" and "freedom." It is important to recognize the nuances that exist between these two concepts, and there is no consensus around the meaning and the differences between these concepts. We have chosen to follow Berlin's (1969) criteria that point toward the similarity of these terms for practical reasoning. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that the materials used in our research project, both in the news piece and the audience's comments, in their original language, Portuguese, only deploy one word: "Liberdade."

Berlin (1969) examined in-depth two main concepts about freedom that are considered central on contemporary analysis—negative and positive liberty. Negative liberty is usually connected with the idea of absence of barriers or constraints, usually external to the agent. Being free means to not be limited. This kind of liberty is related to individual freedom, as something that should be preserved. This concept itself entails some limits: if being free means to not be limited, a subject's freedom should not be constrained by anyone else. For that reason, theorists of negative freedom recognize that in order to sustain a peaceful and safe community it is also important to give up some degree of personal liberty.

Positive liberty, on the other hand, relates to the presence of control, self-determination and self-realization, which connects with the idea of how internal factors influence the autonomous decisions of an individual or a group of individuals. Following this concept, the individual itself emerges as a conscious, active being with purposes, ideas, and autonomy to make their choices according to their values. Thus, the drive is to fulfill one's fundamental purposes (associated with the internal aspects of the agent). Questions about nature and sources of a person's beliefs, desires, and values are relevant in determining that person's freedom. Therefore, to understand positive liberty, it must consider agents not only as individuals, but also as members of given collectives.

Distinguishing between positive and negative liberty allows us to understand two distinct kinds of liberty, but also to discuss distinct political ideals. Negative liberty, which emphasizes individual liberty, even though it recognizes the matter of some concessions of personal freedom in favor of social harmony, defends strong limitations to the activities of the state, for instance. But when considering the notion of positive liberty, the freedom of self-determination can relate to the defense of the State or other kind of collective intervention in favor of social freedom. In both cases, it is considered that individuals' liberty and self-determination must be weighted and balanced with the values of the community.

There are a lot of gray areas when defining freedom and distinguishing between positive and negative freedom. Depending on one's perspective about liberty, there are many constraints that can, or not, be considered, such as climatic conditions, health limitations, functional diversity, natural obstacles, economic forces. Liberty can also be seen in several ways depending on how the variables of agent, constrains, and purposes could be understood (Carter, 2016).

Rather than allowing for a single decision between both kinds of liberty, it could be acknowledged, in toto, that liberty is fundamentally defined by paradox, or ambiguity, rather than paradox being a problem on a path to a definition. In this context, then, how does the liberty to engage in multiple consensual relationships impact on the freedom to not be exposed to modes of expression that might be felt as aggressive? Which, in turn, begs the question—how are intimacies made to be safe or unsafe, public, or only private?

Context and Methodology

Brief Description of the News Piece

So as to allow a better understanding of the context of the comments left on Facebook, we start with a brief summary of what happens during the 10-min-long piece, named "A case of polyamory that owns up to the freedom of choice."

After the title sequence, the main character (a man with long hair) shows up in a static position, while three women enter the scene and talk with one another. After that, he is seen cinematically opening his arms near the riverside, representing freedom. His voice-off serves as an introduction; besides the name, age and profession, he also presents himself as "activist" and "feminist," as well as "polyamorous." He then defines polyamory, emphasizing respect, consent, empathy; then, he summarily describes his family arrangement, and the video cuts to a scene of the same three partners kissing his cheeks, sitting on a couch, with close-ups of some light pecks on the lips.

He talks about how he came to know the concept, interspersed with shots of him sitting down reading *Stranger in a Strange Land* (Heinlein, 1961). His voice-over continues

mentioning characteristics of his polyamorous relationships, while he appears at a public coffee table being surprised by the arrival of a curly long-haired woman, a partner, who kisses him lightly on the lips. He talks about everyday domestic life of his relationships, while the video cuts to him and that partner entering the subway. Under the video, small text overlays convey extra information, including "his partners have relationships with other men as well." On the subway, the two of them meet another of his partners, a shorter woman with long wavy hair, and he is seen holding hands with both of them, while waiting for the subway to arrive. While this is happening, he mentions discrimination against their family for being polyamorous. The video then cuts to him sitting on the subway carriage, one of his partners on his lap, and another one sitting to their side, him pecking the lips of both partners and talking to them; after that, the video cuts to frame another passenger, sitting besides the three of them, who seems bothered, laughs, and looks away.

The image then cuts to their house again, and he talks about calendaring their life using online resources while working with his smartphone. The next scene is of him and two of the partners sitting on the couch, watching TV, while a third partner, a woman with shorter straight black hair, arrives and is greeted by all, while he talks about sleeping arrangements. He is then shown in the kitchen, cooking, while talking about male privilege and the way society sees consensually non-monogamous (cis) men and women differently within a patriarchal society. Himself and four partners are shown sharing a meal at home while he talks about his own issues around self-esteem, and feeling unwanted. He then points out how polyamory involves more than a strictly sexual connection; talks about jealousy and mononormativity. He then mentions the importance of the 1974 liberal revolution to the field of human and sexual rights, and the relevance of literacy and information to make free choices.

After a sped-up version of the making-of, a photo flash cuts to the straight-haired partner directly talking about her place in society as a woman who chooses to be polyamorous and then cuts to the curly-haired partner talking about different kinds of CNM relationships and how they are discriminated against, and while she does there's a cut to a still of the subway scene, with the passenger bothered by the interaction between the three of them. The audio then cuts to the first partner who spoke, while a slideshow of photographs is shown, she talks about the importance of self-growth rather than grandstanding, and that it's not about being seduced by a man; the other partner talks about how hard it was to take this step since it's her first polyamorous relationship, but it's still what makes sense to her, sexually and psychologically, since she had had feelings for other people while being in monogamous relationships in the past. The straight-haired partner who spoke first talks about polyamory as an exercise in freedom, which entails responsibility and facing down struggles and constraints, affirmation and fighting against prejudice—"a freedom that comes at a cost." Credits roll.

Method

The news piece was directly linked to by both news organizations involved in producing the "25 de Abril" series. Therefore, we narrowed our comment collection to the posts on the related Facebook entries that were posted by the news organizations' official pages. These comments are public, and one does not need an account on Facebook to be able to see them. The comments are the functional equivalent of Letters to the Editor and harken to the early days of online comments on news pieces when cyber-journalism was in its infancy.

Measures and Procedure

At the time of the data culling (Sept. 6, 2016), the API still allowed for the collection of bulk comment data from public posts, and so the API was used, via Microsoft Excel, to create a spreadsheet with all the comments made to each of the two posts. We did not seek to characterize the commenters beyond the "poster id" field that Facebook generates, since we had no way to control for the veracity of the data posted on the profiles.

This created two datasets of very different sizes. Comments from the *Expresso* newspaper totaled 33, while comments from the TV channel *SIC* totaled 431. For the purpose of this paper, we will not separate them during the analysis since there was no compelling theoretical reason to do so, and since the disparity in comment number was so high. The comments on *Expresso*'s Facebook share were made between the 6th and the 7th of April 2014, and the ones on *SIC*'s share were made between the 5th and the 17th of April of that same year. These datasets were then imported into and analyzed with NVivo 11, a Computer Assisted Quantitative Discourse Analysis (Jones & Diment, 2010; Krippendorff, 2003; Neuendorf, 2002) software, which served as the basis for the rest of the methodological work.

We completed an initial reading of a portion of the posts to help us become familiarized with the data and then derived an initial list of concepts present in the comments. From there, we created an early version of a coding scheme. This coding scheme was tested initially on about ten percent of the material gathered, with coding being done by one of the authors. As a way to code uniformly, each comment was coded as a unit, in all of the applicable codes.

The other two authors then independently coded the same materials and NVivo 11 was used to check for inter-coder reliability. From the results gathered, all cases where inter-coder reliability was below 80% were more attentively discussed by all the research team and, via an iterative process, we reached

an agreement about the coding scheme and the inclusion and exclusion criteria for each code. After this agreement was reached, the author in charge of the coding processed the rest of the material. We also thoroughly discussed any outstanding doubts at the end of the process, to guarantee no discrepancies in how more complex ideas were categorized. The final coding applied reflects the joint effort of the whole research team and can be found in full on Appendix 1.

Given the amount of material collected, and the specificity of the paper, only a subsection of it was chosen for critical discourse analysis (CDA)—namely the comments coded inside the "positive association between polyamory and freedom" and "negative association between polyamory and freedom," bearing in mind that some were coded in both. CDA does not characterize a field or a subdiscipline of discourse analysis, but rather an explicitly critical approach of studying text and talk (van Dijk, 1995). In its essence, CDA entails an examination of how language in use (discourse) relates to and is implicated in the (re)production of particularly unequal and/or discriminatory social and power relations (Richardson, 2007). Contrary to traditional linguistics, the analysis of discourse is not limited to grammar or abstract sentences, but pays attention to the "natural language use of real language users in real social situations of interaction and communication." Analysis involves studying discourses as social practices that play a fundamental role "in the reproduction of society in general, and of social communities or groups and their knowledge and ideologies, in particular" (van Dijk, 2009, p. 192, emphasis in original removed).

Two of the authors were in charge of doing the CDA and they divided the topics between themselves, independently seeking to understand the main driving rhetorical devices and ideological presuppositions embedded in the comments, and how they relate to different ways of conceptualizing both freedom itself and the politicalness (or lack thereof) of polyamory and consensual non-monogamies.

We focused on one of the levels of analysis proposed by Richardson (2007), the micro-textual analysis, specifically looking at the choice and meaning of words (namely reference and predication), sentence construction and modality, and the rhetorical strategies used by commenters in the positive or negative association between polyamory and freedom.

Ethical Considerations

There are two main ethical aspects to be considered in this work—one of privacy and one of analytical (non-)detachment. Since, as explained above, all the comments were posted publicly, there is no expectation of privacy. Even so, considering we are using these public comments to an end that is not the originally intended one—meaning, to produce academic discourse—we have refrained from detailing any information about the participants, as this would require going beyond the mere culling of purposefully posted information. Likewise, we did not infer gender or any other kind of identity from the names used by the posters, as there was no way to independently validate their identity.

The second ethical aspect pertains to the fact that one of the authors (DC) was also a participant in the news piece detailed above. This means that the research team's gaze upon this material intersects the analytical, the empathic and also a Human Rights' approach. In our approach, we posit that belonging to a group often discriminated against and then working on the topic associated with that discrimination does not grant any form of epistemic privilege, but also does not preclude researchers from doing academic work on those topics (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2015).

Even so, and to allow for the analysis to be valid and replicable, the person from the team directly involved with the news piece was not in charge of the main process of coding, although that person did participate in the final reviewing and discussion of the coding and in the consensus building of the final results; they were also involved in the write-up of the analysis and discussion of those results.

Results

Content Analysis

In order to analyze the content of our research, we collected a total of 464 comments on the news piece (431 made in "SIC Notícias" and 33 in "Expresso"). We started off by checking which words were more common in all of the comments taken together, eliminating some more common conjunctions and other non-relevant syntactic elements (e.g., the Portuguese equivalents of "and," "but," "a"). Those results can be seen in Fig. 1, a word cloud representing the frequency of the words by the size they have. "Freedom" ("liberdade") is the single most common word, lending legitimacy to the decision of analyzing how this concept is approached in relation to polyamory. "People" ("pessoas") and "women" ("mulheres") are also near the top, making it important to consider the gendered dimension of those comments, and if or how gender is explicitly mentioned.

Besides the word count, content analysis allowed for a more systematic approach to what were the main topics referred by commenters. From that analytical work, we ended up with three main categories: "(1) Politics and Polyamory"; "(2) Incivility and Hate Speech"; and "(3) Others/Free Categories." A more detailed outlook of how we arranged the coding categories can be found in Appendix 1. Overall, we applied 1642 discrete codes (Table 1).

In the first category, "Politics and Polyamory," we intended to understand the perceptions of polyamory in online discourse and what kind of definitions of politics

Fig. 1 Word cloud derived from the full dataset. Words in Portuguese. Size correlates with word frequency

were considered. At the subcategory "1.1 Defining politics—disengagement, negativity," we've registered a total of 174 codes, with a special focus on the topic "Immorality and value crisis" (37 codes); "licentiousness" (33 codes); "exhibitionism" (28 codes); "abnormality/pathology" (22 codes), "trend/fun" (16 codes) and "cult" (3 codes). Some of the comments that are included in this subcategory include: "Polyamory? I always thought it was called whoredom…"; "It looked more like a nut-house, how can you confuse Freedom with madness"; "This is not Freedom!!!." With the subcategory, "1.2 Defining politics—solidarity, engagement" we have applied a total of 132 codes. We have coded comments on the topics of "individualized freedom/polyamory as a lifestyle" (83 codings), "informed consent" (31 codings) and "focus on love" (18 codings). In "demarcation from negative visions and comments" we have coded 64 comments and in "association between Portuguese democratic revolution values and polyamory," five comments. Here are some of the comments we coded under this subcategory: "If grown up people want to

Table 1 Number of codes applied at the category, subcategory, and topic levels

Topic	No. of comments coded
(1) Politics and Polyamory	289
(1.1) Defining politics—disengagement, negativity	174
(1.1.1) Disconnecting polyamory from the April Revolution	28
(1.1.2) Polyamory as a negative consequence of liberty	95
(1.1.2.1) Abnormality, pathology	22
(1.1.2.2) Exhibitionism	28
(1.1.2.3) Immorality	37
(1.1.2.4) Libertinage	33
(1.1.2.5) Trend/fun	16
(1.1.2.6) Sect	3
(1.2) Defining politics—solidarity, engagement	132
(1.2.1) Connecting polyamory to the April Revolution	5
(1.2.2) Polyamory as a positive consequence of liberty	100
(1.2.1.1) Informed consent	31
(1.2.1.2) Emphasis on love	18
(1.2.1.3) Individualized freedom/polyamory as a lifestyle	83
(1.2.3) Demarcation from negative views and comments	64
(2) Incivility and hate speech	326
(2.1) Incivility	308
(2.2) Hate speech and threats	71
(2.2.1) Normative definitions of love	14
(2.2.2) Hypermasculinity	14
(2.2.3) Misogyny	31
(2.2.4) LGBTQ-phobia	3
(2.2.5) Racism/xenophobia	15
(2.2.6) Others	7
(3) Others/free categories	214

have relationships which differ from the monogamous norm, it's nobody's business"; "It's a life choice, they're all adults"; "To live and let live (without prejudice), that's Freedom." A special mention here to the comments that focused on other comments, which were aimed at preserving a separation between the irrational and uneducated (on the one hand) and the literate and accepting (on the other)—"These are adults who live like this, and happily so. They don't need your sympathy or approval. Your comments, however, border on envy and pettiness."

Under the second category, "Incivility and hate speech," we have applied a total of 326 codes. At the subcategory "2.1 Incivility," "arbitrary comments" stand out with 262 codes, as well as "insults, offenses and defamation" (170 codes), "irony and sarcasm" (115 codes) and "pejorative or obscene language" (44 codes). In the subcategory "2.2 Hate speech and threats against minorities or discriminated social groups," we have coded 71 comments, 31 on "misogyny," 15 on "racism and xenophobia" and 14 on "hypermasculinity." A prime example is the following excerpt, which also pointedly exemplifies how freedom of opinion is mobilized as a legitimator of incivility, as we mentioned before:

> I respect each person's opinion, but in my humble opinion, this kind of relationship is abominable, disgusting, promiscuous, lustful and a complete self-prostitution, besides showing a total lack of respect for human beings! […] Next to this, homosexuals are at a much higher level, they are people who have my respect, they have much more integrity […] they might love someone of the same sex, but at least they respect each other!!!!

Finally, in the last category—"Others/Free Categories," we collected other relevant online comments that did not belong to any of the previous categories. Thus, "masculine emphasis" stands out (137 codes, against 10 codes on the "feminine emphasis"), along with "undifferentiation between non-monogamies" (48 codes) and "journalism critics" (39 codes).

We also looked at how certain codes intersected. When analyzing these results, we concluded that codes that deal with "incivility" are more strongly related to disengagement with polyamory as something political (138 negative codes vs. 30 positive codes). Considering the comments coded as "hate speech," 23 of 71 relate to disengagement/negative visions of polyamory, especially the ones connected with "normative definitions of love" and "misogyny." Nevertheless, allusions to what was coded as "racism/xenophobia" can be found both on comments positively engaged with polyamory (3) and those that are disengaged (2). "Undifferentiation between non-monogamies" was also strongly connected to other negative aspects—comments coded here were often also coded at "incivility" (30), "hate speech" (28) and specifically "racism/xenophobia" (11), as seen on referring to the situation pictured as a "harem," or saying that "in African communities this is very common" (with an attendant pejorative connotation). Othered racial communities are deployed as a unidimensional example of (gendered) inequality which is presented as proof of their inferiority and thus of the risk to the white bodies that entails imitating "their" customs. Of the 262 "arbitrary comments," so called because they lacked any meaningful content or seemed designed to provoke aggressive reactions, 86% (225) of those who made any mention of either accepting or refusing polyamory as a valid political topic were coded as refusing it.

Considering the gendering of comments, there is a clear focus on the masculine elements of the news piece: out of the 147 that emphasized the gender of any of the participants, 93% (137) were about the man. This result, however, was expected since the news piece is focused on the male character. On the other hand, negative reactions were also mainly directed to the masculine element of the news piece. Furthermore, 36 comments intersected this gendered focus with hate speech (29 of them focusing on him), and 133 contained some form of incivility (125 focusing on him). The gendered dimension opens up some complexity in reading the results—especially given how "woman/women" was such a relatively frequent word overall. Most comments who talk about women do not address the women in the piece specifically—rather, a large number of those hypothesize about "What if it were one woman with three men?" (and other similar variants), in an attempt to point out the sexual double standard prevalent in our society, but then deploying that observation as a critique of polyamory as a whole, erasing the fact (explicitly mentioned) that the women also had relationships with other people. An intersectional look into the results about how different non-monogamies are undifferentiated by commenters is relevant since gender is often mentioned alongside ethnicity and religion. This means the portrayal of "Muslims" or "Africans" as being culturally inferior, and polygamy being presented as proof of that inferiority, and furthermore polyamory being an attempt to institute the same kind of gendered imbalance in western society—"Over there in Arabian lands, men have I-know-not how many women and no one finds it weird."

Concerning comments that touched on the idea of freedom, either framing polyamory as positively or negatively related to this concept, the most prominent category was "individualized freedom/polyamory as lifestyle" (83 codes). There is almost parity between the comments coded as alluding to "polyamory as a negative consequence of liberty" (95) and the ones coded as "polyamory as a positive consequence of liberty" (100). Of those 83 codes that mention polyamory as an expression of "individualized freedom/lifestyle," 12 nonetheless also relate it to "exhibitionism," especially commenting on the fact that the existence of the news piece itself

constitutes a form of exhibitionism and that polyamory is not a topic that has any newsworthiness. It's also important to note that 21 comments intersect "individualized freedom" and "informed consent" in their coding, illustrating the complexities of how this individualized scope in fact pertains to more than just the individual. On the other hand, this "individualized freedom" is also more focused on the masculine elements of the news piece (11) than the feminine ones (2).

Even though "freedom" is the most relevant word used in general, and the concept that is directly connected with the framing as it pertains to the anniversary of the liberal revolution, only 33 codings linked polyamory to it. Of these 33, 28 were made in a negative way, intending to dissociate the Portuguese democratic revolution with polyamory, e.g., "It's not freedom, more like licentiousness"; "What does this nonsense have to do with April 25th…. So many important things to note, and this is what we have…" Seven codes showed a positive vision toward the intersection between politics and polyamory, but several of these comments were also coded as dissociating polyamory with the Portuguese revolution, which reveals that what prevails is an individualized approach of freedom, reinforcing the previous results.

Discussion

In the following section, we will incorporate the results from the content analysis and expand upon them, to understand exactly how polyamory is politicized and depoliticized, how it is connected to, or disavowed from, the idea of freedom, and what implications this brings to contemporary understandings of politics, and intimate citizenship. In order to better demonstrate the ambiguity in the comments that we are analyzing, we have not separated positive or negative representations of polyamory; instead, we have organized the analysis along the categories that Richardson (2007) sets out, as described above.

Words convey value judgments as they bear denoted and connoted meanings—that is why the analysis of particular words (the lexical analysis) is the first stage of discourse analysis (Richardson, 2007). In this context, the way people are named identifies not only the group(s) that the writer/commenters want them to be associated with, but it can also signal the relationship between the namer and the named (Richardson, 2007).

With respect to naming and reference within comments that convey a negative association between polyamory and freedom, the majority of the comments employ referential strategies that describe the man of the television news piece not with his name and/or surname, nor with his social status, but with the pronouns "he" or "him," being referred to as "gross," "freak," "abominable," "disgusting" and other offensive terms that suggest disgust, loathing and even psychological disorder. The women represented in the news feature, however, are mostly portrayed by the commenters with the pronouns "they" or "them," being referenced not as individuals but as a collective (sometimes mentioned as "ladies" or "girls") also qualified with adjectives that suggest contempt and disgust (e.g., "sluts," crazy," "broads") and other expressions (e.g., "barf-worthy," "whoredom," "they're probably chronically frigid"). This can be explained by the way that the news piece was conducted and constructed (with the male subject being presented as the central "actor"), but it may also suggest the heteronormative lens by which commenters discuss and may understand polyamory. The results from the content analysis reinforce this, since most comments referred only to the man in the news piece.

In counterpoint, the positive or more neutral comments were overwhelmingly focused on one thing alone—age or, specifically, adulthood. Several variations on the idea of "they're all grown-ups" could be seen interspersed with defenses of individual autonomy. In fact, this quasi-legalistic approach to self-determination equates age (or legal status) with an overarching intrinsic validation of the life choices made by those in the news piece. This very same validation, however, is also often articulated in such a way that it forecloses any political reflection upon the conditions in which polyamory is lived, in the sense that it brings with it the idea that these intimate choices are wholly private and that their privateness is, in fact, a reinforcing factor of their legitimacy. The participants in the news story are also called "honest," a category seen as a positive personality trait, or as a characteristic of the actions portrayed which again focuses on individual characters.

Also within naming and reference, some comments coded under the category "Negative association between polyamory and freedom" present elements of the "ideological square" conceptualized by van Dijk (2009) suggesting the polarization between a positive representation of Us (the in-group) and a negative representation of Them, the out-group. In this specific case, the in-group can be considered to be constituted by the (positive) view of an "Us" ("in our culture," "we're not animals") opposed and distant from a "Them" (polyamorous) portrayed with negative and hateful attributes. In certain occasions, "Them" is replaced by a collective "You"—sometimes using so-called bossy verbs ("you polyamorous people," "do wtv u want with ur life,"[3] "you know exactly what people think about behaviors like that")—somewhat reinforcing the opposition between this discursive in-group/out-group.

There is, however, another Us/Them dichotomy to be found in the comments: the one set up between those who disparage polyamory and those who criticize the polyamory

[3] We sought to retain the registry in which the comments were made and adapt that into English, including typos and slang.

disparagers. Those who are seen as attacking polyamorous people are described as "rabble," "disgusting," "prejudiced" and "narrow-minded," whereas the commenters who make these accusations portray themselves as "steadily freeing [them]selves from the bonds that, over more than a 1000 years, have formatted us and left us bereft of our genuine and natural freedom." The difference is not only one of attitude, but one of morals and civilizational level, a certain intellectual ascension over the other commenters is hinted at by those who stand against polyamory detractors. As is visible from this example, and because it deals with a vertical organization of ideas and perspectives, there are degrees of cultural, historical, and sociological considerations associated with this type of comment—but those are only signposted, rather than reflected upon, and mostly motivated by other commenters' hate speech, without delving too deep into the topic, apart from mentions about religiousness and conservativeness.

Also relevant to this analysis is the choice of words used to represent the characteristics and values of social actors, events, actions, and social phenomena. In this case, the commenters' predicational strategies when assigning qualities to polyamory through adjectives and nouns (e.g., "licentiousness," "disrespect," "shamelessness," "moral quagmire," "promiscuous, sick, low-level licentiousness," "whoring," "moral and sexual shithole," "wild party," "deplorable," "lack of maturity and utter disrespect for Love," "sex, friendship, orgies, going out and getting wild")—most of which clearly conveyed elements of incivility, obscene language and hate speech, were similar to the naming of the subjects of the news piece we saw earlier. Within the category "Negative association between polyamory and freedom," predication is therefore used to imprint value judgments, aggressively criticize polyamory and polyamorous people, and ultimately deny the public/political status and legitimacy of polyamory.

On a more positive note, we find aggregate descriptions of all the participants in the piece, for example, as "intelligent, literate, in full control of their mental capacities," or "enlightened adults" (in the sense that they are fully aware of what they are doing, that they are rational and purposeful autonomous people), as well as "contented and happy." The masculine participant is also congratulated for being "brave" in appearing publicly to talk about polyamory, or living according to one's convictions.

As above, positively inclined comments in regard to polyamory end up focusing especially on the negativity of detractors, who are then mentioned as "conservative," "moralists," "narrow minded," "backwards thinkers," and other similarly loaded terms. A different term, however, stands out—"hypocrites." Again, there is a dichotomy established here between polyamorous persons (with their implied honest) and those who claim to live according to the monogamous norm but who then (are presumed to) cheat. In this sense, polyamorous lives are not seen as being valuable and valued for themselves, but as a counterpoint to the underhanded disobedience to the norm.

We then analyzed sentence construction and modality, which refers to the degree to which a speaker or writer is committed to the claim they are making, whereby speakers extend their attitude toward the event or situation described by a sentence, usually indicated via the use of modal verbs (must, should, will), their negations, or through adverbs, such as "certainly" or "definitely" (Richardson, 2007, p. 59), among other strategies. We can observe that many comments under this category express categorical views of what liberty or freedom and love are/are not or should/should not be. In this sense, liberty is not "licentiousness," "insanity," "disrespect," "freedom of choice," "exhibitionism," "lack of decorum," "shamelessness," or "divulging private life" but instead is "respecting others," "not interfering with others," or "dignity." These categorical qualifications clearly fit in a privatized and individualized notion of freedom. Additionally, for some commenters whose comments fall under the discussed category, love is not "promiscuity," "sex + friendship" or ultimately polyamory but instead is "affection," "intimacy," "privacy," "exclusivity," "respect," "commitment," terms clearly evoking a normative view of "romantic" monogamous love.

On the opposite field are those who, with equal force, point out "there is no right or wrong way for adults to consensually live out their sexual lives" (emphasis added), or who state that any contrary comments "have, obviously, a lot of repression and envy in the mix," in a move to psychoanalyze the rhetoric behind them. A theme present in many comments is neutrality—"anyone is free to do as they please as long as no one is harmed," or "no one has to agree nor to criticize." These comments, made in defense of the people portrayed and, we could argue, in favor of relationship diversity, simultaneously empty the topic of any political relevance, and remit it to the field of the purely private, depoliticized and, as some of the commenters said, within a "live and let live" approach.

As we previously explained, this news piece was aired during the 40th anniversary of the 1974 liberal revolution, framing polyamory as a freedom that was conquered in this context. In the comments, which negatively associate polyamory and freedom, the references to the liberal revolution are scarce but when they happen there is an evident separation between what is polyamory and what it socially (and politically) represents and the liberal revolution, its achievements and main "values" ("Please don't mix this with the April 25th Revolution," "people didn't do the revolution for this"), and also an understood perversion of the notion of freedom referenced by some comments (as equal to "respect" or "dignity"). Seeing the liberal revolution as a series of formal conquests but excluding polyamory from this once again

conveys the individualized approach by which "the political" is understood as not having the space for Othered relationship configurations.

Rhetorical tropes were also used as a way to persuade others to adopt the same point of view (Richardson, 2007). In this category, irony (to say something but to mean something else; e.g., "My life got so much better since I learned he's a polygamist [sic]"; "well, they should claim their rights, register all five of them on IRS [the Internal Revenue System, meaning, 'paying taxes'], then later their children, with lots of daddies and mommies, all with their due rights… then they'd have lots of grandparents, and so on… all this making a big mess, playing with Man's values, so arduously fought for throughout history by serious people"), hyperbole (excessive exaggeration made for rhetorical effect, in this case often accompanied by expressive punctuation and/or spelling mistakes; e.g., "polyamorous"??!!… In what dictionary cun [sic] that be found… charles manson [sic] and "family," "preachd" [sic] the same!!; "a clear case of compulsory [psychiatric] admission!!!!!!!!!") and neologisms (especially the blending of two existing words; e.g., "polydouchebag"; "polyfreaks") were the most common. In every case, they were used to criticize or to aggressively attack polyamory and its followers.

Conclusions

We sought to understand how, within the space of two comment boxes on Facebook pertaining to a news story about polyamory, the political dimension of relationship diversity is negotiated. In particular, we looked at what ideas and representations about the "political" arise, and how they challenge and/or uphold normative definitions of the "political." Because of the focus of the news piece—the anniversary of the April 25th Revolution—we examined particularly how "liberty" intersects with the "political." We used the entwined ideas of positive and negative liberty, as well as the importance of civility in political discussion, in analyzing the comments, both from a quantitative and from a qualitative perspective.

We found, as previous literature shows, that incivility is common in social networks, and not alleviated by the fact that people are often posting through their identifiable profiles. Additionally, this incivility is present not only from those who would speak out against relationship diversity, but also from those who would defend its legitimacy. Incivility is met and countered with more incivility, and often the discursive focus becomes a tug of war between competing moral narratives. The presence of incivility in public discussions has paramount consequences in the political sphere, such as a weakening of political trust and the delegitimization of political arguments (Coe et al., 2014), as well as heighten perception of political polarization among the public (Kenski, Coe, & Rains, 2020). The number of comments dealing with off-topic issues and incivility weight more than discussions about the topic at hand in the news piece, leading us to question the role of incivility in contemporary politics, not just in comment boxes, but as a normalized part of political discourse—and its potentially dangerous effects in a global context of increased right-wing extremism.

When it was addressed centrally in comments, polyamory was mostly viewed from a weakly political perspective—that is to say, it was framed as encompassed by the ideas of positive or negative freedom, but only insomuch as it pertained to the freedom of private and privatized self-determination. Interestingly, it is via hyperbole that detractors of polyamory and relationship diversity end up endowing it with far-reaching macrosocial (and thus political) implications, by claiming it serves as a conduit for the corruption of "Our" culture by racialized Others and "their" ideas and practices. These implications are often not mirrored positively by those who position themselves as upholding relationship diversity.

Thus, relationship orientation often ends up being reduced, even by more inclusive commenters, to the equivalent of a lifestyle choice, rather than framed as a political category of citizenship (Santos, 2019). Further, a very large number of comments explicitly disavow any connection to the liberal revolution that serves as the motto for the news piece, even when upholding the right for polyamorous people to exist and live out their relationships. In that sense, the public sphere is framed as something that needs to be safeguarded against non-normative intimacies. Intersections with racialized Others, sexualized Others and gendered Others are created to uphold the intimate privilege (Rambukkana, 2015) afforded to monogamy—in that regard, consensual non-monogamy is framed as a threat to civility or society by how close it brings even white and/or male-read bodies to those Othered lives (themselves reduced to a stereotype).

This creates a two-layered understanding of the "political," where some topics within intimate citizenship aren't read as formally political, not seen as "serious" enough to be a source of discussion for the rearranging of sociolegal structures, and where the political ends up being privatized and individualized. As Berlant and Warner (1998) posit, freedom becomes privatized through this policing of what is Political, and intimate citizenship's potential reach is curtailed as much as possible. In our view, intimacy is still understood as part of a feminine dimension of social life which, then, should be remitted to the private space of the house or the bedroom—if that—while topics like "revolution" or (real) "freedom" remain coded as masculine, and thus serious and worthy of respect, pertaining to *Man*'s rights. Even those who defend relationship diversity often mobilize arguments that are connotated with masculinity and individuality, stressing that the people portrayed are rational and consenting adults.

Intimacy is, following Berlant and Warner (1998), more than something that is seen as private and actually privatized

according to patterns of normalization. We recognize, therefore, a public mediation about the way we engage with different kinds of intimacy, where the heteromononormative sexual culture is publicly approved and promoted, and other insurgent or queer ways of intimacy, when allowed, are relegated to the private sphere. However, by delimiting some kinds of intimacy, sexualities and relations as purely private, personal matters, the heteromononormative culture is allowed to prevail and the appearance of dissident sexual cultures is blocked. As Rambukkana (2015) points out, "in giving societal recognition only to the monogamous parts of a broad spectrum of social relations, we erase or elide the legitimacy of other forms of intimate expression." If something is constrained within the walls of the private sphere, it is not because there is a clear, universal distinction between public and private spheres, but rather because some intimacies, disguised as "free to exist in privacy," are not allowed to claim formal public space or, at least, not live socially recognized intimacies. Nevertheless, they are still publicly and politically mediated amidst a normalizing process.

We conclude by saying that polyamory and other forms of consensual non-monogamies occupy a position of political ambiguity within the current mainstream understanding of the Political, which opens itself up to diversity but, by the same movement, also precludes any radical questionings of the mononormative arrangement of contemporary so-called Western(ized) democracies. For the discussion around intimate privilege (Rambukkana, 2015) and the politics of relating (Cardoso, 2015) to expand, and to recognize the politicalness of CNMs and their subjects, the privatization of intimate citizenship must be identified as a process of maintaining the White heteromononormative patriarchal system. A superficial reading of the news story presented here could identify a prime example of several types of intersecting privilege (whiteness, middle class, masculine-centered, apparently straight), and yet a majority of reactions still refuse any recognition toward polyamorous subjects, and mobilize racism, misogyny, and queerphobia against polyamorous people, as well as those Othered communities. Thus, the construction of the Political, as a negotiated process, rather than a singular action in time, along the lines of intimate privilege, can often lead to contradictory, ambivalent, and unexpected results, justifying ongoing academic attention to the topic.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval All procedures were performed in accordance with the ethical guidelines for research of University of Lusofona's CICANT research centre.

Informed Consent No personal data was collected, and all data was collected from publicly available sources where there is no expectation of privacy, therefore according to the ethical guidelines followed, no informed consent was collected or necessary.

Appendix 1: List of Coding Categories Used

1. Politics and Polyamory
    - 1.1. Defining politics—disengagement, negativity
        - 1.1.1. Disconnecting polyamory from the April Revolution
        - 1.1.2. Polyamory as a negative consequence of freedom
            - 1.1.1.1. Abnormality, pathology
            - 1.1.1.2. Exhibitionism
            - 1.1.1.3. Immorality, value crisis
            - 1.1.1.4. Libertinage
            - 1.1.1.5. Trend, fun
            - 1.1.1.6. Sect
    - 1.2. Defining politics—solidarity, engagement
        - 1.2.1. Connecting polyamory to the April Revolution
        - 1.2.2. Polyamory as a positive consequence of freedom
            - 1.2.2.1. Informed consent
            - 1.2.2.2. Emphasis on love
            - 1.2.2.3. Individualized freedom/polyamory as a lifestyle
        - 1.2.3. Demarcation from negative views and comments
2. Incivility and hate speech
    - 2.1. Incivility
        - 2.1.1. Arbitrary remarks
        - 2.1.2. Insults, offences, defamation
        - 2.1.3. Irony, sarcasm
        - 2.1.4. Obscene language
    - 2.2. Hate speech and threats against minorities and discriminated groups
        - 2.2.1. Normative views on love
        - 2.2.2. Hypermasculinity
        - 2.2.3. Misogyny
        - 2.2.4. LGBTQ-phobia
        - 2.2.5. Racism, xenophobia
        - 2.2.6. Others

3. Others/Free categories

    3.1. "The children"
    3.2. Anti-intellectualism
    3.3. Criticism against the male-focus of the news piece
    3.4. Criticism against journalism
    3.5. Emphasis on the women
    3.6. Emphasis on the man
    3.7. Auto-biographical exposition
    3.8. Undifferentiation between non-monogamies

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