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‘If there is no homo, there is no trio’: Women’s experiences and expectations of MMF threesomes

Although contemporary research into threesomes is expanding, little is yet understood about women’s perspective on threesomes involving two men and one woman (MMF)—the generally more stigmatised configuration of mixed-sex threesome. Using semi-structured interviews with 16 women who had ever engaged in a mixed-sex threesome, this research aimed to explore women’s attitudes and experiences of MMF threesomes and understand their (dis)interest in them. The findings suggest that, although MMF threesomes were somewhat stigmatised by participants, more were interested in them than not. Core to women’s (perceived) enjoyment of these threesomes was the desire to engage with men who would interact sexually with each other. This helped to create a safer, less objectifying environment, as well as providing sexual arousal for some women. Accordingly, it is suggesting that the stigma around MMF threesomes is diminishing, and in this context, women are enacting their sexual agency to pursue the sorts of sex they desire.

Keywords: Consensual Non-Monogamy, Group Sex, Sexual behaviour, Sexuality,
Threesome

Introduction

Although still an under-researched topic, contemporary scholarship into threesomes is growing (See: Scoats & Anderson, 2018; Thompson & Byers, 2017). Recent studies have highlighted men's greater interest and willingness to engage in threesomes (Thompson & Byers, 2017), the prevalence of threesome experiences in the general population (Herbenick et al., 2017), and the role of communication and rules during threesomes (Scoats & Anderson, 2018). No studies, however, have explored what is generally perceived as the more stigmatised threesome—those involving two men, and one woman (MMF) (Schipper, 2016)—from women's perspective. Although Scoats, Joseph, and Anderson's (2018) research highlights how young men are demonstrating an openness to MMF threesomes, little is known about the women who are also open to and having these experiences.

The present study thus aimed to understand women's perspective of MMF threesomes and explore their reasons for (not) engaging in them. As part of a larger project into threesomes, interviews were conducted with 16 women who had ever engaged in a mixed-sex threesome. The interviews explored their experiences of and attitudes towards different types of threesomes. Although few participants (three) had actually engaged in an MMF threesome, by speaking with women with some prior mixed-sex threesome experience, it was hoped that perspectives toward MMF threesomes could be understood without the impact of underlying stigma against consensual non-monogamy (Conley, Moors, Matsick, & Zeigler, 2013; Thompson, Bagley, & Moore, 2018)

The Threesome Imaginary

Schipper (2016) describes the *Threesome Imaginary* as collective cultural understandings regarding threesomes that reflect and reproduce existing power relations and social privilege.

The Threesome Imaginary is the dominant, potentially hegemonic, understanding of what constitutes an acceptable threesome. For heterosexuals, this is primarily constructed as a monogamous couple temporarily inviting a third to join them, or imagining doing so (Schippers, 2016). These sorts of threesomes are a tolerated method by which a couple can invigorate their sex life, as long as it does not become a regular sexual practice or structural feature of the relationship (Scoats & Anderson, 2018).

Schippers (2016) also argues that the threesome imaginary is unambiguously gendered in favour of threesomes with two women and one man (FFM). This greater acceptance of FFM threesomes is also shown in much of the research (Frank, 2008; Karlen, 1988; Scoats et al., 2018). Furthermore, a number of studies have suggested women are less likely to be aroused by, participate in, or fantasise about threesomes with two men (Armstrong & Reissing, 2014; Joyal, Cossette, & Lapierre, 2015)—potentially demonstrating both a stigmatisation of MMF threesomes, as well as women's lower general interest in threesomes (Hughes, Harrison, & Gallup, 2004; Thompson & Byers, 2017).

For both men and women, an FFM threesome is seen as harmless fun, whereas an MMF threesome is unthinkable. The reasons for this are, however, different for men and women. An FFM threesome makes up part of the accepted erotic habitus (the expected erotic desires or values) for women, who are not thought lesbian for engaging in them (Rupp, Taylor, Regev-Messalem, Fogarty, & England, 2014; Schippers, 2016). Presumptions of female bisexuality (Fahs, 2009) help eroticise FFM threesomes (Jonason & Marks, 2008) in line with 'heteronormative conceptualizations of attractiveness' (Worthen, 2013, p. 709). An MMF threesome does not, however, make up part of a woman's erotic habitus and having/desiring a threesome with more than one man is likely to have one labelled as a victim or a slut (Frank, 2013; Schippers, 2016). This victimhood narrative has also been found in

research on women's casual sex, specifically projected onto those considered "easy" (Farvid, Braun, & Rowney, 2017)

For men, engaging in an FFM threesome confers sexual mastery/virility (Karlen, 1988; Sheff, 2006), whereas engagement in an MMF threesome can arouse questions about their sexuality (Anderson, 2008; Frank, 2008). Evidencing this stigma, men are rated more favourably when their threesome consists of two women, rather than a man and a woman, reflecting either an eroticisation of female homosexuality/bisexuality or the stigmatisation of perceived male homosexuality/bisexuality accompanying an MMF threesome (Jonason & Marks, 2008). In Anderson's (2008) study, his sample of male college students initially suggested they would only engage in an MMF threesome for a 'good cause scenario' (p. 109)—meaning that they would only engage in it if there was what they considered a valuable enough payoff (e.g., both achieving sex with an attractive woman). This was, however, later found to not be entirely accurate. One participant admitted to inviting a male friend to make-up a threesome when he had already secured the promise of heterosexual sex. Another stated that it was fun to have a (male) friend present during a threesome. Anderson (2008) argues that these men needed to use the excuse of a good cause scenario to enable them to interact sexually with another man.

A changing culture of threesomes

There is, however, a growing body of research that disputes the idea that FFM threesomes are always the preferred threesome option. In contrast to Karlen's (1988) early work on threesomes, the greater acceptability of FFM threesomes seem to be diminishing. Looking at 274 heterosexual university students (202 women, 74 men), Thompson and Byers (2017) found that 13% had at some point engaged in a threesome (24% of the men, 8% of the women). They did not, however, find that both men and women showed a preference for

FFM threesomes. Whilst men demonstrated a significantly higher interest in FFM threesomes, women demonstrated similarly low preferences for both FFM and MMF threesomes.

Hughes et al.'s (2004) results regarding women's preferences for threesomes also questions the taboo of MMF threesomes. Although women were less interested in threesomes than men—78% of men compared to 32% of women said they would engage in a threesome—women did not reject MMF threesomes outright. Female participants' preferences for the make-up of the threesome, showed that '53% preferred two males; 4% preferred two females; 27% preferred a male and a female; and 16% indicated that the sex of the other participants did not matter' (p. 9).

Although the Threesome Imaginary may represent the most acceptable forms of threesome, it does not preclude other types of threesomes from happening. Scoats et al.'s (2018) research explored the threesome experiences and desires of 30 heterosexually identifying, male university students. This research, comparable with Thompson and Byers' (2017) findings, found that a third of the men had engaged in a threesome. These instances were more heavily weighted towards FFM threesomes in both experience (five had FFM experiences; three had MMF experiences; two had both) and desire (all would engage in future FFM threesomes). However, these men still showed a willingness to engage in MMF threesomes: '20 of the 25 men with no experience of MMF threesomes responded that they would be interested in having one' (p. 39). Seemingly, the stigma around MMF threesomes had diminished for many of these men.

As these studies imply, some western societies may be moving away from the cultural constraints of the Threesome Imaginary. Schippers (2016) argues that allowing women to be interested in MMF threesomes could help bridge the gap between heteronormative and queer cultures, facilitating an opportunity for men to engage in queer culture and, possibly, queer

behaviours. As we are seeing, the erosion of the one-time rule of homosexuality among university attending men in the U.K. and U.S. (Anderson, 2008; Anderson, 2014), and a growing rejection of traditional modes of masculinity (see: Magrath & Scoats, 2018; Roberts, 2013; Robinson, White, & Anderson, 2017) may in part be facilitating this development (Scoats et al., 2018).

However, it should be noted that even if a greater rejection of more traditional masculinities (Anderson, 2009, 2014) is contributing to the enhanced acceptability of MMF threesomes (for men), this does not necessarily mean that MMF threesomes are harmless to, or undesirable for women. Indeed, if we do not presume patriarchy to be linked to a hierarchy of masculinities, then a change in norms of masculinity (and a flattening of this hierarchy) does not necessarily diminish patriarchy (Anderson & McCormack, 2016). Consequently, MMF threesomes still have the potential to be objectifying to women, and serve primarily male sexual desires, even amongst more inclusive men. Accordingly, the present study thus aims to better understand women's perspectives of MMF threesomes; exploring how they are both perceived and experienced.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 16 women who had ever engaged in a mixed-sex threesome and was part of a larger exploratory project looking at threesomes. Participants were mainly British (eight), with others identifying as North American (three), Western European (four), and Dutch-American (1). Participants were exclusively white, with a mean age of 31.2, and an age range of 19-57. Regarding participants' sexualities, two identified as heterosexual, four identified as heterosexual with some recognition of their attraction to women, three identified

as bisexual, one as bisexual/pansexual, one as pansexual, and two as queer. Three participants avoided/felt unable to put a label on their sexuality.

Recruitment

Participants were gathered using snowball sampling, with some initial respondents being already known to the author. (Browne, 2005). Some of these initial respondents helped establish referral chains that led to subsequent contact with other participants (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). In addition, personal connections assisted as *de facto* research assistants, putting the author in contact with other potential participants. The use of personal acquaintances has the benefit of accessing those who would not necessarily respond to calls for research participants, but would to a personal request (Browne, 2005); in part, boosted by the enhanced credibility of being recommended (Denscombe, 1998). The sample were selected purposefully to fulfil the criteria of: being knowledgeable of the cultural arena being studied and being willing to talk (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Data collection and analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face and via synchronous, online video applications such as Skype. Rather than follow an explicit script, interviews focused on a number of topic areas to allow for any unexpected emerging themes (Sarantakos, 2005; Seale, 1999). Interviews were recorded for transcription, allowing for rapport to build between the interviewer and participant, unimpeded by note taking, and allowing for a more natural flow within an interview (Reinharz, 1992). Being part of a larger project on mixed-sex threesomes, the interviews focused on participants' attitudes and experiences of threesomes as well as four broadly related areas: previous sexual experiences, understanding

of sexuality, experiences and attitudes towards sex, and experiences and attitudes towards consensual non-monogamy.

Interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis is an often under-utilised methodological strategy that shares many procedural elements with grounded theory, without being tied to an implicit theoretical standpoint (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Rather than engaging in what Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 85) refer to as ‘grounded theory lite’—using grounded theory’s methodological steps, yet not explicitly looking to create theory—thematic analysis was seen as a more appropriate methodological strategy that could still be used to generate theory, but did not restrict the author if no clear theory was forthcoming.

Results

From the sample of 16 women, only three had ever engaged in an MMF threesome. All three, as well as other women in the sample, highlighted a desire for particular interactions during MMF threesomes, namely that the men would interact with each other sexually. These preferences were sometimes borne out of previous threesome experiences, but also the consumption of sexually explicit media demonstrating male same-sex sexual interaction. The desire for these sexual interactions were based in both their capacity to arouse, as well as expectations of what MMF threesomes without this sexual interaction were like.

‘Watching two men interact rocks my socks’

Describing some of their prior experiences, three participants explicitly said that seeing their male partner with another man was arousing. For example, Megan suggested that in an MMF threesome: ‘I do find the guy on guy action quite hot, so it’s an element I like’. Similarly,

Mary recalled one of her MMF threesomes with her long-term partner: ‘He was making out with the guy and being sexual with the guy...it was hot’. It was also perhaps Mary’s desire to see male-male sexual interaction that initially encouraged her to have an MMF threesome with her partner. She stated that it was: ‘maybe more me that wanted to do it, and see him with another guy’.

In addition to the three women with MMF experiences, all of whom were happy to engage in them again, there were a further six women who expressed a desire or interest in having one. Similar to the three women with MMF experience, as well as women in other research (see: Neville, 2018; 2015), the majority of these participants highlighted that they got sexual pleasure from seeing (or the idea of seeing) men interact together sexually.

For those women without direct experience, their male same-sex sexual interaction was limited to consumption of pornography. For example, Anna suggested that she found men interacting sexually: ‘Very arousing! Even if I was just watching’. Likewise, Caroline found: ‘Man-on-man pretty hot’. For Beth, this desire heavily influenced her pornography consumption: ‘I watch gay porn waaaaaaaay more often than I watch straight porn. It's simple math. More dicks!’

Although not describing an interest in watching pornography (or MMF threesomes), one participant, Holly, recollected that:

When I was younger I was like super into gay male sex, like that's what got me off, I read erotic stories about it. That was my porn consumption. All of my earliest romantic attachments or crushes were all on as yet to come out gay boys.

Consequently, this desire to see men interact sexually often fed into the participants’ wishes around MMF threesomes. For eight out the nine women open to MMF threesomes in the

future, a key factor in increasing their enjoyment (or expected enjoyment) was the extent to which the males interacted with each other. Beth, for example, felt that the men interacting would lead to an enhanced experience and she referred to how aroused she thought it would make her: 'Watching two men interact rocks my socks. So, it would make the threesome better because I'd be a human geyser'. Beth went on to suggest that she would view guys not interacting in an MMF threesome as a reflection of cultural homophobia: 'I would want them to interact. If I could only get them should the conditions be that they wouldn't interact, because of stupid homophobic norms. I'd take what I can get. But ideally, I'd want them to interact'.

Another participant, Grace, was less willing to compromise on the interactions of the males in her threesomes. Consequently, this had impacted on her becoming involved in MMF threesomes: 'I'm definitely open for a threesome with two guys, I actually find it quite hot, but I haven't really found guys to do that with'. The difficulty highlighted hinged on her desire to see same-sex male interaction:

If there is no homo, there is no trio. I find it really annoying if they are reluctant to touch each other. I mean they like it when I make out with someone [of the same sex], and I like it when they make out with someone [of the same sex].

Although Grace enjoyed male same-sex sexual interaction she suggested that this kind of situation could be difficult to find and, consequently, she had only once engaged in an MMF threesome. She recognised that this difficulty was in part due to the stigma around male bisexuality: 'If male bisexuality was more accepted then I think, I would have more MMF threesomes'. This suggestion supports other research that highlights elevated levels of stigma

for bisexuals (particularly men) over heterosexual, gay, and lesbian persons (Anderson & McCormack, 2016; Eliason, 2000; Herek, 2002)

Accordingly, these findings dispute suggestions that women are uninterested in watching men interact in a sexual manner ‘except when it is treated as a game’ (Esterline & Galupo, 2013, p. 117). Indeed, other research has also started to challenge this idea. For example, Neville’s (2018) research on 365 women with an interest in male-male pornography found that 91% were using it as a masturbatory aid. Clearly, for a number of women in this current research, the attraction to seeing men interact sexually went beyond simply the enjoyment of sexually explicit media, but also influenced their (desire for) sexual behaviours with others.

‘I would feel less apprehensive if they were going to enjoy each other as well’

Based on their experiences, both Mary and Megan suggested that threesomes where all three people were involved with each other sexually were the most comfortable. Mary suggested that MMF threesomes with no sexual interaction between the men were more difficult: ‘I think I have to pay even more attention to my partner when a guy is straight, because it’s just me and my partner or the other guy and me’. She contrasted this situation with the context of FFM threesomes:

When the third is a girl then my partner can be with her as well so I can relax a little bit more, and there can be a moment where I just mellow out and watch the two of them.

Similarly, she suggested that threesomes where her partner could interact with the other male as being much easier: 'He was making out with the guy and being sexual with the guy and I think that made it a lot easier for me'.

Thus, in situations where there would not be sexual interaction between all three members of the threesome, Mary would make a conscious effort to consider the experience of her romantic partner. Being aware that her partner could sometimes feel dejected, she felt some responsibility to balance her own pleasure with taking care of her partner:

You could have such a wash of bad feelings come over you and then it's hard because you see the other people having a good time and you don't want to ruin their good time. And that makes it worse because you feel like you're a burden. But for me that doesn't really happen. I guess it sometimes makes it difficult because I know it can happen to my partner, and I feel responsible, and I need to shift my focus a lot. So maybe I want to focus on the niceness of the pleasure of the other person but now I need to focus on giving the appropriate amount of attention to my partner so they do not fall into this pit of despair.

These feelings of exclusion, and the uneven distribution of attention within threesomes have also been documented in other research (see: LaSala, 2005).

Likewise, when looking for another man to for an MMF threesome, Megan wanted to find someone who would have sex with both her and her male partner: 'I think we wanted a guy who was not just going to be into me, but would also be into my partner'. Megan felt that this strategy would help them find someone who was more in line with their sexual values:

When I think of a guy who only wants to have sex with a woman then I think of a guy who's a bit homophobic possibly. I know I'm making assumptions, but I wouldn't feel as comfortable or connected with someone like that, and that's important for me.

Despite all of Megan's threesomes having involved male sexual interaction, this strategy did not necessarily preclude instances of female objectification. Describing one experience, Megan said: 'The sex was not good. He was just very chauvinistic. It really makes me cringe. It makes me feel embarrassed. And we've laughed about it, but he was a bit objectifying and that made me feel a bit crap'.

Perhaps linked to cultural expectations around MMF threesomes (Schippers, 2016), when questioned about engaging in one, some women assumed that this sort of threesome would not involve the men interacting with each other. Indeed, more mainstream sexual scripts for heterosexual men have only in recent years (slowly) started to incorporate include same-sex sexual behaviour (Scoats et al., 2018; Ward, 2015). When scenarios were suggested whereby the men would interact sexually, however, this had the potential to make this type of threesome more appealing. Ruth suggested:

Yeah, I think because I would probably say it's quite important because if you're going to have a threesome, it should be about all three of you...I would feel less apprehensive if they were going to enjoy each other as well.

For Anna, who initially suggested that she would worry for her safety in an MMF threesome, she felt that, 'I would feel far more comfortable if the men were interacting together'. Laura also suggested that if the men 'Kissed and touched each other', then this might reduce some of the anxieties she had. Laura did, however, suggest that the experience would still need to

be sensual, and she would not want to feel excluded: 'If they both interacted together sensually and I was part of it all, I might like it. You never know until you try, right?'

Explaining these reductions in apprehension around MMF threesomes, when men interact sexually they may be perceived as breaking away from heteronormative sexual scripts (Schippers, 2016), and are perceived less likely to objectify or subjugate the woman involved. Indeed, McCutcheon and Bishop (2015) suggest that one of the reasons why some women preferred watching gay porn was the shift in power dynamics that it created. They found, 'participants consistently referred to an atmosphere of equality in gay pornography, regardless of whether or not role reciprocity was depicted between performers (i.e., alternating between 'top' and 'bottom' roles) (p. 80). Thus, there may also be a similar, favourable assumptions made regarding the men who engage in MMF threesomes that include same-sex sexual interaction.

'That's being used and abused and I'm not up for that'

Although more than half the sample expressed arousal or enjoyment over the idea of seeing two men together sexually, there were still a lot of anxieties around what an MMF threesome might mean in reality. Most commonly, these anxieties related to feeling intimidated and concerns about objectification; impressions being somewhat derived from pornographic representations of MMF threesomes. Concerns were more frequently expressed by those who had never had an MMF threesome, but were still highlighted by some of those with MMF experience.

Five participants suggested that the idea of an MMF threesome was intimidating. Anna said that, with two men, 'There would just be too much testosterone, and I'm a strong woman but I couldn't defend myself with two men'. She added, 'That's being used and

abused and I'm not up for that'. Holly echoed Anna's suggestion of danger. Referring to when she had previously engaged in sex work, she commented:

So some guys would ask for [MMF threesomes], but I was always like hmmmmm. I did make some friends who were doing sex work and I talked with one who was like, "Dude you do not know basic safety! Never go anywhere with two men, it's just a big no!"

Although not expressing a fear for her physical safety, Laura suggested that having to interact with two men simultaneously might be technically, and physically, overwhelming. She expressed a worry that the physical challenge of two penises in sex might lead to a loss of sensuality; something she strongly desired when having sex:

I thought about it, and I think I would have been intimidated to be honest. Lots of penises to manage at the same time...I don't think in my mind I would feel as aroused, because it's nice to be desired by two men, but the technical aspects, being penetrated by two men at the same time, that would be a little bit too much for me; more hard-core than sensual.

Some of these participants indicated that their perceptions of MMF threesomes being intimidating had been partly influenced by how they are portrayed in pornography; primarily that MMF threesomes are aggressive. Although Gemma recognised that porn was not necessarily true to life, its representations of MMF threesomes were enough to make it an unattractive prospect:

My only knowledge of two males, one female threesomes is from porn, and it always just seems absolutely brutal. The woman just seems to be absolutely violated, and obviously porn isn't a true representation of sex but it's never something that I've watched and I thought that's really appealing to me. It just looks like, really uncomfortable.

Gemma acknowledged that pornography often gave an inaccurate depiction of sex, but felt that she did not really have any other frame of reference to draw upon when it came to threesomes.

Representations of MMF threesomes in pornography were also linked by other participants to the objectification of women. When asked about whether she might consider engaging in this type of threesome, Laura stated that:

^ I associate that more with porn, and feeling like an object that two men are sharing... You feel like you're probably the thing that they're sharing. I don't know, it's weird, because it could be completely different. I guess it could be really satisfying and open, but that's the first idea that popped into my head.

Ruth also indicated that, although she had never had a threesome with two men, the impression she had from porn would put her off: 'It feels a bit like the girl is just being fucked. But then it could be different. It might be different'. Even Megan, who had engaged in numerous MMF threesomes, suggested that porn was probably a contributing factor to why she would be less interested in a threesome where the men were not involved with each other:

The idea of being the only woman doesn't massively appeal. Maybe I'm just thinking of porn and stuff, but it makes me think it would be more like, "Here's this piece of meat, let's have sex with her". But I know it doesn't necessarily have to be like that but in my head I think that's what an MMF threesome without the guys interacting would be like.

This section has highlighted a number of concerns that participants had around MMF threesomes. Mainly, anxieties related to how they, as the only woman in the three, would be treated during the threesome. A fear of physical danger, expectations of mistreatment, and anticipation of objectification all added to a sense of anxiety around MMF threesomes. Pornography also seemed to be somewhat influential in creating these expectations. In combination with the previous sections' findings we also see a perceived connection between the reluctance of men to engage sexually together and other expectations regarding their behaviour. Accordingly, it appears that men in threesomes who don't sexually interact are perceived to endorse orthodox forms of masculinity (Anderson, 2009) and are consequently seen as more likely to engage in the objectification and mistreatment of women (Locke & Mahalik, 2005; Warkentin & Gidycz, 2007).

Discussion

This research explored women's attitudes and experiences of MMF threesomes, from the perspective of those with a prior mixed-sex threesome experience, in order to investigate (dis)interest in them. Although actual experiences of MMF threesomes were relatively low, more than half the sample showed an openness to them in the future. Primarily, an interest in MMF threesomes seemed to centre on a desire to have men interact together sexually—providing not only sexual arousal, but also a perception of a safer, less objectifying

experience. In contrast, some participants demonstrated an anxiety around MMF threesomes, citing fears of objectification and/or for their safety.

With one level of analysis, the results support the suggestion that MMF threesomes are more culturally stigmatised (especially for women) (Karlen, 1988; Schippers, 2016), being that only three women out of 16 had engaged in MMF threesomes (whereas all had previously engaged in FFM threesomes). Despite the low frequency of occurrences, however, few women overtly stigmatised MMF threesomes, suggesting that the stigma around them may be diminishing, at least in comparison to early threesome research (Karlen, 1988). In fact, more women were interested in MMF threesomes than disinterested. Accordingly, I argue that the taboo around MMF threesomes may be slowly shifting, although stigma is still clearly present. While FFM threesomes may be more popular, more common, and more desirable for many, MMF threesomes appear to be emerging as an option (See: Scoats et al., 2018), and the notion that an MMF threesome is never acceptable (Schippers, 2016) is changing. If this trend continues, it is likely we will see more women able to turn their desire for MMF threesomes into a reality.

When stigma was attached to MMF threesomes, it came in the form that it might not be a comfortable (or safe) experience. Somewhat linked to pornographic representations of MMF threesomes, as well as heteronormative assumptions regarding men, some women assumed that a threesome with two men would not involve the men interacting together sexually. Assumptions of danger or misogyny, however, were reduced when (it was suggested that) the men were sexually interacting together. This scenario had the potential to be a lot more appealing as well as easing some of the participants' fears. This finding supports Yost and McCarthy's (2012, p. 21) suggestion that: 'If women had a wider range of sexual imagery on which to draw, some would choose other means for sexual empowerment that were not simultaneously objectifying'. Accordingly, a more varied representation of

threesomes via pornography (as well as other sources) may create more opportunities for women (and men) to explore threesomes in different ways.

In addition, rather than absorbing pornography as reality, it could be argued that some of these women demonstrate a certain level of ‘porn literacy’ (Albury, 2014, p. 173); able to cast a critical perspective over pornographic representations and accept it as not necessarily demonstrative of real life practices. Despite this acknowledgement of the fictional basis of much pornography, however, these women were still using MMF threesomes’ representation in porn as a reason not to engage in them.

Another key finding was that men interacting together sexually was a source of desire for a number of these women, and many of them found this prospect to be arousing (either hypothetically or from their experiences) and in fact the most desirable way to have an MMF threesome. Although knowledge of women’s desire to see men interact sexually is not necessarily new, the majority of research in this area has been limited to women seeing men interact in gay porn (Neville, 2015; McCutcheon & Bishop, 2015; Ramsay, 2017). While this type of porn was still a source of enjoyment for some of the women in the sample, the present study finds some women do have desire to experience it in their own sex lives. This finding also contrasts with Karlen’s (1988, p. 238) suggestion that the number of women who ‘would like to have two men involved with each other as well as with them’ was ‘relatively small’.

In tandem with women’s desire for male same-sex sexual behaviours, we see an implicit (and sometimes explicit) acceptance of male bisexuality, or at the very least, non-exclusive behaviours. Whether we recognise this as acceptance of bisexuality is, however, a question for debate as it could be argued that male heterosexuality is starting to incorporate sexual non-exclusivity into heterosexual identities (Carrillo & Hoffman, 2018; Savin-Williams, 2017; Scoats et al., 2018). Linked to this, there were also instances of women

viewing men unwilling to interact together as indicative of homophobia. Nevertheless, the participants in this study suggest at least a growing acceptance and eroticisation of male non-exclusivity, and for some, an acceptance of male bisexuality.

Lastly, the results suggest that, at least in this sample, women were broadly comfortable in pursuing the types of threesomes they enjoyed, and not engaging in those they did not. A number of scholars have questioned whether women in contemporary society are truly imbued with sexual agency (Burkett & Hamilton, 2012; Gill, 2008; Wood et al., 2007). As Burkett and Hamilton (2012, p. 829) argue: ‘Although the blatant denigration of women is no longer acceptable, somehow it is women themselves who are freely choosing to partake in practices that conform to traditional gender stereotypes’. Seemingly, through the internalisation of patriarchal constructions of appropriate sexual behaviour, women may privilege the sexual desires of men at the expense of their own (Wood et al., 2007). Consequently, this perspective could be used as an argument explaining some women’s engagement in behaviours they are “meant” to have little interest in—MMF threesomes. In the current sample, however, I argue that we do not see this type of capitulation. Instead, we find women’s wanting to engage in particular types of MMF threesome—ones where the men interact sexually—while simultaneously rejecting threesomes that don’t align with their desires.

However, due to the number of participants in the sample, and in particular, the number of women with experiences of MMF threesomes, the results must be interpreted tentatively. Although the results may speak to other women’s experiences, they are not necessarily representative. The sample is also relatively homogenous with regards to level of education, race, ethnicity, and social class. Furthermore, participants have all been gathered from broadly similar cultures, all being fluent enough in English to participate in an interview, and all being willing to talk about their experiences. Accordingly, the data may not

speak to those outside of the cultural backgrounds of the participants, those with highly negative experiences, or those unwilling to be interviewed. Without further research, we also cannot suggest that others' experiences will necessarily be any different.

Conclusions

In sum, this research largely shows that some women do have an interest in MMF threesomes, and these sorts of threesomes are not necessarily as negative or damaging as the stigma around them suggests. Despite positive attitudes, there still remains an apprehension around MMF threesomes; seeing them still connected to objectification, misogyny and danger—particularly when no male sexual interaction was to take place. Nevertheless, some participants were able to move past these negative presumptions, reconstructing MMF threesomes in a way that became safer, less objectifying and more arousing.

Accordingly, future research should look to explore women's experiences of MMF threesomes on a larger scale. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to explore the implicit links some participants made between men's willingness to engage with each other sexually and their presumed rejection of misogynistic behaviours. Additionally, further research into women's desires around viewing male same-sex sexual interaction is also justified given the impact that these scenarios had on women's attitudes towards sex.

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