Reconstructing the Meaning of Fidelity: A Qualitative Inquiry into Swinging Relationships

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation used qualitative methods to gain a richer understanding of the
dynamics of swinging relationships. Swinging was defined at the onset of the study as
sexual activities that married couples engage in with people other than their spouse.
Fourteen people (seven couples) volunteered and were interviewed to gain information
about what meaning they assign to their sexual practices, and how they experienced
intimacy and power in their relationships. Also included was a distinction between the
secrecy and privacy practiced by swingers. Symbolic interactionism and social
constructionism provide the theoretical frameworks the study. Computer mediated
communication was used to conduct the interviews. Analysis of the data revealed three
themes: swinging is only for committed couples, the reinforcement of heteronormative
ideals, and a reconstruction of the meaning of fidelity.

This dissertation is dedicated to:

Three years:
3 seasons of American Idol,
1 half-marathon,
15 pounds,
2 poodles,
4 goodbyes,
2 hellos,
6 jobs,
1 SUV,
30 Rapid Rewards points,
1 laptop,
Countless trips to Starbucks,
A few tears,
A few more laughs,
14 individual stories,
Several hands of blackjack,
And the people that were involved in making it all possible!

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Swinging, or sexual mate-sharing, has been the subject of empirical research for at least 30 years, and presumably it has been around much longer than that. There is no question that swinging is happening in this country; the multitude of websites and swinging publications available attest to that. In fact, some popular television shows (i.e., *Oprah*, *Six Feet Under,* and *Nip/Tuck*) have recently aired shows about the lifestyle. Despite this media attention, however, there still remains an air of privacy surrounding swinging. Rubin (2001) believes that it is like a "family secret [where] everyone is aware of it, but no one acknowledges it" (p. 723).

In the latter part of the 20th century, the meaning of sexuality shifted in America. According to D'Emilio and Freedman (1997), a major period of the reconstruction of sexual expression began near the end of the 1960s. Americans began to increasingly view sex as a recreational activity as well as a form of procreation, and sexual pleasure as legitimate and necessary components of their lives. Swinging is a part of this shift in the beliefs about sexuality. In fact, in 1965 the word 'swinger' itself came to be described as a "person who is lively in an unrestrained way" (Harper, 2001), connoting the lack of sexual restraint demonstrated by some couples.

It was during the sexually liberal 1960s when phrases such as "open marriage, sex surrogates, swinging, [and] couples' clubs" began to appear in American vocabularies (Janus & Janus, 1993, p. 13). During this era, sexual meaning, regulation, and politics were being reshaped in the middle-class culture. This reshaping resulted in a climate of open sexuality. Also, it was in this decade that sex-oriented television

shows and publications, and advertisements for sexual devices were becoming readily

accessible.

During the 1970s, sex researchers started studying swinging and reporting on it

in sexuality literature. At this time, most of the empirical literature discredited swingers'

claims about the benefits of swinging and condemned the practice (Henshel, 1973;

Knapp, 1975). Between the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, there were few scholarly

articles published about swinging. Then, briefly in the mid-1980s there was a renewed

interest in the subject, perhaps due to the HIV/AIDS crisis and researchers' interest in

how it affected swinging practices. From that time until now, sex research has focused

on seeking to understand the health and emotional outcomes of swinging and why

people continue to engage in the practice of it (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Jenks,

1998).

Contrary to the unfavorable depiction of swinging that the majority of the

empirical literature presented, popular books (e.g., *Open Marriage, Sex Rebels,* and

The Lifestyle) described swinging as a beneficial lifestyle for married couples. According

to these books, swinging was presumed to improve a couple's intimacy and to equalize

the power within a marriage. These books presented swinging couples who reported

increased feelings of intimacy (e.g., warmth, closeness, and love) after beginning

swinging (Varni, 1974). Also, swinging was touted as a way to overcome traditional

double standards of sex within marriage, as women were afforded more opportunities to

express and act upon their sexual desires.

When I reviewed the research that does exist on swingers, four primary themes

emerged: a description of swinging as part of the continuing sexual revolution of the

United States (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997; Macklin, 1980); the roles and rules in swinging relationships (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Cole & Spanier, 1973; Jenks, 1998); intimacy in swinging relationships (Peabody, 1982; Robinson & Blanton, 1993); and power in swinging relationships (Denfeld, 1975; Knapp, 1975). Informed by the collective descriptions of many researchers, working definitions were developed at the beginning of the research process to describe swinging, intimacy, power, secrecy, and privacy. Based on the literature from several authors (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Jenks, 1998; Rubin, 2001) swinging was defined as sexual activities that married couples engage in with people other than their spouse. Intimacy was defined as the perceived closeness that a person feels toward their spouse (Robinson & Blanton, 1993; Peabody, 1982). Power was defined as a person's ability to impose their wishes on another (McCormick & Jesser, 1983; Komter, 1989). Secrecy was considered an imposed condition of concealing information from others because of a fear of negative consequences. On the contrary, privacy was defined as making a choice not to share information with others in order to define one's self in a particular manner (Frisdl, 1994).

<div align="center">Rationale of Study</div>

Because an air of privacy surrounds swinging, it is difficult to obtain an accurate estimate of how many people actually participate. However, Bergstrand and Williams (2000) and the North American Swing Club Association [NASCA] (2005) estimate that approximately 15% of couples in the United States have incorporated some swinging-related activities into their marriage at one point or another. The fact that swinging continues to be practiced suggests that it fulfills some purpose or function that makes it worthwhile for couples (Rubin, 2001). Previous literature suggests that the function of

swinging is to improve intimacy and to equalize the power in marriages. In this study, the use of 'how' and 'why' questions provided an explanation and understanding of the intimacy and power that the participants experienced. Also, there is a need for updated information about the rules and roles found within today's swinging relationships. Family scholars have generally neglected swinging relationships (Rubin, 2001). What little research can be found is considered to be outdated (the majority was written prior to 1980) and was not included in marriage and family journals. These case studies present the stories of seven of today's swinging couples in their real-life contexts.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to use qualitative methods to gain a richer understanding of the dynamics of swinging relationships and the experiences of intimacy and power that occur between swinging couples. Two theoretical frameworks guided my dissertation research: social constructionism and symbolic interactionism. As symbolic interactionism focuses on how individuals interpret events, social constructionism reminds us that these interpretations are based on socially constructed realities. When studying a population of swingers, it is important to consider the meanings that they associate with their lifestyle and the ways that these meanings have been socially constructed through their interactions with spouses, family, and society.

Research Questions

Using case study research, the following research questions were investigated in this study:

1. How do individuals who participate in swinging describe or assign meaning to the experience?

2. How do swinging couples engage in intimacy?

3. How is power negotiated in swinging relationships?

<div align="center">The Self of the Researcher</div>

It is important that researchers maintain a critical awareness of self and explicit statements of who we are and what we assume (Allen, 2000). Before beginning my research, I have situated myself in the context of this research through a description of who I am and what I assume about swinging relationships. Also, I discuss how my previous experiences of being monitored informed my understanding of privacy and secrecy.

I am a white, educated, middle-class female. My family is close-knit and very affectionate. Married couples in my family hold hands, hug and kiss, and say "I love you" often. While sex was never blatantly discussed, I felt sure that I could ask either of my parents any questions that I had. My parents divorced when I was in middle school, and both eventually re-married. After the divorce (and before they remarried), I perceived that both were happier and that their quality of life seemed to have improved. Also, my mother was empowered to focus greater attention on her career and to pursue interests that she found personally fulfilling. Through this experience, I came to believe that divorce can be a viable option for some couples.

For a short time, my mother was married to an officer in the military and I lived as a "military brat" overseas. Because of my stepfather's status, I became aware of a social order in the military and among military dependents, and of my place as a young woman within that order. On one hand, I had many privileges and had many opportunities for travel and new experiences. However, I also had a lot of people

watching me and reporting my behaviors (no matter how insignificant they were) to my stepfather. He, in turn, continually reminded me that the way I act was reflected on him. The pressure to uphold a positive image restricted my activities to ones that were acceptable for an "officer's daughter" (e.g., a missionary trip instead of a senior class trip). If I chose to engage in socially unacceptable activities, I had to take measures to ensure secrecy.

The experiences I had growing up affected the way I view marriage and sexuality. I believe that they have also contributed to my interest in studying the swinging population. For example, I wonder if women in swinging relationships are truly experiencing greater power within their marriage, as much of the literature suggests. Also, my experience of being highly monitored as a military dependent made me aware of how family or social pressure can make secrecy so important. I wonder if swingers perceive negative repercussions for their activities and therefore use secrecy to protect themselves.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Frameworks

Symbolic interactionism and social constructionism were the theoretical

frameworks which guided this study. These theories informed an understanding of how

swingers interpret and define events in their life. This chapter begins with a brief

discussion of each theory's key concepts, assumptions, strengths and limitations. I also

provide a discussion of how the theories influenced the choice of research questions

and the data analysis.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism addresses how people interpret and define events in

their life and how these perceptions influence behavior. Additionally, the interpretations

that people have about particular events are a product of commonly understood

symbols (e.g., language) which are generated through social interaction (Stryker, 1980).

Hence, the focus of this theory is the connection between symbols and interactions.

Many researchers have contributed to the evolution of symbolic interactionism in

social sciences. First was Charles Horton Cooley (1956) who developed the notion of

the *looking glass self*. This sense of self emerges from an individual's perception about

how others imagine them, and their reaction and reflections on those beliefs. Another

important concept in symbolic interactionism is George Herbert Mead's (1956) notion of

taking the role of the generalized other. This involves a person's ability to extend

interpersonal meanings to an entire group. In other words, they interpret the responses

of others, based on their knowledge of social norms, and anticipate the responses that

others will have to their behaviors. This practice can cause people to restrict their behaviors to avoid violation of social norms and embarrassment or punishment.

Finally, Thomas and Thomas (1928) discussed the idea of the *definition of the situation*. This concept is described as one of the most recognizable phrases in symbolic interactionism. Defining the situation involves understanding that human action can't be understood separately from their subjective interpretations. Thomas and Thomas' summarize defining the situation as follows: "if people define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, p. 140). With respect to swinging, for example, if a couple defines their sexual activities with others as a means of improving their marital relationship, then they will be likely to attribute positive consequences to their actions.

Strengths for Studying Swinging

Symbolic interactionism was an appropriate framework for the study of swingers. I was interested in how swingers interpreted and defined events in their life, and how their perceptions influenced their sexual behaviors. Also, I was interested in the language and resulting dialogue that swingers used to communicate their shared meanings about intimacy, power, secrecy, and privacy. Symbolic interactionism provided guidance for understanding how swingers came to define these terms through their experiences with initiating and participating in swinging.

Swingers' understanding of their *looking glass selves* allowed them to assign meanings to others' responses to their sexual practices. Also, their ability to *take the role of the generalized other* allows them to anticipate the responses that others would have to swinging. Because of the negative connotations that are usually associated with

swinging, they may choose to either restrict their behaviors or engage in secrecy about them. Data collection included a focus on social processes and how they encouraged either freedom or constraint (acceptance or condemnation of swinging) to explain the presence or absence of secretive behavior.

Limitations for Studying Swinging

A criticism about symbolic interactionism is that it overestimates the power of individuals to create their own reality (White & Klein, 2002). People live in a world not of their own making, and must attend to subjective as well as objective factors when assigning meaning to actions. In this study, the participants' discussion of the rules they have created for swinging highlights the limitations of creating one's own reality. The rules that swingers establish are an attempt to address the subjective risks of their practices. For example, they make rules about using condoms with non-spousal partners because they recognize the risk of STIs or unwanted pregnancy.

Symbolic interactionism has also been criticized for neglecting the unconscious and emotional dimensions of human contact (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993; Stryker, 1980). Obviously, everyone does not always act rationally or consciously. Also, some people are not capable of reflectively thinking about the meaning of their actions. Swingers say that they will be able to avoid emotional connections with their non-spousal partners, but this may not be something which they can control. In any swinging interactions, there is always a chance that feelings for another person will develop. In fact, the specific rules that they create are intended to safeguard the primary relationship from the emotional dimensions of sex. Thus, even if it may not be conscious, they do not recognize that

there may be situations in which one member of the couple acts unconsciously and disregards their rules.

Social Constructionism

Gergen (2001) defines social constructionism as a perspective which emphasizes discourse as the way in which self and world are articulated, and the function of such discourse in social relationships. Walker, Allen, and Connidis (2005) remind us that social relationships are negotiated and renegotiated over time. Also, it is important to understand that when individuals negotiate their lives, they are doing so within shifting social and historical contexts. Therefore, research utilizing a social constructionist perspective must take into account not only an individual's account of a phenomenon, but their familial and social context and histories.

Gergen (2001) postulates that there are four major assumptions of social constructionism: 1) for any word that we use to understand our world and ourselves, there are potentially unlimited alternative words that could be used; 2) language and other forms of representation derive their meanings from the ways we use them within relationships; 3) we fashion our future through describing, explaining, and representing; and, 4) it is vital to our future well-being that we reflect on our forms of understanding.

In *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, bell hooks (1990) describes the struggle of language. Language, she writes, is a part of our being. Words not only have meaning, they are a form of action or resistance. For example, the words that swingers use to conceptualize infidelity can be considered a form of resistance to traditional notions of marital fidelity. Also, concealing a swinging lifestyle is a form of

communication. By choosing not to give public language to the lifestyle, swingers communicate a desire for privacy.

Gergen (2001) advocates for the pretense of objectivity to be abandoned and emphasis instead to be placed on dialogue. Within each of his assumptions, Gergen questions the positivist notions of Truth and objectivity. For social constructionists, there is no Truth, rather there can be multiple truths which are socially adopted. Because of this, he posits that objectivity can only be achieved within a particular paradigm. In this case, that paradigm could be swingers or swingers' families.

Burr (1995) discusses the idea that there are a potentially infinite number of alternative constructions to any event. She argues that a focus on these different meanings allows us to possibly re-construct ourselves in ways that may be more facilitating for us. For example, a couple that has decided to begin swinging must re-construct their conceptions about what constitutes infidelity. If they successfully do so, they will be more likely to enjoy swinging without feeling guilty that that they are "cheating".

Strengths for Studying Swinging

Burr (1995) identified two strengths of social constructionism. She stated that "part of the power of social constructionist accounts is that they deconstruct categories and classifications and urge us to recognize the diversity, fragmentariness and localness of experience and subjectivity" (p. 13). Also, she added that social constructionism cautions us against "assuring that 'we' (whoever 'we' are) can legitimately speak on behalf of 'them' (whoever 'they' are)" (p. 17). Giving voice to

multiple perspectives can empower groups that may not otherwise have the opportunity to share their experiences with others.

This theory provided guidance for understanding the dialogue that swingers engage in with family, children, or society. Constructionists recognize that swingers' perceptions are shaped by their social relationships, culture, and time. Within their dialogues, they are constantly defining and re-defining social roles and norms in order to maintain their identities.

Approaching research on swingers from the perspective of social construction, the ultimate goal was to identify how their understandings of intimacy, power, and privacy and secrecy are shaped through their interactions with others. For instance, did the dialogue between swingers and their parents cause them to feel the need to conceal their lifestyle? Or, did swingers believe that they will be labeled as deviant or immoral if they reveal their practices to society? And, is the possibility of labels negative enough that publicly they adhered to heternormative ideals about marriage and family? Heteronormativity is an ideology which recognizes traditional gender roles, family values, and heterosexuality as the optimal goals within relationships (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). These are the types of questions that a social constructionist perspective helped to answer.

Limitations for Studying Swinging

A limitation of this theory is that it reportedly fails to provide guidance about how to choose which 'discourse' to support (Burr, 1995; 1998). With multiple perspectives to attend to, Burr questioned how anyone can justify advocating one view of the world over another. The challenge, therefore, was to situate the knowledge gained from this study

within a frame of partial perspectives (in this case, swingers' perspectives). Also, it was important to acknowledge in my results and discussion the fragmented nature of reality and the impossibility of fully representing all possible truths.

Summary

Symbolic interactionism and social constructionism are theories that were well suited to be used together for a study on swinging. Symbolic interactionism's focus on the shared meanings of events is complimented by social constructionism's emphasis on the social construction (and continual re-construction) of these meanings. Based on my understanding of the theories' key assumptions, strengths and limitations, the research questions for this study were developed. I was interested in understanding how swingers assign meaning to their experiences (SI), and how they engage in intimacy and power in their relationships. Recognizing that these meanings were socially constructed (SC), the research questions and interview protocol were developed to provide insight into these areas of swinging. Also, these theories provided a framework for analyzing and interpreting the data gained in this study.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

The existing literature on swinging described research that is primarily

quantitative in nature. The body of literature focused on attempts to define the

phenomenon of swinging and understand who swingers are, why they participate in

swinging, and gender relations in marriage. Also, the literature proposed typologies of

swingers, provided descriptions of how couples find each other, and how rules were

created within swinging relationships. From the swinging literature, four themes were

identified: the construction of sexuality among swingers, roles and rules of swingers,

intimacy, and power in swinging relationships. In this chapter, I review the existing body

of literature as it related to each of these four themes.

The Social Construction of Swingers' Sexuality

The Changing Nature of Sexuality in American History

In their book, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (1997), D'Emilio

and Freedman write about the changing constructions of sexual expressions in America

from the 1920s to the 1970s. They contend that sexuality has continually been

reshaped by the shifting nature of "the economy, the family, and politics" (p. xii). Political

attempts to regulate sexual practices have fluctuated between conservative to liberal

periods throughout American history. Also, the personal meanings of sexuality's

function in an individual's life have been affected by his or her culture. For example,

improvement in medical technology led to freedom for women as sex came to be seen

more as a form of recreation than of procreation (Freedman, 1982; Schwartz, 2000).

As the anti-contraception laws were overturned at a government level, changes in the meanings of sexuality within marital relationships also began to occur. D'Emilio and Freedman (1997) discuss changes in the expectations regarding sexuality within the context of marriages. In the 1900s, women expressed guilt for desiring sexual gratification from their marriages. As the decades progressed, however, women's concerns about duty to their husbands began to be supplemented by expectations of enjoyment and fulfillment in their sex lives (Christopher & Sprecher, 2000; Freedman, 1982). These changing expectations were embraced by sociologists, who led a self-proclaimed campaign to "bring marriage into the 'modern' era" (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997, p. 265).

Ernest Burgess (1926) coined the phrase "companionate marriage" to describe this new, more egalitarian marital arrangement. Companionate marriages were defined as intimacy-focused and love-based relationships that encompassed the "new freedoms" that post-suffrage women possessed (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997). Partners mutually sought happiness and personal satisfaction from their spouses. They also recognized and appreciated the fact that a female's sexual desire could be just as strong as a male's. As a result, mutual sexual enjoyment was an important factor related to their marital happiness (Christopher & Sprecher, 2000). Spurred on by the increasing availability of birth control, which alleviated concerns over unplanned pregnancies, couples enjoyed greater freedom for sexual expression.

The construction of sexuality continued to shift in the late 1940s and early 1950s when Alfred Kinsey, Clyde Martin, and Wardell Pomeroy published their studies on the sexual behaviors of males. With reports of high rates of premarital intercourse and

extramarital sexual relationships, the Kinsey Reports (Kinsey, et al., 1948) shocked Americans. It became apparent that the moral standards that were being preached (e.g., saving one self for marriage; homosexuality as a sin; anti-masturbation) were not actually being practiced (Janus & Janus, 1993).

Situating Swingers in American History

In the book *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, and Gebhard (1953) made a brief reference to wife swapping. They state that several of the interviews that were conducted included mention of husbands encouraging their wives to engage in extramarital sexual activities. Some of this encouragement was attributed to the husbands' attempts to justify their own extramarital behaviors. However, Kinsey et al. state:

> It should, however, be emphasized again that most of the
> husbands who accepted or encouraged their wives' extra-
> marital activity had done so in an honest attempt to give
> them the opportunity for additional sexual satisfaction. (p. 435)

Around the same time as the Kinsey Reports were published, whisperings of wife swapping and "key clubs" in the military began to circulate (Gould, 2001). At a key party, as it was rumored, husbands would throw their keys into a hat and the wives would choose their sexual partner for the night by drawing out a set. The group that Gould (2001) credits with beginning these key clubs is World War II fighter pilots. These pilots were officers with elite status within the Air Force, chosen from the top one percent of the military. Often they were men who were prone to taking risks. Their wives were also considered risk-takers, as they married men who could be dead within one year. Bonds

of trust, respect, and loyalty tied these officers together (Bowker, 1998). The elite status of these pilots, and the high fatality rate (one in three) resulted in the formation of a strong brotherhood where they put their lives in each other's hands.

Gould (2001) discusses the fact that the appearance of key clubs seems to have emerged out of this brotherhood. The sharing of wives at these private key clubs reportedly began as a means of sexual enjoyment. However, to the husbands it came to mean more than that. They described it as a way to provide security to their wives. They reported that there was an unspoken rule in these key clubs that the husbands who survived combat would provide for the wives of men who did not.

From the perspective of a 21st century researcher, the justification that these pilots provided for their behaviors at key clubs is difficult to accept. It is hard for many people to identify a connection between allowing someone else to have sex with your wife and asking him to provide for her if you die. Gould (2001) did not provide a discussion of the hyper-masculinized culture of the military and how it may have influenced their reasons for connecting wife swapping with security. Philaretou (2004) writes about the military's hyper-masculinized atmosphere in which young men are able to "measure their manhood" (p. 89) and learn to become "one of the boys" (p. 91). Perhaps the emphasis on "proving your masculinity" in this military atmosphere these pilots empowered them to command compliance of their wives. If this were the case, it would follow that the husbands used wife swapping to try to justify their sexual encounters with other women.

While Gould (2001) does not specifically discuss the wives' reactions to the key parties, there is some question as to how much they contributed to the decision-making

about swinging. Dobrofsky and Batterson (1972) describe military wives of that time period as the epitome of a woman behind a successful man. They were expected to gracefully accept their role as military dependents and to behave appropriately at social functions and in military life in general (e.g., serve as hostess, be charming, reserved, and polite). Few, if any, worked outside of the home. If these characteristics held true with the pilots' wives, it is possible they felt obligated to participate in the swapping because of their role as a subservient wife. Unfortunately, no evidence is available to confirm or disconfirm this possibility.

Following World War II, wife swapping is rumored to have expanded to civilian communities through a veteran named Leidy who became a traveling salesman (Gould, 2001). As Leidy traveled, he met married couples that had heard about swinging and were interested, and he began to compile and distribute a list, which came to be known the "Leidy List." This list kept record of names, phone numbers, and addresses of swingers, and is considered to be the first example of a swinging publication.

During this period in the late 1960s, John Williamson purchased a fifteen-acre retreat known as Sandstone. Before purchasing Sandstone, Williamson and his friends frequently met at his house to discuss how to achieve greater fulfillment in marriage. These discussions often led to group sex and swapping of marital partners, shattering traditional social roles in the pursuit of sexual fulfillment and satisfaction. When Williamson bought the retreat, his intention was to expand this pursuit of sexual fulfillment beyond his own home and small group of friends.

Talese (1975) describes Sandstone in *Thy Neighbor's Wife* as a beautiful communal retreat located at the end of a difficult, winding road, which ensured that

people who ended up at Sandstone were deliberately looking for it. Many people lived in one of the cottages or in the main house, and everyone took turns with chores. Williamson emphasized gender equality and insisted that chores not be divided according to traditional gender roles. Along with the residents, many couples would spend occasional nights or weekends at the retreat for annual dues of $240. While there, people were encouraged to follow their inclinations for recreational sex (e.g., spontaneous sex outside or at the pool, having threesomes). Also, they were encouraged to challenge themselves to overcome the jealousy of seeing their partner with another person by watching it happen. Many couples reported that the act of seeing their partner with someone else made them feel liberated of their jealous instincts and actually love their partner more. Over the years, Sandstone became a popular sort of underground attraction for sexual adventurers (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997).

One feminist who was involved in the perpetuation of swinging was Betty Dodson (Talese, 1975). Dodson believed that the American middle-class conditioned women to be sex-negative. She advocated that women be free to choose their sexual activities and express their preferences, in the sex-positive manner that men were already experiencing. Just like John Williamson was doing at his home before opening Sandstone, Dodson hosted parties where she invited couples to explore a variety of sexual activities and improved fulfillment through experimentation. Talese discussed Dodson's experience of visiting Sandstone and that she was delighted by what she saw (i.e., people openly engaging in sexual acts by the pool). In fact, she labeled it a safe

place where "recreational sex could be indulged in by women in a pleasant and open environment" (p. 513).

Print media first informed the American public of the existence of swinging as a subculture through their coverage of Sandstone. Media recognition continued after the initial founding of Sandstone, when the film *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice* (1969) was released. In short, the film was about one couple that attended a couples' retreat where they were encouraged to be more honest with one another. As they practice being honest, Bob reveals to Carol that he has had an affair while away on a business trip. Instead of being upset, Carol finds herself excited by the thought and enjoys their new level of honesty. She exuberantly asks Bob for details of the affair, and revels in hearing his story. The couple shares their experience of new-found honesty with their friends Ted and Alice, and the foursome considers swapping partners. In the film, the two couples wrestle with the idea that mutual love and honesty may be dependent on their swapping partners. In the end, however, the couples decide not to go through with the swap. Despite the ending's rejection of the practice of swinging, the film is still considered a hallmark in America's increasing awareness of swinging.

One well-known member of the media, film critic Roger Ebert, reviewed the film in 1969. He described it as a sex comedy that "isn't really about wife swapping at all" (p. 1). Rather, Ebert says that the film addresses the moral crisis of Americans in their thirties. That crisis, he says, is their desire to be honest with each other and to be young and hip (i.e., open to new sexual experiences), but still having to deal with their hang-ups and conventional values. The film was also well received by the Academy Awards, where it received four nominations.

A final notable hallmark of the emergence of swinging as a recognized practice in American history is George and Nena O'Neill's book *Open Marriage* (1972). The O'Neills argued that rigid, prescribed gender-based scripts were destructive to the growth of healthy relationships. In response to this claim, they suggested that marital arrangements based on trust be established which would allow opportunities for an individual to seek personal fulfillment. The personal fulfillment they proposed was in the form of social outings (e.g., dates or attending theater or operas) with a member of the opposite sex. They also mentioned the possibility of sexual activities with other partners, but this was not the only focus of their book. The O'Neills wrote their book in an attempt to propose ways of combating stagnation in marriage, which they believed was contributing to the rising divorce rate. Because of the growing American interest in "all things sexual," their message was interpreted as a "treatise as a justification for extramarital sexual activity" (Rubin, 2001, p. 718).

It is clear that swinging has a part in contemporary society. Mentions of the practices infiltrated the media beginning in the 1960s and continue to do so today. Also, the proliferation of swinging publications and websites, and resorts and vacation packages just for swingers, attests to the presence of swinging practices in contemporary culture. Swinging publications and websites (e.g., www.scarlet-fever.com, www.sexherald.com) are replete with stories of swingers and how their swinging practices made them feel closer to their partners or improved their sexual satisfaction with their spouse. The limited amount of current empirical literature, however, makes it difficult to specify how swinging has changed from the past decades.

Roles and Rules of Swinging

There were many subcategories that fit within the major theme of the roles and

rules of swinging. First, I discuss the definitions of swinging and what distinguishes it

from other types of relationships. Second, I provide information about swingers'

individual, family, and relationship characteristics. Third, I discuss non-swingers'

perceptions of swingers. Next, I present two typologies and two models of swinging.

Then, I discuss why people report engaging in swinging, and how they go about finding

other couples. Finally, the rules of swinging are addressed.

Defining Swinging

As Americans became increasingly aware of the swinging subculture,

researchers attempted to define and explain the phenomenon. Most often, swinging has

been defined as an alternative relationship. Rubin (2001) defines *alternative*

relationships as any family form that is nontraditional: gay and lesbian lifestyles,

cohabitation, stepfamilies, swinging, and open marriages. Specifically, he defines

swinging as "the consenting of married couples to sexually exchange partners" (p. 712).

He states that the defining attraction to swinging is sex, and that couples otherwise

maintain their couple autonomy. In other words, they continue to restrict their emotional

involvements to only the spousal relationship, but expand their physical involvements to

include others.

Many authors (e.g., Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Macklin, 1980; Rubin, 2001)

identify swinging as a lifestyle. In the case of swingers who challenge the status quo

and incorporate other people into all aspects of their relationship, this is an accurate

description. However, swinging is not always considered a lifestyle. For some couples,

swinging is perceived only as a form of recreation (Varni, 1974). These couples and

claim that swinging is not the driving force behind their relationship, rather that it

something extra that they could do without. Therefore do not consider it to be their

lifestyle, rather a variation in their sexual practices.

In addition to being labeled as one type of alternative relationship, swinging has

been defined by Bergstrand and Williams (2000) as non-monogamous, recreational

sexual activity that allows for exploration of sexuality in a non-threatening manner. The

authors state that swingers consider their sexual activity much like any other social

activity. And, the primary focus in the relationship continues to be emotional monogamy.

Because of this desire to combine non-monogamous sex with emotional monogamy,

Bergstrand and Williams label swinging as "'deviant' from the western model of romantic

love" (p. 2). Similarly, the North American Swing Club Association (2003) defines

swinging as social and sexual intercourse with someone other than your mate ...

recreational social sex ... primarily an activity of couple" (p. 1).

Macklin (1980) provides a similar definition to swinging: "legally married spouses

sharing coitus ... with other legally married couples in a social context" (p. 912). In

addition to her definition, however, Macklin addresses the distinction that swingers

make between their practices and extramarital affairs. According to her study, couples

that participate in swinging do not see their activity as extramarital since they participate

as a marital unit.

Swinging versus Open Marriage

The terms *swinging* and *open marriage* are often used interchangeably. While

they do share similarities such as mutual trust and open, honest communication

(Wachowiak & Bragg, 1980), they also have two important differences. These differences are an emphasis on an individual versus the couple, and the allowance or restriction of emotional involvement.

Wachowiak and Bragg (1980) write that the emphasis in an open marriage is the individual partner and his or her own expression of sexuality, usually without the partner. Also, the original intention of open marriages was not primarily for sexual activities. O'Neill and O'Neill (1970) emphasized an individual's search for fulfillment in multiple aspects of their life, with sexuality only a small part of that fulfillment.

In contrast, reports about swingers indicate that the emphasis is on the couple's relationship and their mutual expression of sexuality. As Bergstrand and Williams (2000) describe emotional involvement with a non-spouse is discouraged among swingers. However, open marriages emphasize emotional, as well as sexual, involvement outside of primary relationship (Macklin, 1980). Therefore, for the sake of clarity, swinging will be distinguished as a type of relationship that is unique from open marriage in this dissertation.

Demographic Overview: Who are Swingers?

While swinging has been presented in both negative and positive lights by researchers, there still appears to be a stronger negative opinion held of swingers by non-swingers. In fact, Jenks (1998) reports that non-swingers in his sample perceived swingers as deviant in respects not related to their sexual behaviors. He adds that they have been perceived as using alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs far more frequently than the swingers themselves have reported. Also, swingers are perceived by others as engaging in high-risk behaviors. Almost half of Jenks' sample of non-swingers (N = 100)

would mind if a swinging couple that was "otherwise unobjectionable" moved into their neighborhood (p. 510). Maykovich (1976) states that even among considerably permissive cultures, the approval of swingers that was actually experienced was less than the approval that was verbalized.

Despite perceptions of swingers as hippies, drug users, and/or reckless and irresponsible risk-takers, demographic evidence from previous studies provides a profile of swingers as middle-aged, middle-class people spanning the spectrum from conservative to liberal. Also, swingers reportedly function psychologically as well as non-swingers. It may be true that, as Rubin (2001) summarizes based on his own and others' findings, "apparently the more privileged, stable, and ordinary citizen was and is the most likely to swing" (p. 712). If this 'privilege' truly exists, it can explain how swingers are able to maintain secrecy about their practices. Also, 'stable' individuals may be able to more easily manage non-normative sexual arrangements.

Given the fact that the typical stereotypes of swingers are not supported by the literature, it is important to provide information regarding swingers' individual, familial, and health characteristics at this point. Bergstrand and Williams (2000), Jenks (1985), and Rubin (2001) identify some general characteristics that seem to be representative of the swinging population. These characteristics fit with three categories: individual, familial, and health.

Individual Characteristics. Perhaps due to racism or the stereotype of hyper-sexualization among ethnic minorities (Patton, 2001), the general public believes that the largest percentages of swinging couples are nonwhite (Jenks, 1985). However,

Bergstrand and Williams' (2000) national study of 1092 swingers disproves this assumption. In fact, the authors reported that over 90% of swingers are White.

The ages of swingers ranged from 28 to 45, with Jenks (1985) reporting the mean age as 39 and Rubin (2001) reporting *30-something*. Both of these age ranges were fairly similar to Henshel's (1973) earlier findings that the average age was 30. Some possible reasons for swingers to fall into this age range are: they probably have been married a while and may be experiencing some boredom, their children should be of an age where they can be more independent, and this is around the time that women are entering their sexual peaks.

With regard to socio-economic status, swingers are reportedly middle- to upper-middle class (Denfeld, 1970; Jenks, 1985). Also, they tend to be in professional and management positions (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000). As Bergstrand and Williams (2000) noted, the middle-class is often seen as a restrictive status, therefore swingers may use their sexual activities as a means of escaping the perceived societal restriction.

Jenks (1985) also adds that swingers appear to have above average educational levels and income. This is important because, as Atwater (1982) states "education often liberalizes people's values and also gives them additional power through expertise to realize the life style they prefer" (p. 83). This liberal attitude could be a possible explanation for why swingers are capable of engaging in non-traditional sexual practices. Also, people of higher education and income levels have more resources available to help them keep their practices secret.

Familial Characteristics. Swingers are significantly more likely than control groups made up of randomly selected individuals with similar marital status or SES to

report unhappy childhood memories (Chernus, 1980) and negative memories of their

parents' marital relationships (Cole & Spanier, 1973). Jenks (1985) reports that

swingers were less likely than non-swingers to visit with their families or to hold them in

high importance in their lives. In addition, Cole and Spanier (1973) report that swingers

have much closer ties with their friends than they do their kin groups. Perhaps as a

consequence of this, they report less contact with their parents and other relatives than

control groups. It is interesting to note that none of these articles are more recent than

1980. It is not stated whether more recent authors simply did not see family ties as

being of primary importance because of other, more pressing issues, or because they

simply did not find any remarkable findings to report.

Health Characteristics. Janus and Janus (1993) report that most of the swingers

they surveyed expressed great anxiety about sexual diseases. However, their

participants also reported that sex was so important in their lives that "not even the

threat of AIDS would get them to cautiously adopt a more limited sex life" but they did

report making some changes in their actual sexual practices (p. 18). These changes in

practices were believed to be enough to protect them from the spread of diseases.

With the appearance of HIV/AIDS in the early 1980s, and concerns of preventing

the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), the small amount of research that

focuses on the sexual health of swingers deserves attention. Because swinging involves

behavior that can be considered high risk, sexually transmitted infections are a logical

concern. Despite this, very little research provides much information about this issue. In

fact, venereal diseases are mentioned in only one article when Symonds (1971) states

simply that they are of concern and that swingers take them into account.

Gould (2001) reports that swingers practice relatively high levels of safety measures to protect against STIs, such as condom use and selectivity of partners. Swing clubs ensure that each of their rooms is stocked with condoms, and owners encourage their clientele to use them. On the contrary, Rubin (2001) reports that swingers do not consistently practice safe sex through condom use. However, Larsen (1998) reports that in many cases, swingers reportedly limit their sexual interactions to people who have tested negative for STIs or HIV/AIDS.

When addressing the specific issue of HIV/AIDS in one study, swingers overall (N = 88) expressed only a moderate (58%) fear of contracting HIV (Jenks, 1992, 1998). Many felt this way because of their selectivity in sexual partners and their own experiences of practicing safe sex. Also, there was no significant relationship between the length of time that someone had been swinging and the fear of AIDS. In fact, the longer swingers engaged in swinging, the less fearful they were (Rubin, 2001).

Typologies of Swingers

In addition to understanding who swingers are and why they swing, Varni (1974) and Symonds (1971) developed typologies of swingers. These typologies attempted to divide the larger group of swingers into smaller groups, based on their reasons for engaging in the practice. Varni and Symonds' descriptions share similarities, however Varni identified five types of swingers and Symonds only two.

Varni's Typology of Swingers. Based on his empirical research of 32 swingers, Varni (1974) suggested that there are five types of swingers. These types are based on individual characteristics. However, Varni believes that similar types would likely be in relationships together. He organized the types around their degree of emotional

involvement. They are: hard-core, egotistical, recreational, interpersonal, and communal.

Hard-core swingers seek no emotional involvement with people other than their spouse and swing with as many couples as possible, as often as they can. Often, their partners are not necessarily good friends, and may even be relative strangers. This type would be the ones most likely to report that they can successfully separate sex from love. Similarly, egotistical swingers have very little emotional involvement and seek only to gratify their own needs and desires. Unlike hard-core swingers, however, egotistical types do not move as rapidly from one sexual encounter to another. In fact, they would be more likely to spend a little time getting to know one another before any sexual exchange occurred. They would not necessarily establish friendships with their partners, but would know at least a little about them. Recreational swingers see their swinging more as a form of play and/or entertainment in their lives. They feel secure in their marital relationship, and see swinging as a source of excitement. Recreational types would be more likely to swing with acquaintance or friends that they trust not to interfere with their intimate relationship with their spouse. Also, they may not participate in swinging as frequently as hard-core or egotistical types might. Finally, both interpersonal and communal types seek not only sexual satisfaction, but want to develop emotional relationships from their sexual exchanges. The latter, however, proposes that group marriage become their permanent lifestyle (living in group marriage communes) whereas the former does not seek such a formal and structured arrangement.

Symonds' Typology. Symonds (1971) also distinguishes between types of swingers, but with only two categories: recreational and utopian. *Recreational* swingers are similar to Varni's (1972) in that they use swinging as play. However, Symonds' research indicates that recreational swingers accept the current social order and are in support of the status quo. These would be people who see swinging as a form of entertainment or a way to spice up their marriage, but not as a way of developing intimate relationships with people other than their spouse. Recreational swingers believe that they can successfully separate sex from love.

Utopian swingers, on the other hand, seek to build a new order through swinging (as do Varni's communal type), where marriages involve more than two individuals, and residences and responsibilities are shared among a group. The utopian swingers seek intimacy and commitment from their sexual partners, not just sexual satisfaction. This type of swinger would be less likely to separate sex from love.

Why do People Swing?

Many of the researchers who study swingers have attempted to understand why some married couples choose this particular sexual practice. While we still know very few specifics about why people choose to swing (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000), several hypotheses have been generated. These hypotheses include: improving the quality of the marital and sexual relationship, seeking autonomy and overcoming social restrictions, improved contraception, and escaping boredom within the marriage.

The goal of improving the quality of ailing marital relationships was an often-cited reason for swinging in the literature. Knapp (1975) reports that swingers view their behaviors as an attempt to address their sexual needs openly and honestly, in order to

improve their marital relationship. Similarly, Schwartz (1973) questions whether it is possible that no one person could sexually fulfill any one other, and therefore whether swingers' relationships would only improve if they accepted this fact and allowed one another to be fulfilled sexually. More specifically, Bergstrand and Williams (2000) surveyed 1092 swingers and reported that among the respondents who reported unhappy marriages before swinging, 90.4% said that their relationship "became happier" (p. 7) and that it was stronger as a result of swinging.

As Bergstrand and Williams (2000) suggest, swinging may be a creative solution to sexual habituation or boredom. It can provide variety, adventure, and opportunity to express fantasies without deceit or secrecy. Jenks' (1985) study found that 26% of respondents (N = 406) named variety of sexual partners and experiences as their reason for swinging, followed by 19% citing pleasure or excitement as their motivation. The remaining reasons given were: the possibility of meeting new people, increased social life, and voyeurism or sexual thrills and excitement.

In addition, several authors describe swinging as a way to enhance and/or maintain an already satisfying marital relationship (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Cole & Spanier, 1973; Denfeld, 1970; Peabody, 1982). The goal may be to make a good relationship even better through exploration of fantasies in a non-threatening manner. Couples report that the absence of deceit or guilt creates this non-threatening environment in which they feel comfortable to explore (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000).

Another reason for swinging that has been hypothesized is that couples are challenging social restrictions with the desire of lessened social restrictions and a desire for greater personal autonomy. As Cogswell (1975) stated, all age groups question the

values of exclusive monogamy. And, North American society holds a cultural norm that says that sex should be enjoyable and exciting (Denfeld, 1975). Jenks (1985) suggests that because swingers as a group emphasize their personal values over more social ones, they may therefore be better equipped to overcome these societal restrictions. More recently, Rubin (2001), reports that many researchers see swingers' motivation as challenging existing religious, legal, and social rules.

Peabody (1982) writes that swingers tended to demonstrate a higher need for personal autonomy than did control groups and suggests that they are generally less socialized in their families of origin to conform to conventional societal ideas which equate sex with love. Also, swingers may be coping with their need for autonomy by depersonalizing their sexual partners so that they are no longer seen as emotional individuals, but only in terms of bodies capable of having sex. While this type of sexual interaction is sometimes considered dysfunctional, it is important to remember that swingers do not depersonalize their spouse. Therefore, they are capable of maintaining an emotional connection with someone. This connection is simply limited to one person.

Swingers Seeking Other Couples

The Internet has now become the most common method for swingers to find other couples (Rubin, 2001). Globally, in the new millennium, nearly 140 million people are expected to use Internet technology (Merkle & Richardson, 2000). A simple search through a web-based search tool yields several sites devoted to swingers who are searching for other couples (e.g., www.adultfriendfinder.com, www.swingnet.com, www.123couples.com www.adultlifestyleadventures.com, www.grapevines.org). Some of these websites are free, but many charge up to $40 per month for memberships.

The use of email, instant messaging tools, chat groups, and online message boards may have reduced some of the difficulties that swingers experienced through use of the postal mail and swinging publications (Rubin, 2001). One problem with the postal method of finding and meeting other couples, according to Denfeld (1974), is the amount of time that it takes for couples to actually get to the point of meeting one another. If an ad is placed in a (paper) swinging publication, it can be up to six months before results can be seen. On the Internet, the amount of wait time that occurs when communicating with possible partners is shortened.

Also, according to Jenks (2001), swingers have reported that it is difficult to find other couples that they find attractive. Often they experience disappointment when they finally do meet someone and their physique has not been honestly represented. The affordability and availability of digital and web cameras may help to assure that couples are accurately representing themselves, which could eliminate some of this disappointment.

Other, less frequently cited means of finding couples are going to swing clubs, swingers' conventions, word-of-mouth from other swingers, and personal referral (Denfeld, 1970). Swing clubs have reportedly been operating since the early 1970s. Couples pay an entry fee, typically around $20 to $40 to meet and socialize with other couples, to engage in anonymous or planned encounters with others, or to simply exercise voyeuristic tendencies (Gould, 2001). One problem with finding couples at a swing club is that they are usually only open on weekends.

Another method of meeting other couples is swinger's conventions. These conventions were first organized in 1979 (Gould, 2001) and blend swing club-like

activities into a vacation setting. Today, the two largest, nationally advertised annual

conventions are held in Las Vegas and Chicago. Approximately 2,500 couples attend

these four-day conventions, which cost approximately $600 (not including hotel

accommodations). Finally, word-of-mouth and personal recruitment are common

methods of finding other couples in which small networks of swingers introduce their

swinging partners to others in their networks.

The Rules of Swinging

Through discussion as a swinging couple, ground rules are established to

determine acceptable behavior and restrict non-acceptable behavior of both partners

and hopefully, prevent a threat to the marital bond (Buunk, 1984). The process of

actually becoming involved in sexual mate sharing is not considered to be very difficult.

Rather, the difficulty lies in working out mutually acceptable ground rules. Buunk (1980)

also refers to swingers' attempts at safeguarding their marriage through the use of quite

stringent rules (i.e., no kissing, same-room swap only).

Specifically, some of these rules deal with restricting emotional involvement with

non-spousal partners (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Thompson, 1984), spending days

of significant importance such as anniversaries together (Lawson, 1988), honest and

open communication (Denfeld, 1975), absence of a double standard since both partners

are participating equally (Peabody, 1982), and an emphasis on sex as a purely physical

act (Biblarz & Biblarz, 1980). Ramey (1975) lists specific rules given by swingers, most

of which have to do with maintaining strong boundaries between sex and intimacy (e.g.,

no kissing, no meeting on the side). Sharing personal information (i.e., no personal

commitments, no professional information) is also avoided, although sharing health

information is allowed. Also, the rules grew to include safe sexual practices (e.g., using condoms) as information about STIs and HIV/AIDS became more well-known.

Rules regarding the couple's conduct during sexual activity are also created when a couple begins swinging. Some couples may decide that they wish to only practice voyeurism. Others may decide that they will invite a single male or female to join their sexual activity, but not another couple. Yet another option that swingers may choose is to exchange partners (full swap) only in the presence of their partner. A fourth option would be for swingers to agree that each partner may engage in sex with other individuals or couples without the presence of their spouse, but that they will communicate to their spouse that they are doing so. Each couple makes a decision about which of these four they are willing to participate in, and many report that they progress from voyeurism to the latter as they grow more comfortable with their swinging partners.

In addition to explicitly stated rules, unspoken rules also seem to be important in swinging relationships. Peabody (1982) states that there appears to be a need for increased honesty and intimacy with the spouse in order for swinging to work. Each member of the couple must feel confident that he or she knows what their partner is doing and that he/she are discussing sexual activities with the spouse. While they may exchange sexual partners, they maintain couple autonomy in all other aspects of their relationship (e.g., financially and emotionally) (Rubin, 2001).

Deconstructing Gender Relations in Swinging Marriages

Gender is a complex aspect of every relationship, and a way of structuring social life. Lorber (1994) defines "gender" as a process of creating social statuses in order to

assign rights and responsibilities. Through human interaction and socialization, gender is constantly created and re-created. Gender socialization, the process by which an individual learns what 'appropriate' behaviors are for men and women, occurs at many levels (i.e., work, family, and media).

Traditionally, men and women have been considered to differ in roles, duties, needs, preferences, and sexual norms (Lorber, 1994; Vanyperen & Buunk, 1991). For example, prior to marriage women were expected to be 'virtuous' and refuse to succumb to sexual temptation, whereas men were believed to require sexual variety for their physical health. This double standard was a very real phenomenon in the past, and, many argue, still exists. The "good girl/bad girl distinction" still is a part of our culture, as is the "ethic of male conquest." The difference in modern times, however, is that women are less likely to tolerate it (Giddens, 1992, p. 9).

In the past, husbands were socialized to believe that their wives were exclusively their sexual property (Bell, 1972). Rogers and Amato (2000) discuss important ways in which gender relations within marriage have changed in the last two decades. Today, marital relationships have become more flexible and egalitarian, leading to the potential for improvements in marital quality. Initially, as our society (and marriages) became more sexually equal, men welcomed their wives' increasing sexual availability. However, they also reported feeling nervous and challenged by it at the same time (Giddens, 1992). Rogers and Amato add that husbands have greater difficulty accepting nontraditional attitudes than wives, causing the possibility of discord in relationships.

Gender Relations in Swinging Relationships

Ramey (1975) emphasizes that some people characterize swinging as a male-dominated activity whose main purpose is to allow men to actualize their fantasies. Despite this belief, swingers reportedly tend to reject traditional sex roles (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000) and cite their ability to overcome the double standard and level the status of genders as one of the benefits of swinging (Cole & Spanier, 1973; Fang, 1976; Libby & Whitehurst, 1973). In fact, Ramey (1972) refers to swinging as a sex equalizer, which promotes female independence and an improved sense of self-worth. Also, women's sexual needs are reportedly taken into account, and they are afforded the same rights and privileges as males when it comes to making decisions about sexual behaviors and activities (Chernus, 1980; Talese, 1973).

Heteronormativity and Swinging

While some scholars argue that traditional gender relations are becoming more egalitarian within marriage, heteronormativity remains the dominant ideology for studying families. Oswald, Blume, and Marks (2005) define heteronormativity as "an ideology that promotes gender conventionality, heterosexuality, and family traditionalism as the correct way for people to be" (p. 143). The authors discuss how males and females who conform to the White middle-class value of how "real men/women" behave are favored over individuals with more ambiguous gender roles. Within the context of sexuality, heterosexuality is still considered the "gold standard" of sexual behavior. Judged against this standard, alternative sexual identities are considered to be less valid or natural. Finally, this framework favors biological and legal family ties over other "pseudo" forms of relationships (p. 146).

It could be argued that swingers challenge heteronormative expectations about sexuality. For example, the reportedly high incidence of bisexual activity among female swingers (Dixon, 1985) implies that they reject the value of heterosexuality. And, the incorporation of extramarital sexual activities would be considered a rejection of traditional values of monogamy. However, overall swingers are more likely to reinforce heteronormative practices than to reject them.

Most bisexual activities among swinging women are limited to occasions in which at least one male (usually their spouse) is present (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Dixon, 1985). Also, the practice of male bisexual activities is rarely condoned (Dixon, 1985; Fang, 1976), even among bisexual wives. In fact, male swingers in Fang's study report that a homosexual experience would be too threatening to their masculinity. Thus, while lip service is paid to swingers' non-traditional values, their behaviors reinforce heterosexuality as an ideal.

Swinging activities take place within an otherwise traditional marital and familial context. While swingers' sexual practices may extend beyond the values of monogamy and fidelity, all other aspects of their relationship remain fixated within socially valued boundaries. For instance, they do choose to formally marry and, often, rear children. They also expect that each member of the dyad will remain faithful emotionally.

Gender as Related to Initiation and Attrition in Swinging

The swinging literature suggests that the outcomes of swinging are relevant, according to who initiates the practices in a relationship. Husbands usually introduce their wives to swinging (Cole & Spanier, 1973; Denfeld, 1970; Jenks, 1998; Macklin, 1980). Henshel (1973) wrote that husbands had an advantage over their wives in that

they were usually the first to become aware of swinging as an accessible activity and they initially had more information about it. Subsequently, wives were less likely to be the initiators of swinging, with husbands making 59% of the initial decisions, the wife doing so only 16% of the time, and the couple making the decisions together 25% of the time. Jenks (1985) adds that husbands are the primary initiators in 44% of the cases, as opposed to making the decision jointly.

The process that husbands undergo when suggesting swinging to their wives usually involves a long series of hints and suggestions about restoring the meaning and vitality of their marital relationship (Cole & Spanier, 1973; Gould, 1999). For example, a husband might leave literature about swinging for the wife to find or may mention a friend who had begun swinging and is enjoying it. After these initial hints, the husband may progress to proposing 'what if' situations to the wife, gauging her reaction to hypothetical situations about them participating in swinging. Finally, if the husband feels the wife is interested, he may suggest that they begin looking for another couple and "see how it goes."

Denfeld (1975) writes about attrition in swinging. He provides several complaints that wives have about swinging which lead to dropping out of the lifestyle. First, wives found multiple sexual partners more difficult a pattern to sustain. They also were considerably more bothered by swinging than their husbands and expressed feelings of disgust or repulsion more often. As a result, they were more frequently the initiators of dropping out of swinging and returning to a monogamous relationship. In fact, the responsibility for dropping out was entirely the wife's 54% of the time. Bell (1975) similarly reports that many times the wife resists after entering swinging and the couple

drops out. Finally, Murstein, Case, and Gunn (1985) cite the "wife's inability to take it" as a major reason that couples report for dropping out of swinging (p. 26). Bell (1971) states that some wives may experience enthusiasm (perhaps even greater than their spouse) because they realize that their partner has no intention of stopping, and they do not have enough power within the relationship to exert their wishes, so they convince themselves that they want to do it also.

With regard to the number of couples remaining in swinging long-term, they were outnumbered by the couples that dropped out (Peabody, 1982). Denfeld (1975) surveyed 966 marriage counselors, 50% of whom reported having worked with at least one former swinging couple. Extrapolating from the figures he collected, he offered a conservative estimate of 75,000 American couples that had dropped out of swinging. Some authors (Denfeld, 1975; Jenks, 1998; Macklin, 2000) have reported possible reasons given by these dropouts including: jealousy, guilt, fear of discovery, (Macklin, 2000) development of emotional attachment with other partners, boredom, disappointment, lost interest, and weakened marital bonds (Denfeld, 1975; Fang, 1976; Jenks, 1998). Interestingly, Peabody (1982) found that many of the people who reported dropping out of swinging remained married but went on to other types of extramarital relationships which included more emotional intimacy than they found in swinging.

<div align="center">Intimacy in Swinging Relationships</div>

Swinging couples perceive intimacy as the central concept of importance in their relationship (Robinson & Blanton, 1993). Peabody (1982) argues that the structure of monogamous marriage may actually inhibit an intimate bond. She attributes this inhibition to the fact that intimacy can only be increased and maintained if an individual

incorporates non-routine elements into their marriage (e.g., variety and spontaneity), creates alternative relationships to meet specific needs (i.e., sexual variety), and uses multiple relationships to meet individual (emotional and sexual) needs. In support of this argument, Peabody writes that intimacy with the spouse was perceived to increase as the couple successfully engaged in swinging. The use of non-routine elements and using multiple relationships to meet sexual needs are hypothesized to be the effect of that increased intimacy.

Constructs of Intimacy

Many of the effects that couples report about swinging are constructs within the overarching theme of intimacy. An important focus of much of the swinging literature is on these outcomes. Some of the most commonly discussed effects are: marital satisfaction, commitment, communication, trust, sexual satisfaction, and jealousy.

Marital Satisfaction. Marital satisfaction is defined by Roach (1981) as an "attitude of greater or lesser favorability toward one's own marital relationship" (p. 537). Gilmartin and Kusisto (1973) stated that it is the degree of "agreement or harmony between mates" regarding values and expectations for the relationship that is most important in the assessment of satisfaction (p. 158). Carroll, Knapp, and Holman (2005) state that 'good marriages' are most often defined in terms of satisfaction of the spouses and relationship stability.

Weigel and Ballard-Reisch (1999) identify particular maintenance behaviors that improve a couple's level of marital satisfaction: self-disclosure, togetherness, communication, and sexual intimacy. It is assumed that an individual's satisfaction with their relationship contributes to the likelihood that they remain in it. Additionally, Weigel

and Ballard-Reisch state that an individual's perspective of satisfaction with his or her relationship influences how hard they work to maintain it.

Studies have shown both increases and declines in marital satisfaction once a couple begins swinging. Macklin (1980) stated that the degree to which a couple's relationship will be affected by swinging is based on several traits: their dyadic characteristics, backgrounds and values, and the degree to which swinging is mutually desired by both individuals. Researchers who report an improved marital satisfaction among swingers present varying opinions about how levels of marital satisfaction before swinging affect levels of satisfaction after beginning swinging. Chernus (1980) cautions that an improvement seems to only occur in a relationship that is already "fundamentally sound" in regards to marital adjustment (i.e., they identify as a cohesive pair and perceive swinging as a mutually shared experience) (p. 120). In this case, swinging is seen as a form of increased marital play or an activity to add spice to a happy marriage. Whereas Bergstrand and Williams (2000) state that the perceived quality of a couple's marriage improves regardless of the level of satisfaction that existed before swinging. Some of their respondents report that swinging improved a rocky marriage, and others reporting improvements to an already stable one.

Several authors report that marital satisfaction improves, or is at least as good as comparison couples (made up of non-swinging counterparts), once a couple starts swinging (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Chernus, 1980; Denfeld, 1975; Jenks, 1998; Peabody, 1982). Chernus (1980) did not necessarily report on increased satisfaction, but did say that swingers perceive their marriages as no more unsatisfactory or problematic than most other marriages.

Bergstrand and Williams (2000) compared their sample of 1092 swingers to data from the University of Michigan's General Social Survey (GSS). According to their information, swingers experience higher levels of happiness, higher overall life satisfaction, and more exciting lives than married couples in the general population. And, 62.6% of the swingers they studied perceived that swinging improved their marriage regardless of how satisfying it was before swinging. The authors correlate the respondents' swinging with their overall happiness. Additionally, Jenks (1998) cites increased feelings of warmth, closeness, improvement in the relationship, and love between couples who swing. And, Macklin (1980) states that swingers report more frequent sexual intercourse with their spouses than a control group of non-swingers.

Communication. Communication skills include sharing thoughts and feelings, discussing problems together, mutual respect, and listening to the other person's point of view. Robinson and Blanton (1993) state that the more effective the communication a couple has, the higher the level of intimacy they will experience. Mazur (1973) reported that some swinging couples believe that they can include their spouse in their activities, even when they are not present, by verbally sharing their experiences and always having their other partners meet their spouse. Also, communicating with each other when setting ground rules for swinging allows couples to practice negotiating and sharing their thoughts and feelings. If a couple is able to engage in the types of communication necessary to establish rules and discuss swinging activities, it would make sense that their intimacy will increase.

Trust. With regard to swingers, the issue of trust has often been studied (Jenks, 1998). Trust is generally defined as a belief in the integrity of another person that

increases with commitment and declines when a relationship is terminated. Trust is also a prerequisite for intimate self-disclosure in relationships. As one's trust in another grows, so does their love for the other person. Also, trust increases security in a relationship, reduces inhibitions and defensiveness, and frees people to share feelings and dreams (Larzelere & Huston, 1980).

It can be argued that when a couple is able to establish a trusting relationship where they can remove the secrecy and dishonesty that is typically associated with one's natural desires for sexual variety, they can feel more free to explore their fantasies together without guilt or deceit (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000). Also, a couple must be secure enough in their relationship to trust each other to have sex with other people. At the same time, the couple must trust that the other relationships will not move beyond physical ones.

Sexual Satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction is assumed to be a part of swinging and a construct of intimacy. As defined by Sprecher (2002), sexual satisfaction is a favorable balance of rewards and costs in sexual aspects of a relationship (p. 190). It stands to reason that if a couple were not getting some sexual satisfaction out of their activities, they would not continue to swing. Grold (1970) states that the ability to give and receive sexual satisfaction increases with the amount of swinging experiences. When swingers add sexual variety and excitement to their lives, it makes sense that their sexual satisfaction would improve.

Following this reasoning, it is important to highlight Sprecher's (2002) discussion about how both men and women positively link sexual satisfaction to relationship satisfaction, love, and commitment. Sprecher also discusses the fact that how married

people feel about their sexual relationship is related to how they feel about their entire relationship. If a person feels good about the sexual relationship with one's spouse, they should in turn feel good about their marital relationship overall.

Jealousy. Even among sexually liberal couples who choose to participate in swinging, jealousy is an issue (Buunk, 1984). White (1980) defines romantic jealousy as "thoughts, feelings, and actions, which follow threats to self-esteem and/or threats to the existence or quality of the relationship" (p. 24). Reports on open marriages state that jealousy does appear in the relationship, but it seems to diminish with time. In fact, Buunk states that jealousy decreased in far more cases of swingers than it increased.

It does seem to be true, as Jenks (1985) states, that one must have "feelings quite alien to what most of us learn in our society [about jealousy]" in order to "relinquish one's spouse to someone for sexual purposes" (p. 519). The question seems to be why certain couples are able to address their jealousy in such a way that it is not a problem. Jenks (2001) suggests that it is an issue of pre-existing personality characteristics such as a low degree of jealousy among swingers. Alternatively, Buunk (1982) suggests that mate exchange simply evokes a rather low level of jealousy because the couple has communicated with one another and established ground rules. As a result, as Grold (1970) suggests, swinger's levels of jealousy seem to be reduced as they begin swinging and have positive experiences in which their trust in the partner is strengthened.

Sixty-eight percent of respondents (N = 1092) in Bergstrand and William's (2000) sample report that jealousy is not a problem in their relationship. Denfeld (1974) states that jealousy is avoided in this arrangement by giving paramount importance and loyalty

to the marriage and avoiding emotional attachments with others (p. 45). Respondents also reported that they attain a new level of trust and openness because of this lack of jealousy. Jenks (1985) found similarly that a sample of swingers (N = 406) scored lower on a jealousy scale than did a control group (N = 340), with only 13% naming it as a problem.

<div align="center">Power within Swinging Relationships</div>

Power has been defined as one person's ability to impose their wishes, attitudes, or behaviors on another (McCormick & Jesser, 1983). Within the context of marriage, it has been defined as the ability to consciously or unconsciously affect the emotions, attitudes, cognitions, or behavior of someone else (Komter, 1989). From a social constructionist perspective, it is considered to be a mobilizing phenomenon, encouraging action from those who impose it or seek to overcome it (Giddens, 1992). According to Atwater (1982), the most important factor that influences the type of intimate lifestyle an individual prefers is the amount of power they have. Two types of power were identified for this study: sexual, and non-sexual (i.e., decision making).

Kane and Schippers (1996) discuss the intersection of power and gender inequalities. Both males and females reportedly perceive the opposite gender as having the most sexual power. To begin, many feminists perceive that men's dominance and the ideal of heteronormativity afford them an advantage in that they have more power to define their relationships. Alternatively, women's prescribed role as gatekeeper in heterosexual relationships appears to increase their power, as they dictate when and how sexual interactions will occur.

Specifically within a swinging dyad, power is reportedly more egalitarian after the couple begins swinging (Ramey, 1972). Also, female respondents in Gould's (1999) qualitative study reported that they perceived an increase in their own power within their relationship as they began swinging. They explained that they felt more powerful because they were able to contribute to the decision-making process related to swinging (e.g. negotiating the rules of swinging), as well as their ability to approve or disapprove of potential couples.

Power and Sexual Secrecy

Today's America is engaged in a debate over moral culture (i.e., values and beliefs) (Struening, 1996). As evidenced by the current conservative political agenda, sexuality is at the forefront of this debate. On one side of the issue are religious doctrines that tie sexuality to procreation, children, and traditional gender relations. Alternatively, sexual expression is valued and given meaning independently from conventional family or religious world-views.

Sexual expression is a significant source of a person's self-conscious and self-perception. Foucault (1981) hypothesizes that modern institutions (i.e., marriage) compel us to "pay a price—increasing repression--for the benefits they offer" (e.g., financial and emotional stability) (p. 142). The predominant constraining force in this 'repressive hypothesis' is power. According to Frisdl (1994), one consequence of having to repress one's sexuality is inner-turmoil and stunted personal development. For swingers, the possibility of condemnation may cause them to choose to stop swinging.

Frisdl (1994) discusses the importance of making a distinction between repression and privacy. Typically, repression is considered an imposed condition in

which someone must conceal information that they would otherwise share. Privacy, on the other hand, involves a personal decision to withhold information from others. Many people are suspicious of privacy, as it makes deception and concealment possible. However, privacy allows individuals to edit themselves, creating their identities on their own terms.

Summary

This chapter has provided a description of the previous empirical literature about swinging relationships, in relation to four major themes: the construction of sexuality among swingers, roles and rules of swinging, intimacy, and power in swinging relationships. To that end, it has provided an overview of who swingers are, why they choose swinging practices, and how they go about meeting other swingers. Also, the literature reviewed described how rules about swinging were created, and how intimacy and power were expressed in these relationships.

Chapter 4

Methods

This study was a qualitative inquiry into the dynamics of swinging relationships. Qualitative research seeks to understanding people's behaviors, thoughts, and meaning making (Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995). The use of qualitative methods in this study facilitated the search for understanding the swinging experiences of seven couples (Patton, 2002). Also, this methodology made possible a description of the rules and roles of swinging and the intimacy and power that swingers experience within their relationships. This chapter will provide a discussion of case study research, trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability in qualitative research, the study's procedures, sensitizing concepts, and data analysis techniques that were used.

Case Study Research

This was a collective case study (Stake, 1995) of seven swinging couples. The focus of case studies is an in-depth analysis of one or more cases using description and identification of themes (Creswell, 1998). For this study, case studies were chosen because of their ability to provide understanding and explanations about swinging relationships through the use of 'how' and 'why' questions. Additionally, case studies proved to be an effective research strategy that examined a contemporary phenomenon, swinging relationships, in real-life context (Yin, 1981). Finally, the case studies "create[d] lasting images, and…share[d] the stories behind the statistics" (Piercy & Deacon, 1998, p. 23).

Merriam (1998) identified specific properties of a case study: 1) the study focuses on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon; 2) the end product is a rich

description; 3) there is illumination of the phenomenon, bringing new meaning or confirming what is already known. This study focused on the phenomenon of swinging and provided a description of the dynamics of swinger's relationships. Also, it confirmed some of the previous information about swingers, but brought new meaning to their understandings of intimacy and power.

Studies may contain only one case or multiple cases. For this study, multiple cases were used. Yin (2003) wrote that a benefit of multiple cases is that they may reveal more compelling evidence than single ones. With as few as two cases, there is the possibility of direct replication, causing conclusions to be more powerful than if they came from a single case. Also, the context of each subsequent case will have slight variations, providing a more complete understanding of the phenomenon of swinging.

Creswell (1998) provides a typical format for writing up case studies. He writes that first there should be a within-case analysis that describes each case and its themes. Then, there should be a cross-case analysis, followed by a report of "lessons learned" (p. 63). In the next chapter, I will provide within-case and cross-case analyses.

Trustworthiness, Credibility, and Transferability in Case Studies

Three goals of qualitative studies are trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Patton, 2002). Trustworthiness and credibility are the qualitative counterparts to the quantitative notions of internal and external validity, whereas transferability is the counterpart to generalizability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In this study, specific techniques were used to attend to these three goals.

Trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggest that trustworthiness in analyzing and reporting data is important in qualitative studies to ensure that the interpretations and explanations make sense, and that they truly reflect the phenomenon. In order to ensure such trustworthiness, I returned to the data 12 separate times during the analysis process, as suggested by Patton (2002). Additionally, a peer who was trained in qualitative methods independently coded the data. Through four consultations, we compared our coding schemes and came to an agreement about the primary codes that emerged from the data. Finally, purposive sampling was used to make certain that all participants met the general conditions for participation.

Allen (2000) argues that researchers must acknowledge the misnomer of objectivity, a traditional indicator of trustworthiness. She states that our lives inevitably affect our work and how we approach research. In order to address this, she suggests a critical awareness of self, recognition that knowledge is derived from partial perspectives, and explicit statements of who we are and what we assume. In order to accomplish this, I began this research with a description of who I am and how my experiences affected my research choices. Also, I described the theoretical frameworks that guided my study, and how they shaped my interpretations and understandings of the data. Finally, I kept a researcher's journal throughout the data collection process. In this journal, I discussed my assumptions and how they shaped my understanding of the data.

Credibility. Closely related to trustworthiness, credibility is considered by qualitative researchers to be one of the major hallmarks of authentic work (Lincoln &

Guba, 1986). Patton (2002) identifies three elements of credibility in qualitative research: rigorous methods, credibility of the researcher, and a philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry. Rigorous methods are defined as fieldwork that yields high-quality data that are systematically analyzed. The credibility of a researcher involves the researcher's training, experience, status, and presentation of self. And, a philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry is considered to include a fundamental appreciation of qualitative inquiry, methods, analysis, and sampling.

Specifically, Patton (2002) described strategies that enhance the credibility of qualitative research. One strategy that he recommended is discussing predispositions, making biases explicit, and acknowledging one's theoretical orientation. In addition, searching for alternative themes and rival explanations can increase credibility. Doing so involves exploring other ways to organize the data that might lead to different results. In my research journal, I discussed the predispositions and biases I had, and described my thinking as I considered different ways to organize the data. Also, analyst triangulation and theory triangulation were used to increase the study's credibility. Analyst triangulation involved having two people (a peer and myself) "independently analyze the data and compare the findings", helping to identify potential coding bias (p. 560). Next, theory triangulation involved using different theoretical perspectives "to look at the same data" (p. 562). The goal of this type of triangulation is to understand how differing assumptions (i.e., social constructionism and symbolic interactionism) affect the study's findings and interpretations.

Transferability. Guba and Lincoln (1981) proposed that the quantitative notion of generalizability be changed to one of transferability when measuring the worth of

qualitative studies. Transferability is the capacity for one researcher to extrapolate another researcher's findings into their own study (Patton, 2002). Guba and Lincoln stated that the amount of transferability a study has is a direct function of the similarity of two contexts. Therefore, in order for another researcher to replicate my study, they would need to consider the similarity of the populations' demographics. To make this possible for future studies, I provided a detailed description of the demographics of my participants and the methods I used.

<div align="center">Participants</div>

The criteria for participants were: a) being legally married; b) having participated together as a couple in swinging for at least six months; c) at least 21 years of age; d) being a member of a Yahoo group in one of two southwestern states. Participants were recruited online through postings on Yahoo! Groups which were limited to members from two southwestern states. Participants were asked to choose a pseudonym that was used in transcription and reports, to protect their identity. All responses were kept confidential and a summary of the final written report is available to participants upon request. I also gave all participants $15 for their time.

Challenges in Recruiting Participants

As I began planning this study, I intended to recruit participants and conduct my interviews at a national swinger's convention in Las Vegas. This convention brought together over 2,500 couples from all over the country for a four-day event involving dances, pool parties, mixers, and vendor expos. Unfortunately, due a miscommunication between myself and the convention's organizers, I was unable to conduct any interviews with the convention's attendees.

The difficulties I experienced stemmed from misinformation that I received from the convention organizers. Eight months before the convention I contacted the sponsoring organization, explaining what I was hoping to do, and asking permission to recruit via flyers at the convention. I was assured by three people at the organization that this would be no problem. When I arrived at the convention however, I was informed that the contracts that had been signed between the organizers and the exhibitors at the convention assured that no one other than exhibitors would be allowed to distribute anything, including my flyers.

In retrospect, I have identified three things that I would do differently if I were going to recruit interview participants at a future swingers' convention. First, I would register for the entire convention and stay on-site at the convention. As it was, I could only afford to attend one day of the convention, and was not able to book a room at the site before they sold out. These steps would help me to have a longer period of access to potential participants. Also, I would be able to speak with attendees earlier in the week, so that they would be able to schedule their interviews into their plans for the week. Next, I would coordinate with the sponsoring organization to either reserve an exhibitor's table or I would try to reach an agreement with them by use of a contract to ensure that I would be able to distribute flyers, widening my recruitment attempts. Finally, I would volunteer to be a presenter at one of the convention's seminars, further expanding my recruitment efforts. By using these techniques I believe that I would have better success in finding interview participants at a future convention.

Recruiting Participants Online

After my unsuccessful attempt to recruit participants at the Las Vegas convention, I decided to take advantage of a common technology which brings swingers together, the Internet. In order to recruit online participants, I posted a message on five local Yahoo! Swingers' groups, whose membership was restricted to urban areas in two southwestern states. In the posts, I explained the intent and goals of my study. The message was posted weekly, so that it was less likely to be overlooked among other postings. Interested couples contacted me via email or instant messenger to receive more information or schedule interviews.

Before the interviews were conducted, I emailed each individual an informed consent document that they reviewed, electronically signed, and emailed back to me. These forms were then printed and stored in a locked cabinet in my home. In order to ensure that the interviewees were aware of their rights, I reviewed the consent over the instant messenger before completing the interview.

Challenges of Recruiting Participants Online. Because each Yahoo! Group listed 20-35 couples as members, I anticipated a high amount of responses (at least one fifth of the total members, or 20 couples) to my postings. Thus, it was surprising to me that only ten couples responded. And, of those ten couples, there were three in which only one spouse was interested. I have identified two possible explanations for the low response rate. First, it is likely that there were people that do not check the group postings regularly and therefore simply missed my messages. Next, I believe that some people may have doubted the authenticity of my request. With so many reports of

people misrepresenting themselves online, they may have been suspicious of my

intentions and unwilling to take the risk that I was not trying to exploit them.

Interview Protocols

This study used semi-structured interview protocols. Interview questions were

formulated to address each of the research questions being investigated. As the initial

round of interviews was completed, it became apparent that the information in the

transcripts did not paint a clear picture of the participants' experience of intimacy or

power. As a result, follow-up interviews were conducted with five of the couples (two

couples were not available) to solicit expansion and/or clarification of participants' initial

answers. A copy of the initial interview protocol can be found in Appendix B, and the

follow-up interview protocol can be found in Appendix C.

Sensitizing Concepts

Sensitizing concepts are loosely operationalized notions which are constructed

by data analysts with the intent of categorizing data. These concepts are drawn from

social science theory, the research literature, or evaluation issues identified as a study

begins. They are used to examine how particular concepts are manifest and given

meaning among a particular group of people (Patton, 2002). Sensitizing concepts are

identified prior to data collection when possible, or at least before data analysis, to give

the researcher a frame with which to approach the data. In order to orient this research,

the following sensitizing concepts were identified: intimacy, power, and fidelity.

Data Collection

Using semi-structured interview protocols, I conducted interviews with individuals

who met the criteria for participation. I copied and pasted the transcripts of the Yahoo!

Messenger conversations into a Word document for later entry into Atlas.ti. Once the interviews were transferred to Word, the message archives were destroyed.

Conducting Interviews Online

The Internet is becoming a valuable tool for qualitative researchers. Mann and Stewart (2003) discuss the use of Computer Mediated Communication [CMC] for conducting interview research. They write that the anonymity of this technology has allowed researchers to gain access to socially marginalized communities and to people who are not comfortable discussing sensitive issues in a face-to-face [F2F] setting. Also, they identify the benefits and costs to using CMC and discuss how to build rapport through online dialogue.

Building Rapport in CMC. Some people argue that interactive, rich, and spontaneous communication cannot be achieved through CMC as well as it can through F2F interactions. However, Walther (1992) reports that it is possible to develop warm relationships online, and that rapport can develop. As Mann and Stewart (2003) describe, using electronic paralanguage such as LOL (laughing out loud), JK (just kidding), or 'emoticons' such as :) (smiling) or :-0 (shocked) can add a jovial nature to the conversation. The authors do caution, however, to use this paralanguage judiciously as individual participants can interpret it differently.

Mann and Stewart (2003) also write about the importance of developing a shared research agenda and trust when building rapport. Participants who bore easily or have no vested interest in the research may have less participation or even decide not to continue with the interview. If, however, they feel that they share in the goal of the research, and that they are being heard, their interest should be maintained. Also,

mutual trust must be established before participants will be willing to share their experiences with a researcher. Mann and Stewart recommend being as open about the research process, purpose, and timeframe as possible to establish a trustful rapport. Finally, positive online relationships take time to be established, and improve with as more interactions occur. Thus, it is important that emails or conversations occur as a lead up to the actual interview, and that they work to initiate the process of rapport building.

Benefits of Using CMC. One of the benefits of CMC is the access to a wide variety of users, which makes it possible to identify those with similar interests. Also, despite the seemingly overwhelming number of people online, search engines allow researchers to narrow their query so that very specific groups of people can be identified. In the case of my study, for example, there were a myriad of swinger's groups available through a simple web search. The capability to specify search criteria helped to filter out participants that did not live within the specified locality, and did not meet the criteria for the study. Also, once participants were identified, they were able to participate conveniently from home or work. This allowed the pool of potential participants to be extended beyond those who would only be available for F2F interviews. Finally, CMC is cost-efficient as it minimizes the expense of travel to reach participants (Mann & Stewart, 2003).

Anonymity and the safety of physical distance provide additional benefits to both researcher and participants in CMC research. Especially with potentially embarrassing or personal subjects, using CMC can make sharing information feel less risky. Also, the participant recruiting technique of 'snowballing' is very easy, as emails from researchers

can be forwarded to interested friends of participants, minimizing the effort required

from participants. Finally, CMC generally takes place in an informal, conversational

style, which makes it accessible to writers of all skill levels (Mann & Stewart, 2003).

There were definitely benefits that I have identified to conducting interviews

online. First, the flexibility for scheduling was very helpful. Participants were able to

choose any time that worked for them and, because I did not have to travel to meet, I

was able to accommodate their preferred interview time in every case. Also, participants

reported that they felt a heightened sense of anonymity because of the fact that we

were meeting online. In fact, one person emailed me after our interview was completed

to state that she felt comfortable sharing more with me than she would have in person,

because she felt less embarrassed. Finally, the use of typed responses yielded a

transcript that required only a little adjustment for coding with Atlas.ti.

Challenges *of Using CMC.* One of the biggest challenges that researchers who

are using CMC must be aware of is the notion of the "digital divide". Internet access is

patchy and dependent upon economic status as well as gender, culture, ethnicity, and

language. Also, individuals with low technical skills may be marginalized through CMC.

These challenges, however, are mainly restrictive for individuals seeking representative

samples of non-specialized populations (Mann & Stewart, 2003).

It can also be more challenging to attract participants to CMC projects because

of the need for a relatively high level of proactivity. Mann and Stewart (2003) write that

interviewers need a 'hook' in their advertisements to attract participants. Also, because

of the potentially high number of postings that any given message board or newsgroup

may receive, advertisements must be re-posted on a weekly basis to attract new members.

In addition to the benefits, however, I did recognize that there were some drawbacks to using an instant messaging service for my interviews. First, even though I received names from the IRB documents, there is still the potential that individuals misrepresented themselves. However, individuals that I met face-to-face could also misrepresent themselves. Another disadvantage to this method of interviewing was that I had to rely on emoticons and sentence structure to gauge the tone and meaning of their responses. Fortunately, all participants seemed well versed in chatting protocol, and used expressions such as "LOL [laughing out loud], LMAO [laughing my ass off], JK [just kidding]" to convey additional meanings behind their words. A final disadvantage was that interviews took longer than face-to-face ones. Because of individual's different typing skills, and some slow Internet connections, interviews ranged from an hour and a half to two hours.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

Coding Interview Data

The interview transcripts were coded using Atlas.ti. This computer program facilitated the coding and retrieving of data, and speed up the process of "locating coded themes, grouping data together…and comparing passages in transcripts". It did not, however, conduct the analysis (Patton, 2002, p. 442). After I completed each interview, I added it into an Atlas.ti database. Then, I reviewed each transcript file within the database and identified the common codes by highlighting them within the document. Once all the interviews had been coded, I used the software's reporting

features to generate a printed list of codes and the quotations that fit within each one. At that point, I compared the codes for similarity and collapsed them into major themes. I then was able to use Atlas.ti to generate new lists of quotations for each major theme.

In addition to the coding that I did, I had a colleague, who is trained in qualitative methods, code the transcripts independently. After she independently identified codes, I had several conversations with her, and with my committee chair, about the major themes that emerged. Through mutual decision, we created a list of common codes. Then, I worked to collapse the codes into larger themes, returning to my colleague and committee chair to see if they agreed. Finally, I organized the codes according to their fit within my research questions. The final coding scheme is provided in Appendix D.

Analytic Strategy

I followed Yin's (2003) preferred strategy for data analysis, relying on theoretical propositions. In line with this strategy, the study's propositions, and theoretical frameworks, guided the data collection. The three propositions that were identified at the onset of the study were: (a) swingers are continually assigning meaning to their sexual practices; (b) swingers experience intimacy in their marital relationships; (c) swingers continually negotiate the power in their relationships. These propositions helped to organize the entire case study by focusing attention on data that addressed the questions asked in the study. These research questions were:

1. How do individuals who participate in swinging describe or assign meaning to the experience?

2. How do swinging couples engage in intimacy?

3. How is power negotiated in swinging relationships?

Additionally, I analyzed the data from the couples' perspectives. Studies that rely on couple data "obtain information about the same variables from both partners", not necessarily through simultaneous interviews (Szinovacz & Egley, 1995, p. 996). One partner from a couple may be able to provide some general information about their spouse, but cannot provide valid information regarding their partners' attitudes or perceptions. Following Szinovacz and Egley's approach for using couple data, I interviewed each participant in this study separately, and then compared their responses to their partners'. Because participants were interviewed using the same interview protocol, I was able to identify differing perspectives on the experience of swinging, intimacy, and power between spouses. This within-case comparison is provided in the findings chapter of this dissertation.

Chapter 5

Results

Case Summaries

The following are summaries of each of the cases investigated. Each couple's demographic information is given, along with a summary of their relationship, and a description of their experiences with swinging. Pseudonyms chosen by the participants are used.

Case 1: Cherisse and Drew

Cherisse (age 24) and Drew (age 33) have been married for four years and have no children. This is the first marriage for both. Neither of them currently identifies any religious practices, although Cherisse reports that she used to attend church regularly. Cherisse has earned a master's degree and is a teacher, and Drew has earned a bachelor's degree and works for the federal government. Both report that they are White, and both Cherisse and Drew earn $35,000 each annually.

Cherisse characterizes their overall relationship as "great". She says:

When we met something just clicked, ever since that day it was just like

we were each other's other half. And we've been through some pretty

serious trials and came through them even stronger.

Drew also perceives their relationship positively, saying that it is

"normal…number 8 on a 10 scale". Sexually, Cherisse says that they are "pretty active…[we have sex] pretty often, different positions and locations, trying to keep it varied and exciting. Using toys, stuff like that."

Drew had some swinging experiences alone before he met Cherisse, and she did not. The couple has differing reports at to how long they have been swinging together. Drew reports six years, but Cherisse reports only three. This discrepancy, however, can be explained by their definitions of swinging. Drew considers the amount of time that they spent considering swinging in his estimate, whereas Cherisse is only counting the amount of time that they have actually swapped partners. There is also some discrepancy between the two as to how often they swing, with Cherisse reporting once a month and Drew saying "not enough," only once every 3-4 months. It is likely that this difference also stems from different interpretations of what constitutes 'swinging.' Drew considers swinging to be the actual sexual activity, whereas Cherisse considers the time spent looking for and chatting with other people to be a swinging activity.

Another discrepancy between Cherisse and Drew is their description of how swinging was introduced in the marriage. Drew reports that he knew about swinging first because he had done it on his own. However, he says that he and Cherisse both thought about trying it as a couple at the same time.

I started thinking about it on my own, whether or not I would be able to, I would be ok with it. And I guess she did the same thing and then we both came to the conclusion at the same time that we were ok with the fact that, you know, one doing something with others and vice versa.

Cherisse, on the other hand, reports that he began mentioning it to her slowly, eventually asking her if she wanted to try it. According to her account:

Well it was really covert, he mentioned it a few times and when I didn't act like it was appalling to me, he mentioned that he had done a little of it

before he met me, when he was single. Then he said that he wanted to

take some naked pictures of us…then asking if we should send them off to

a publication, 'just to see'. He was very slow with it, taking little steps, but I

suppose he had the ultimate plan already, just went slowly to gauge my

response along the way.

Despite the differing accounts of how swinging was introduced, both Drew and

Cherisse maintain that the actual decision to try it was a mutual one. As Cherisse said,

"he definitely had wanted to try it for longer than me, but we were equally interested."

Neither Cherisse nor Drew believes that the power has changed in their

relationship since they began swinging. They report "give and take" in making everyday

decisions. Cherisse says that "sometimes I think I have a lot [of power], other times I

think I have less…we're both strong headed, so sometimes I win, sometimes he does".

Drew believes that their non-sexual power is "equal."

With regard to swinging, Drew reports that he 'lets' her make all the decisions

about who they will swing with, even if that means that he misses out on opportunities to

meet people who she is not interested in. Cherisse confirms that this is the way that it is.

However, she attributes this to the fact that he gets turned on by her taking the lead, not

necessarily because she has any more power than he does.

When asked about the negative side of swinging, a power struggle is evident

between the couple regarding the process of finding other couples. Cherisse states that

she feels pressure from her husband to respond to emails every day, and struggles to

keep it as a pastime that does not take over their lives. She reports that Drew has more

free time than she does, so he doesn't understand why she can't find the time to write

people back more regularly. He, too, reports that this is what he would change about swinging. He perceives her 'excuses' of being busy as exaggerations and thinks she does have more time than she thinks to get involved. Despite their differences of opinion, both Cherisse and Drew report that they argue about it occasionally but are able to work it out. If they came to a point where they were no longer able to work it out, however, they believe that they would stop swinging.

This couple was one of only two that reported male bi-sexuality. Early in the first interview, Cherisse said that she knew she was closer to her husband than other women because he was able to tell her that he was curious about being with other men. She believes that "there are probably more men out there that are [bi]curious than would ever admit it", but does not believe that most couples ever trust each other enough to explore it together. However, this may be due to the fact that she thinks that the thought of seeing two men together is "very hot." Knowing that Cherisse is turned on by this, Drew may feel more comfortable talking to her about it.

Case 2: Rachel and Martin

Rachel (age 34) and Martin (age 35) have been married for 11 years, and have a nine-year-old daughter. This is the first marriage for both. Neither reports any spiritual or religious practices. Rachel is a homemaker and Martin a police officer. Both report that they are White. Rachel has a high school education and no income, and Martin has completed some college and earns $80,000 annually (although this amount of income seems suspiciously high for his vocation). This couple has been involved with swinging together for approximately two and a half years. They report that they initially engaged in swinging activities a lot but that it has dwindled to a few times a month.

Rachel credits their decision to swing to Martin's lack of sexual experience. She reports that she was the first person he ever had sex with, and after a few years of marriage she recognized that he was restless and frustrated. He learned about swinging from a few popular movies, and then did some research about it online. After he decided that he would like to try it, he brought it up to her and they went to a swing club together. Martin says that the way that he introduced it to her was by showing her information about a swing club he wanted to visit. This, however,

Probably wasn't the best way, didn't go over very well…she got

upset…she took it that I wasn't attracted to her anymore and that…there

was something missing that I was gonna try to grab.

Rachel says that she was not necessarily opposed to the idea of swinging once she got over her initial concerns and understood that he still loved her and was not looking for a replacement. She did say, however that she could do without swinging at any time because "I'm just happy with him".

Despite her noncommittal feelings about swinging, Rachel does perceive benefits from her sexual practices. She reports that her self-esteem has been bolstered through her experiences with others. She admits that "I have always been bigger and it's still a problem of mine", but that "a lot…that they like your personality and they just don't care [about weight]…People that like you for you". Additionally, she reports that she has developed close friendships with the people they have met through swinging. She perceives more social benefits than sexual one, and her swinging friends have become a part of her everyday life (e.g., their children play together).

As for the power in Rachel and Martin's relationship, they perceive a difference in the kind of power each has. Martin reports that he is more of the 'social director' who makes decisions about where they are going and what they will be doing when it involved non-sexual activities. They both say that they make 'big' decisions together. Sexually, however, both agree that Rachel has more power. She has always been the one who initiates sex within their relationship, and feels this responsibility flows into swinging also. She is the one who searches for others online and makes contact with them, and decides when to meet. Martin believes that some of this is due to her having more sexual experience prior to their relationship. Also, Rachel generalizes the power she has to all women who swing because "we've got the yes or no…we're the more vulnerable sex I would think. We're more emotional".

Perhaps the most poignant information that arose out of this couple's interviews' was the information Rachel gave about developing feelings for a swinging partner. She reports that she and another man developed strong feelings for one another, and have expressed those to each other. However, she says that she has not acted on her feelings:

It's been like a couple years, well about a year and a half. So actually the longer it goes, it's, even though we love each other but it's not going anywhere, it's just like a lifelong friendship now…I still love my husband. It's like being; it's like loving two people.

Rachel says that this man's wife also "knows mostly" so Martin is the only one that doesn't know. Rachel believes that she swinging can easily turn into an affair if "you're

not happy in your relationship with your spouse". However, she believes that she is able

to avoid an affair because of the fact that she loves Martin so much.

Case 3: Rose and Gene

Rose (age 26) and Gene (age 29) have been married for five years, and have no

children. This is the first marriage for both. Rose reports that she is a Catholic, and

Gene that he is Christian, however neither attend services. Rose is an engineer and

Gene a teacher. Rose is White, and Gene identifies himself as Pacific Islander. Rose

has earned a master's degree and makes $46,000 annually, and Gene has earned a

bachelor's degree and makes $30,000. They report that they have been swinging for 4-

5 years, beginning when they were still newlyweds, and that they have a swinging

encounter about every other month.

Rose characterizes their relationship before swinging as:

Very good…it was really strong, we were newlyweds, so we were still in

the newlywed state. So you know really lovey dovey, huggy kissy, just you

know…sweet talking to each other all the time, that kind of stuff.

Similarly, Gene believes that their relationship was "good…good

communication, a strong relationship" before they began swinging.

This couple reported that they learned about swinging from friends. Rose says

that they were hanging out with some friends and they brought up the fact that they

were swingers. After this, they went home and Gene asked Rose if she would be

interested in trying it. At first, she didn't think she was. However, after hearing more

about their friends' experiences, Rose says:

I had thought about it a little bit, and then maybe we hung out with them,

did some drinking and that night again he'd, you know, ask about it, cause

I had been, I had upped the flirtation and so it gave him the impression

that I was getting more interested in it, and so he'd repeat the question,

you know, and then I'd start kinda giving in a little bit, saying yeah.

From there things happened, according to Gene:

Kinda by chance, both of us were just in the mood so we did it and

afterwards there wasn't any hard feelings or anything like that so we both

talked about how the rush and the feelings that came about, so we

decided to try it again.

Both Rose and Gene identify an equal power dynamic in the non-sexual aspects

of their relationship. They agree that their major decisions are made mutually, with Rose

having more power over more financial decisions and Gene more power over decisions

about social details. Sexually, however, this was the only couple that identified the male

as having more power. According to Rose, "I think probably he has more power,

because he can use his mood to manipulate everything". She feels constant pressure to

make sure that he's 'ok' and that he is receiving enough reassurance [or attention] from

other couples. She continues by saying:

I might be really into a situation and ready to go further and having a good

time, and he's not receiving enough assurance so he's ready to go, he's

ready to end things, so then I get disappointed that we're not going to

continue.

Gene summarizes this dynamic by saying: "We've tried to do things mutually but in the long run it's really whatever I feel like doing is what we end up doing". Rose admits that this dynamic has caused arguments, and that in the end she usually "feel[s] like [she] should have left when he said he was uncomfortable".

Case 4: Kitty and Spoke

Kitty (age 45) and Spoke (age 45) have been married for twenty-one years and have two teenaged children that live with them. Neither were married previously. Both come from a Christian/Protestant background, but are not currently practicing or attending services. Kitty has a high school education and is an administrative assistant, and Spoke has completed an associate's degree and is in the US Air Force. Both identify as White. Kitty earns $35,000 annually, and Spoke $42,000. They report that they talked about and considered swinging for about two years, and have actually been participating for six months, with some sort of activity about once a month.

Kitty believes that their relationship before swinging as "good, although it seemed routine". She says that it was good because "we didn't disagree too often, our sex was satisfying, we worked together on raising our children". Spoke believes that their relationship prior to swinging was "an above average relationship…communication, intimacy". However, he thinks that they were lacking some of the passion that they had earlier in their marriage and that swinging allowed them to "reopen the door where we stored it". This couple reports that they are closer than ever, thanks to swinging. They say that it has opened the door for them to be more honest with one another and rekindled their sexual desire and enjoyment. After being in a marriage that became fairly

monotonous, they report that now they feel fresh and excited again because of their new sexual practices.

Like Cherisse and Drew, Spoke introduced swinging to Kitty slowly, mentioning things that he read about it to her little by little. Kitty admits that at first she believed that he was going through a mid-life crisis, or that he had lost interest or was unsatisfied with her. She says:

> He tried easing into talking about it…basically just telling me what it was, how it enhanced people's marriages…I wondered of course if he had lost satisfaction in me or our relationship…For a long time I must admit I avoided the whole concept. We would talk a little about it and he would joke around with me about it, but I was really closed minded about it until just recently.

She believes, however, that a lot of her reluctance stemmed from unhappiness in other areas of her life.

> I was dissatisfied with the current job I had, I wasn't happy of our location of living, I had really started concentrating on my own personal fitness level to try to deal with the other stresses I was feeling and by doing that and noticing the attention that was bringing, it made me feel like I wanted to experience more than just mundane, why do I have to be here and unhappy kind of attitude.

Neither member of this couple can identify exactly how things changed, Kitty just says that she began doing a little research about swinging on her own and suddenly

decided that she was interested in trying it, and that she no longer doubted her

husband's feelings for her. She says:

> I guess, I knew all along it wasn't because he wasn't satisfied with me, but
>
> I have lacked self confidence as a person myself, my beauty, when other
>
> men started reinforcing what he had been telling me all along, I go the
>
> picture.

Spoke adds that they both struggled with the fact that they would be breaking the

Christian notions they had about marriage and sexuality, but that they have been able to

reconcile the dissonance they experienced and can still be religious and swing at the

same time. He says:

> Coming from a Christian background, I've always wondered "why" many
>
> Old Testament key figures had many wives and hundreds of concubines.
>
> That was also a turning point for her…one of the articles I read was from a
>
> group in AZ that were reformed "Christians" who believed in the swinging
>
> lifestyle…we have very much [overcome the traditional Christian ideals
>
> about marriage and sexuality]…I was definitely not traditional with many
>
> beliefs…just the basics.

Overcoming this struggle by reading about other Christians who were accepting of

swinging also was a catalyst for them to begin swinging.

Spoke reports that they are equal in every aspect of marital power. He said "we

mutually decide in all decisions…explains why we've been married 21 years…we've

always said we were devoted to each other 100% and would share all!" Kitty agrees,

saying that they have equal power and make all decisions together.

Sexually, however, Kitty believes that within their own sex life, swinging has helped her to become more aggressive and to start saying what she wants, when she wants it. Both report that they make decisions about swinging together, but that they have not yet experienced a situation in which one person is interested and the other is not. They say that they have talked about how they would handle that situation, and think that they will be able to talk it out and come to a mutual decision.

Case 5: Carrie and Harley

Carrie (age 31) and Harley (age 30) have been married for six years and have three young children (aged 9, 5, 3) that live with them. This is the first marriage for both. Both report that they are practicing Catholics, although Harley says that he does not attend services regularly. Harley identifies as White and Carrie as White/Ethnic. Carrie has earned a bachelor's degree and is a tax professional who says that she earns $85,000 and Harley has completed an associate's degree and works for the government and also says that he earns $85,000 annually. The couple has been swinging for approximately a year and a half, and swing as often as they can, about every weekend.

This couple classifies their relationship before they began swinging as a positive one. Carrie says that it was "wonderful, we were happy and stable…he was very attentive, affectionate, and had passion". Harley says:

Before we started [swinging] we were best friends. We of course had our ups and downs but many more ups than downs. To give an example, we enjoy spending as much time together as possible even if it's just going shopping or some other mundane task.

Unlike most of the other couples, Carrie was the one who introduced swinging in their relationship. She says that she was chatting with a couple online and they began telling her about swinging. After chatting for a while, the couple then emailed her some information to read. Having had sexual experiences with women in the past, she approached Harley about giving swinging a try. He says:

I was concerned that maybe she wanted to be with others because I was not fulfilling her any more emotionally…I was reluctant at first. It took her a long time to convince me to try it. What made me finally decide to do it was convincing me that it was not for a desire to have an emotional attachment to another person but only strictly for the play aspect.

With regard to power, Harley reports that he lets her make the day-to-day decisions, and Carrie concurs, saying that she "makes all of the decisions…as far as day to day spending". For major decisions, the couple tries to always make them together. However, Harley says that "when it comes to something important we try to discuss it and come to an agreement, but I have the final say so".

Sexually, the couple is one of the few that says that they are comfortable with each individual 'playing' on their own. When they play together, they both have to be comfortable and willing, or they will not continue. If one of them is interested and the other isn't, they don't pursue the activity. Because of this, and the together approach that they take to making other sexual decisions, they believe that they have equal power in this area of their relationship.

Carrie and Harley both say that since starting to swing, they are closer now than ever. They report that they have always felt like soul mates, and enjoy spending time

with one another, but that they have improved their ability to communicate, making them feel even closer. Harley says their connection has:

> Gotten stronger [after beginning swinging]. I know now that no matter who she plays with, no matter how much fun she has that she doesn't want anyone else as a friend or partner and that she always comes back to me…We are able to talk openly now about our physical desires for others.

Carrie says they are:

> Closer than ever…We have learned to communicate a lot better. That's the thing with swinging, the whole thing is a trust thing and communication is the most important thing in that. We love to hear about the other's experiences.

Case 6: Dee and Melvin

Dee (age 34) and Melvin (age 22) have been married for a year and a half. Neither have been married before. They have no children, but do hope to have some in the future. Dee is Wiccan and Melvin says "I won't pick any religion…I just try to be a good person". They both identify as White. Dee is a disabled veteran and a student that is working on an associate's degree, and Melvin is a mechanic and a student who is also working on an associate's degree. Each reports an annual income of $17,000. They have been swinging for about one year, and go to a swing club almost every weekend, but only actually swing about once a month.

When asked about the quality of their relationship prior to swinging, Dee says:

[It is] the same now as it was before. He and I are special. He will tell you

that as well. We are best friends…We had ups and downs like any other

couples, but we are great communicators so we always got along well.

Similarly, Melvin reports that their relationship before swinging was great. He

says:

We had the usual arguments but for the better part everything was

great…We talk about everything…we don't keep secrets, we get along

99% of the time and we like the same things, enjoy a similar taste in

music, food, and cultures and both of us know how to say 'oh well' when

something [happens] that would usually upset someone.

Melvin believes that they have become even closer after they began swinging,

because they have had the opportunity to talk and understand each other even better.

Similarly, Dee says that they are closer because they have been able to face what

many people consider their biggest fear "a partner having sex with someone else", and

see that it isn't hurtful. She then reiterated that "we don't let recreational sex affect our

lives…we can take it or leave it".

Dee was a stripper for seven years, and heard about swinging because of that

job. She has always been bi-sexual, so the idea of swinging was especially appealing to

her. Also, she says that "we liked the idea that you can be as outrageous as you want

and it is ok there". When a friend of Dee told them about a local swing club, they

decided to go and watch what happened. Melvin agrees that other friends introduced

swinging to them, and admits that he was concerned initially because he was not sure

that he would be able to handle seeing Dee with another man. He says, however, that

after thinking about it and watching other couples at the club, he realized that it did not bother him. He says:

I know I love her and she loves me and that unless one of us gets killed we are going to be together, and that when you are with someone else it's…just a physical thing and that it's not because you are deeply in love with him/her.

Similar to most of the other couples, Dee and Melvin report that they have equal power within their relationship. Dee says that they discuss everything and are equal in all decision-making and Melvin says that their power is "a 50/50 thing". Especially related to swinging, they discuss everything before participating with anyone. As Dee puts it: "we always discuss every detail of what we like and dislike and if we are interested or not. If one of us has reservations then both of us do". They view all sexual encounters with others as recreation, and only have a strong attraction or deep emotions for one another. As Dee said, "he is the only person that I have that strong attraction for."

Couple 7: Jennifer and Stan

Jennifer (age 34) and Stan (age 36) have been married for three and a half years and have one child that lives with them, Stan has been married once before and has a daughter from a that relationship. She stays with the couple occasionally. Both Stan and Jennifer report that they were raised as Christian, but are not currently practicing. Both identify as White. Jennifer has completed some college and is in administration/management, and Stan has completed technical school and is in the military. She reports that she earns $35,000 annually, and he $30,000. They talked

about swinging for a year, but have only been actively swinging for about six months. They are "very picky and discreet" and only swing every two to three months.

The couple believes that their relationship prior to swinging was positive. Jennifer says her relationship is "now and before, a unique science of honest…which I never experienced before. We have a clarity of speaking that makes us never fight." Stan says that he could not have asked for anything better, that "we enjoyed being together, didn't argue about anything…love for each other was always noticeable, even by other people".

Jennifer had a swinging experience with another couple before she met Stan. She was interested in swinging with Stan, and when she told him about her experience, he was interested in trying it. He says that he had always wondered about swapping partners, before he even knew specifically about swinging, so he was excited when she said she wanted to try swinging with him. They began by discussing playing with a single woman, and then progressed to considering playing with another couple. They have had some experiences with others, but say that they are not willing to lower their standards just so that they can play.

Both Stan and Jennifer say that the power and decision making in their relationship is equal, sexually and non-sexually. Stan says they "always discuss everything and make decisions together, so I wouldn't say that either one of us has more power over the other one". Jennifer agrees, saying "we both discuss it, pros, cons, and make a decision. I can't say he wears the pants or I wear the panties, it's a mutual decision in all our adventures. . . we are equal in all senses".

Also, they say that they feel closer to each other since they began swinging. Jennifer says:

I know now that I could never be without him, unless death. I learned a long time ago, the words "I love you" mean nothing unless you back it up. He does that for me. . .[our] closeness hasn't changed much [since beginning swinging] but sensuality has…more touching, more flirting, more vocals of wants and desires, and overall more desire to please one another.

Stan thinks that they are closer because swinging has allowed them to communicate with each other about their desires and experiences. Also, he says that they are closer because he "felt less pressure to 'make a good impression'" and was "on the same wavelength" as Jennifer.

This couple was the second to report male bi-sexuality. While Stan did not discuss it in much detail, Jennifer graphically detailed an experience that they had with another man in which both engaged in sexual acts with him. She says that she enjoyed watching the two men together, that she thought it was "HOT". After the fact, she spoke with Stan and was assured that he enjoyed it too.

Cross-case Analysis

After twelve readings of the interview transcripts, consultation with my advisor and a colleague, and thoughtful consideration of the subject matter, four primary codes emerged. They were: a description of swinging, intimacy in swinging relationships, power in swinging relationships, and privacy about swinging.

Describing Swinging

Swingers reportedly reject traditional gender roles because of the acceptance of female bi-sexual activity (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000). And, the establishment of mutually agreed upon rules provides the opportunity for sexual exploration and adventure in a non-threatening manner (Buunk, 1984). The interviews conducted for this study provide further information about these aspects of swinging, as well as the distinction between adultery and swinging, and the positive and negative aspects of this lifestyle.

Excitement

Seven participants characterized swinging as exciting. Martin said that he thinks of swinging as a "mind drug" because of the excitement he gets from it. He enjoys the feeling that he's still able to be involved in the "chase" that he enjoyed in dating, and is excited to have people find him attractive as he ages. Rose also enjoys the thrill of being with someone new and "all the excitement of somebody different from your husband thinking you're attractive". Similarly, Harley finds it exciting to be "with someone new" but also he thinks it is just as exciting to "hear about her experiences" with other people. In fact, Kitty believes that the excitement of meeting new people is the best part of swinging.

For these seven people, swinging symbolizes an opportunity to continue to experience the excitement that they experienced when they were single. Through their experiences with swinging, they have re-constructed their expectations about this aspect of marriage. Their desire for excitement highlights the tension between their meanings about marriage (i.e., eventually the excitement dwindles and marriage

becomes monotonous, and they should only be desired only by their spouse). Also, they desire what they considered the benefits of being single.

Bi-Sexuality

One issue that is prevalently reported in the swinging literature is female and male bi-sexuality. In this study, two of the women (Dee and Jennifer) said specifically that they were bi-sexual and that this orientation was one of their motivations for swinging in the first place. Rachel is the only woman who said that she is not bi-sexual, although she did say that she was willing to receive sexual favors from other women, but that she preferred not to give them. Also, she was willing to kiss women, but she views this as more of a show of affection than a sexual act. The remaining women reported sexual experiences with other women during the course of play with a couple, but did not define themselves as bi-sexual. All of the men said that one of the benefits of swinging was being able to witness female-to-female interactions. Only two of the male participants had been involved in bi-sexual experiences. Stan and Jennifer both discussed Stan's experience, and Cherisse shared information about Drew's. Both wives report that they enjoy seeing their husband with another man, that it turns them on. Thus, they attach a positive meaning to the male-to-male interactions, as they identify them as stimulating. And, when asked about the stigma against it, Stan simply said "I wouldn't know about the clubs, but it's all allowed in MY house!"

The participants' discussions about bisexuality bring to light the fragmented nature of bi-sexuality in swinging. While females do engage in sexual acts with other females, and are encouraged by their husbands, they are reluctant to label themselves as "bi-sexual". And, only two of the males engage in bi-sexual activities, but this

information came from their spouses, not the men themselves. Thus, there is a disconnect between the meanings associated with bi-sexuality (perhaps because of the adherence to heteronormative notions) and the actual sexual experiences of the participants.

The Rules of Swinging

The rules that couples develop are also a part of the discussion of swinging practices. Interviewees were not asked specifically about rules, but all volunteered information about the importance of agreeing upon rules before beginning swinging. The participants said that they only felt comfortable swinging because they had set forth a set of guidelines with their partner that detailed what they find acceptable and what is not allowed. For them, the rules meant security. They believed that these rules would not be broken, but if they were, then they would consider it an adulterous act and not swinging. Some of the rules that were described include: no kissing someone other than the spouse, always use a condom, don't get drunk and act recklessly, only play together or, play individually but tell the other person when you do. Following the rules is a way for these couples to feel comfortable with swinging and to maintain the boundary between physical acts and emotional attachments.

Despite the importance that participants placed on their rules, they were fragile. That is, there is no guarantee that all of the rules would be followed all of the time, or that they would protect the couple from any complications. For example, Rachel experienced strong attraction to another man, in spite of the rules she and Martin agreed upon. In order to justify her situation, Rachel has assigned a new meaning to "following the rules". In her eyes, the fact that she has not acted upon her feelings

means that she has been able to adhere to the rules. However, what really has taken place is that she has adopted a very literal interpretation of the rules to help her feel exoneration.

Adultery vs. Swinging

An important distinction that 11 of the participants made was the difference between adultery and swinging. Based on their answers, adultery came to be defined as secret sexual interactions or an emotional connection with someone other than your partner. These participants viewed adultery as a negative thing that they would not condone in their own relationship.

In the dictionary to cheat is to deceive. There is no deception in our relationship. . .So as long as he knows and is not hurt, having sex with other people is not cheating. Cheating is bad…we do it together, how could it be cheating?

Drew, however, agrees that adultery is having a secret emotional or sexual relationship, but that sometimes this can sometimes be justified if it serves to keep the primary relationship intact. He said that if one member of a couple "has a desire to sexually experiment and the other person is unaware. . .it's better for them to have experimented rather than end the relationship in order to experiment". He says that this experimentation ought not to extend beyond one or two times, because by then the person would know if what they were doing would be worth ending their relationship over. If the encounters continued, then he would perceive the adultery as maladaptive.

The distinction that participants made between swinging and adultery is another sign that they are using the meanings of their activities to justify their behaviors. They

have co-constructed these meanings as a group to justify their behaviors. If they construct swinging differently than adultery, they can justify it as a valid practice. Hopper (1993) writes about the use of such motives to "impose a sense of order onto situations that were otherwise fraught with ambiguous and contradictory events, emotions, and inclinations toward behavior" (p. 801). In these cases, participants are experiencing the tension between the traditional heteronormative notions about fidelity within marriage and their swinging activities. They are re-constructing the meanings that they attach to these symbols in order to address these tensions.

The Process of Initiating Swinging

The participants' descriptions of how they began swinging highlight a process that is often coercive. Rose said that her husband first mentioned some friends that they knew were swingers and asked if she was interested in swinging. Initially she was not interested and would not consider it. However, her husband continued to occasionally ask her about trying it and eventually she started "giving in" and saying that she would. Similarly, Kitty initially reposed with no interest to Spoke's suggestions that they swing. After she was "given time" to think about the expanded sexual experiences she might have, and Spoke convinced her that he "really did love her", she agreed to try. In only one couple, the male had to be talked into starting swinging. Swinging had always been a fantasy of Stan's wife, and she would bring up the possibility of including others when they had sex (the time when he felt his "most vulnerable"). He was reluctant for a long time, and it took a "lot of convincing" over a long period of time to get him to be willing to try. His dilemma stemmed from concerns that she was not getting enough emotional or

physical fulfillment from him and that she was looking for a replacement from someone else. Once she got him to believe that this was not the case, he was willing to try it.

Thus, the participants are again assigning new meaning to their experiences in order to justify their decisions. While they did not label it as such, five of the wives did describe a coercive process when speaking about how swinging was introduced to them by their husbands. At the end of the process, however, the women say that they were as willing to try swinging as their husbands were. This can be related to Hopper's (1993) notion of motives. These women have assigned a different meaning to the coercion they experienced, in order to vindicate their choices and unconsciously maintain the allusion of equal power in their relationships.

<div align="center">Positive and Negative Aspects of Swinging</div>

During the interviews, each participant was asked what they though was the best thing and worst thing about swinging. Everyone was able to come up with at least one 'best' thing very quickly, and many listed more than one. When it came to the 'worst' thing, however, everyone took a much longer time to respond, and many initially answered that there was no 'worst thing', that they couldn't think of anything negative. I also asked them what, if anything, would make them give swinging up, and everyone said that they couldn't think of anything. Despite the initial resistance, a few answers were given, although the participants all maintained very positive outlooks overall.

Positive Aspects of Swinging

The people that volunteered to participate in my study were very interested in what I was doing because they see a need for more publicity about what swinging really is. Twelve of the participants learned about swinging through word-of-mouth means or

by searching for information over the Internet, methods which help to ensure anonymity. Therefore, they believe that many people may not be exposed to accurate information about the lifestyle. Drew believes that "it's a lifestyle that a lot of people would participate in or would like to do but don't know it exists…[or] they don't know exactly what it entails".

> I think a lot of people have the idea that anyone involved in the lifestyle is a deviant pervert. That's really not the case. It's just people, sometimes very average people. I think everyone has thoughts or desires about being with someone else…we have just decided to be more open about those feelings.

> Half of the participants refused the money that I offered them, saying that they did not help me because of the money, rather they wanted to be able to share their story and get the word out about swinging. They identified an improved connection and physical relationship with their spouse and improved self-esteem as positive aspects of swinging.

> *Improved connection and physical relationship with spouse.* One positive aspect that participants described was the improved connection that they felt with their spouse. They report that the experience of sharing their desires and thoughts with their partner was a very intimate feeling, which helped them to feel closer. Also, four participants report an improvement in their physical relationships as a result of swinging. Carrie says that it has "improved our sex life ten fold…we have learned many new things that we like and have taught the other to do those things". Similarly, Martin reports that they have "expanded, we've tried new things". Spoke reports that he and Kitty have rekindled

the passion in their marriage. And Stan says that his sex life with his wife has "absolutely" improved. Rachel said:

> And after so many years he is not a kisser. But I didn't miss it because I didn't know any better. And then meeting men, a couple in particular, love kissing and are very good at it, and I found out that I am very good at it and I love kissing!
>
> And it's an extreme turn on for me, and it's not for him, and he doesn't do it.

As Rachel reported, her swinging experiences have served as a substitute for some of the physical aspects that were lacking in her relationship. Her husband is not interested in kissing, but some of their swinging partners are. She has found that swinging allows her to receive kisses that she does not get from her husband.

Improved self-esteem. Another benefit to swinging that was mentioned by both male and female interviewees was improved self-esteem. Kitty, Rachel, and Carrie both report that the experience of being desired by men other than their husband helped them to feel better about their appearance. Rachel recognizes that the people that she has met have been "happier people. I'm not saying that it's because of what they do, but how they feel about themselves maybe". For these women, swinging means validation, to know that they are attractive to other men.

Also, Dee has never had a poor self-image, but does enjoy the attention that she receives from others, that she is often hit on at the swing clubs. When describing the swing clubs, Dee says that she likes them because people are very social, but it does not feel like a meat market. While none of the men reported in increase in their own self-esteem, four did notice their wives' self-esteem increasing as they started meeting other swingers.

Negative Aspects of Swinging

Interview participants had more difficulty responding to questions about what is 'bad' about swinging. Their optimistic attitudes could be indicative of their desire to rationalize their choices by overlooking anything that might otherwise be considered negative. Or, because couples choose to engage in swinging, they would be unlikely to continue if they recognized many drawbacks.

The answers that were given about what was negative about swinging had to do with finding other couples. Four of the participants believed that this was the most problematic aspect of swinging. As Rose, Spoke, Harley, and Stan mention, it is difficult to find other couples that shared the same interests or where all four people are equally interested. As Rose says, "you're tying to get four people to all be cohesively wanting each other, interested in each other, and that's hard to get all four people". Similarly, Martin said "now you have four people and they all have to get together and get along". Just one person, Harley, reports that many couples that they find are not as 'open' as he and his wife are. Given his reported experiences with bi-sexuality, this would fit with previous reports that male bi-sexuality is uncommon in swinging.

Dropping out of Swinging

When speaking about what would make them give swinging up, every person was reluctant to say that they would ever consider completely stopping. As Rachel said, "If I had to give it up I would, but…I don't see why". Similarly, Gene believes that "as long as it's a good experience I'll probably continue doing it". Finally, Drew believes that "nothing would make me stop". All participants expressed the belief that their marriages were strong and that their rules would protect them. Even when an answer was given to

this question, it was usually couched with a potential solution that would allow the person to continue at some future point. When pressed, the primary reason to stop was health risks, although this response was usually couched with a statement about how these risks can be minimized by using proper precautions (e.g., condoms). Rachel said that she would stop or 'take a vacation' from swinging if it began to take over her life, taking time away from her family or responsibilities.

Issues of age also came up when discussing reasons to stop swinging. Jennifer thought she would only stop when her "tits hang to my coochie…when I don't feel attractive enough to please anyone but my husband". And Harley thought that he would eventually stop when he was too old to enjoy it any more, although he could not identify what that age might be. The three couples that do not already have children (Cherisse and Drew, Rose and Gene, Dee and Melvin) reported the desire to have them eventually. When or if this happens, they believe that they would only quit swinging temporarily, not give it up altogether.

Advice to Others

If interviewees were asked for advice by someone interested in swinging, the first thing they would tell them is that swinging is not for everyone, and certainly not a fix for an ailing relationship. Once this were understood, they would offer advice such as: "you've got to have an open line of communication, don't take one for the team" (Martin); "the whole aspect of it working or not working is based on communication" (Drew); "never ever lie about anything" (Dee); "make sure you communicate OPENLY, HONESTLY, SINCERELY, and OFTEN" (Spoke); "be extremely picky" (Rachel); "make

specific rules and don't break them" (Cherisse); "take things slowly…take small steps" (Gene).

<p align="center">Intimacy in Swinging Relationships</p>

An important focus of much of the swinging literature is on intimacy within the swinging couple. Initially, participants were simply asked to describe what intimacy looked like in their relationship. However, the answers that emerged from this phrasing were vague, and did not provide a clear picture of the meanings that they associated with intimacy. Because of this, during follow-up interviews participants were asked to define intimacy in their own words, and then to share what they believed to be the three most important aspects of intimacy. The meanings given for intimacy shared common themes: something that exists between two people, an emotional/mental connection or bond, and an all-encompassing aspect of a relationship.

Trust

Trust was the most commonly reported component of intimacy, in line with the high importance that couples place on trusting their partners not to allow their interactions with others to progress beyond physical ones, or at most, close friendships. To participants, trust meant that a partner would follow the rules and maintain emotional fidelity.

> An example of trust in our relationship is our willingness to allow the other to go off on their own to play with others, knowing it is only sex and nothing more. (Carrie)

> We usually let each other go out by ourselves, and there's no questioning later. . .other than did you have fun? (Stan)

In our relationship, we trust each other that we do not cheat with others behind each other's back. There is no way to judge this without difficulty, so it falls upon trust. When this trust is broken it results in relationship problems, and in this case, of the worst kind. (Gene)

Even for the couples that did not play separately, they reported trusting each other to not break their established rules. And, if those rules were broken, it would have a tremendous impact on the couple's relationship.

Honesty

Similarly, five of the participants (two males and three females) identified honesty as an important aspect of intimacy. The types of honesty described, however, varied from sharing sexual desires openly to relationship issues about resolving conflict. Overall, this population of swingers understood honesty to be an open form of communication in which all subjects were appropriate for discussion. "There's the honesty of wanting to be with other people, sexually" (Drew) or "when something is bothering one of us (about the other one) we don't hold it in and let it build up" (Stan). Also, at one point or another, every participant said that open, honest communication was necessary for swinging to work.

Jealousy

Jealousy has been identified in previous literature as an inhibitor of intimacy. Eight of the swingers in this study reported that they may experience jealousy, but that they were able to address it so that it did not impair their relationships. I asked each participant what their partner could do to make them experience jealousy, and when/if jealousy appeared in their relationship, how they addressed it.

Of the examples of jealousy, very few were directly related to swinging. Mostly, the men and women reported jealousy over 'typical' things that most married couples face (e.g., time spent apart because of work or hobbies, going out with non-swinging friends without the partner). Some interviewees did report jealousy over their spouse having a bond or physical connection with others. Rose said that she would feel jealous if Gene had some sort of 'connection' with someone else, where he shared intimate thoughts and feelings with them, and not with her. Gene thought that he would be jealous if he perceived that she was receiving more sexual benefits than he, if things weren't 'fair'. And, Drew said that he would be jealous if another man kissed Cherisse or bought her expensive gifts. The possibility, or presence of, jealousy was expressed by both male and female participants.

When asked how jealousy is or would be addressed in the relationship, the importance of communication was reiterated. All 14 participants said that they would deal with the jealousy directly, openly telling their partner how they were feeling, and working through it. This answer seems very optimistic, and it is difficult to gauge if this really was the first thing that would happen, or if respondents were simply saying what they would like to do first, or what they know to be the best idea. The participants have constructed jealousy as a negative emotion that should be addressed so that it does not harm the relationship. However, jealousy is not always a rational emotion, and participants' beliefs about how they would address it may be unrealistic.

Power in Swinging Relationships

During the interviews, participants were asked to give an example of what the power was like in their own relationship, and whether they perceived a difference in their

own power before and after swinging. During the interviews, participants asked for clarification as to what type of power they were being asked about. Therefore, power was divided into two components, non-sexual and sexual.

Non-Sexual Power

In general, five of the couples perceived equal non-sexual power (i.e., decision making) within their relationships, with only two exceptions. Their answers show that they perceive power to be indicative of who makes decisions in their relationships. Kitty reports that she and Spoke "are both equal…we try to make all decisions together". Spoke agrees, stating: "we mutually decide in all decisions". Similarly, Dee says that she and Melvin "discuss everything, we are equal".

The first exception was evident by Cherisse as she hinted at power struggle with Drew. She says "sometimes I think I have a lot [of power], other times I think I have less…I usually give in before him". On the other hand, Drew perceives their relationship as egalitarian. Each member of this couple has assigned a different meaning to the power they experience. Cherisse perceived her power as limited, and she believes that she loses power when she 'gives in'. Drew, on the other hand, does not acknowledge this struggle. He believes that he shares equal non-sexual power with Cherisse. The other exception was seen as Harley said he "lets" her make all of the day to day decisions, "but when it comes to something important we try to discuss it and come to an agreement, but I have the final say so". In this situation, there is tension between Harley's understanding of power and how it is demonstrated in the relationship, as well as tension between his understanding of their power and Carrie's understanding. He sees the benefit in trying to share the decision making with Carrie, but even this is

demonstrative of the power he has as he "lets" her be involved. Carrie, however, had assigned a different meaning to the power in their relationship as she believes they "take a together approach" on all non-sexual decisions.

Sexual Power

When speaking specifically about sexual power (i.e., who makes decisions about swinging partners or activities), most couples again reported that they had an equal relationship. Only Rose and Gene reported that the male had more power in swinging situations, as discussed in their case summary. The other twelve participants said that they discuss each couple that they are interested in, to make sure that both partners are interested and willing. They perceived a give-and-take aspect to sexual power, as they say they would not play if both members of the couple were not equally interested. To these eleven participants, equal power meant having the opportunity to say no to a potential partner, without concern for the stability of their marriage. Only two couples (Carrie/Harley and Dee/Melvin) said that if one partner was not interested, they would play without them. For these two couples, they had agreements that the interested person could play by themselves in this type of situation, but they would tell each other when they were going to and what happened afterwards. All couples reported that their power dynamics had not changed because of swinging. Thus, they do not perceive swinging to be an equalizer of any kind, which is contrary to claims made in previous literature.

Privacy about Swinging

One area that is not covered in previous studies of swingers is the privacy that swingers hope to maintain with their families and society. Initially, it was assumed that

swingers engaged in secrecy about their sexual practices. In order to gain an understanding of secrecy, each participant was asked who they talk to about their practices, who they do not talk to, and why. As participants discussed this topic, it became evident that they were actually speaking about privacy more so than secrecy. Their responses emphasize that they were more interested in not sharing their lifestyle because it was no one's business, rather than feeling that they must keep it secret to protect themselves. The amount and type of privacy they maintained was determined by the nature of their relationship with others. That is, they reported different levels of privacy between themselves and their families, children, and co-workers.

Adult Family Members

When asked about disclosing to family members, all 14 participants said that there were certain members of the family that they would consider telling, and certain members that they would never tell. The reason for not disclosing that was given by 11 participants was that their sex life was simply not everyone's business. As Cherisse said: "I wouldn't tell them about my sex life even if I wasn't a swinger, if it was very traditional. It's not a conversation I think that I need to have with everyone". And Rachel said: "I consider it a very private aspect of my life". Carrie was the only one to report that almost all of her friends and family knew about her swinging. She says that they were "a bit shocked at first, but they…respect our choices". Rachel said that she found out that her mother is also a swinger accidentally (at the same time that her mother found out about her), but that they have never directly talked about it.

In order to get a clear understanding of how they would handle questions from family members, I asked each participant how they would respond if a family member

that they are close to asked them directly if they were a swinger. When answering, most couched their answer by saying that they doubted that would ever happen. Also, everyone said that their answer would depend on the reason behind the questions. If their family member already knew about their participation in the lifestyle, they would be honest about it, but then they said that they would limit the amount of information that they gave because it would be none of their business. If a family member did not already have an idea that they were a swinger, they would laugh it off or do their best to avoid the question. Again, the interviewees typically said that this would have more to do with the information being no one else's business (their need for privacy) than being ashamed or embarrassed.

Children

During the interviews, I made a distinction between talking with family members and talking with children about swinging. Some participants already have children, and the others plan to have them at some point. Harley was the only one who said absolutely that he did not want to tell his children. He believes that his sexual activities are absolutely private, and it is not appropriate to tell other people about them, especially his children. And, he said that this was a source of contention between he and his wife, as she did want to tell them. The other 13 participants said that they would probably tell their children if they were old enough and they felt that they would be mature enough to understand. While everyone except Harley did not think that they would volunteer the information, they believed that if their child(ren) asked them, they would prefer to be honest and to explain the lifestyle so that they knew what it was really about, not what they might see on television or the Internet, as this information

tends to be negative or inaccurate. Harley reported that he would deny that he was involved with swinging, even if his children asked him directly.

Co-workers and Casual Acquaintances

Another group that was included in the discussion about secrecy was co-workers or casual acquaintances. It seems that the only group that everyone agreed they discussed their swinging with was other swinging friends. Participants reported that they were willing to share anything except personal information (i.e., their names, where they live) about their partners.

Three participants did tell a few of their non-swinging friends or co-workers, but for the most part they chose to keep their lifestyle private at the workplace. Especially if they perceived that someone's intention for knowing was malicious and intended to defame them or start gossip at work, they would deny their involvement. However, if they thought the other person might be interested in trying the lifestyle, they were more likely to share.

When asked what might happen if someone at work found out about the swinging, most participants said that they did not think anything would happen to their job status. At most, they thought there might be a bit of embarrassment about discussing their sex life with someone at work. Melvin said that he had to keep his lifestyle as a 'rumor' because of his position in the military, but that it was not a problem unless it became public knowledge. As his wife Dee explained:

Once it becomes an issue such as everyone is talking about it, or we are

in public doing something offensive, then his chain of command has to

act…So as long as it is rumor and he is in good standing it doesn't matter who knows.

Similarly, Martin's position as a police officer did make him feel a bit more cautious about disclosing, because of his being in the public eye. But, he reasoned that if someone found out about him, they would have to have been looking into the lifestyle themselves, so they would not be likely to notify his supervisors.

A cross-case analysis of the interview data provided information about several aspects of swinging relationships. First was a description of swinging and its positive and negative aspects. Then, there was a summary of how these couples experienced intimacy and power in their relationships. Finally, the way that privacy is employed in these relationships is discussed. Emerging from this analysis was three themes: swinging is only for committed relationships, swingers reinforce heteronormative ideals, and swingers have reconstructed the meaning of fidelity.

Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusions

Overview

The purpose of this study was to use qualitative methods to gain a richer understanding of the dynamics of swinging relationships. Fourteen people (seven couples) were interviewed to gain information about what meaning they assign to their lifestyle, how they experience intimacy and power in their relationships, and the secrecy that they engage in with their spouse, family, and society. In many ways, the information that emerged reinforces the existing literature on swinging, but it also adds new understanding to what is already known.

At the onset of the study, swinging was defined as sexual activities that married couples engage in with people other than their spouse. Based on the information from these seven couples, however, it is clear that swinging is much more complicated. A more complete definition of swinging would be: a process in which married couples re-negotiate notions of intimacy and power in order to support the incorporation of other people into their sexual practices.

In this chapter, I will discuss the main themes that emerged and link them to the existing literature, research questions, and theoretical frameworks. Also, I will discuss future research directions. Social constructionism and symbolic interactionism provide the theoretical framework for understanding the information that came out of the interviews.

Analysis of the data reveals three themes: reconstructing the meaning of fidelity, swinging is only for committed relationships, and the reinforcement of heteronormative

ideals. The first research question in this study was: how do individuals who participate in swinging describe or assign meaning to the experience? The first theme, reconstructing the meaning of fidelity, emerged from this question. A second research question asked: how do swinging couples engage in intimacy. The theme, swinging is only for committed relationships, engages this research question. Also, information about trust and jealousy were identified in the data and included within the second theme. Finally, a third research question was: how is power negotiated in swinging relationships. The third theme, the reinforcement of heteronormative ideals, and a discussion of privacy about swinging is situated within the umbrella of this research question.

How Do Individuals Who Participate in Swinging Describe or Assign Meaning to the

Experience?

Reconstructing the Meaning of Fidelity

The rules that swinging couples establish have been described in previous studies (Buunk, 1984; Ramey, 1975). Also, previous studies have distinguished open marriage and adultery from swinging relationships (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Macklin, 1980; Wachowiak & Bragg, 1980). However, these studies failed to establish a connection between how the rules of swinging affect swingers' constructions of fidelity. This is an important concept for understanding the ways that swingers construct their lifestyles and successfully negotiate swinging, and a contribution of this study.

The couples in this study co-constructed an understanding of swinging based on their notions of what they perceive as acceptable sexuality within a marriage. Participants confirmed Macklin's (1980) finding that swinging couples do not perceive

their activities as extramarital since they are both involved in them. Their construction separated the traditionally negative connotation of "infidelity" from the act of married people having sex with people other than their spouse. Infidelity is defined as a person engaging in a relationship (typically sexual) with another person that violates the characteristics of marriage such as trust and shared intimacy (Swenson, 2003). In this study, however, the participants' carefully-constructed rules served as safeguards to the fidelity of their relationships. Physical acts with others were not considered to have a detrimental effect on the participants' marriages. Rather, emotional involvement and connections with other people were identified as violations of the rules that could be harmful to the relationship.

The absence of deception and strict adherence to rules are how participants distinguished their activities from adultery (infidelity). They believed that the rules that they created would protect their own intimacy and prevent emotional connections from developing. Also, they believed that there would not be a need for secrecy within the marriage as long as the rules were followed. For example, in Biblarz and Biblarz's (1980) study, as in this one, participants were prohibited from swinging without their spouse in most cases. Even when the couple allowed for this, there was an expectation that the one who was involved would not conceal anything but would tell their spouse when it happened.

Thomas and Thomas' (1928) notion of *defining the situation* is apparent here. That is, if something is believed to be real, then its consequences are real. Participants believed that sex and love could be successfully separated. Therefore, they believed that swinging resulted in benefits to their relationship. If, however, the participants

thought that their spouse had moved beyond the boundaries of swinging, they would experience negative consequences. Participants would consider a spouse to be an adulterer if he or she developed an emotional connection with someone else. It would also be considered cheating if their spouse were to engage in sex with others and keep secrets about it from their partner (Denfeld, 1975; Ramey, 1975). These violations of trust, honesty, and communication would inhibit a couple's experience of intimacy. However, as long as these boundaries were maintained and they followed the rules, the couples believed that they had fidelity in their relationships.

The way in which participants reconstructed their understanding of fidelity demonstrates the tensions involved in assigning meaning to their practices. They maintain that they trust their spouses, yet this trust is rooted in the creation of strict rules rather than an inherent belief in the integrity of their partner. Also, all but two couples prohibited one partner from playing without the other, despite the assertion that the rules would safeguard the primary relationship.

<div align="center">How Do Swinging Couples Engage in Intimacy?</div>

Swinging is Only for Committed Relationships

When seeking to understand how swingers assign meaning to their experiences, the data provided a snapshot of people who have similar perspectives (i.e., valuing trust and intimacy, addressing jealousy honestly) on swinging. Previous swinging literature suggests that swinging may be a way for couples to enhance relationships that are already satisfying (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Denfeld, 1970; Peabody, 1982). The participants' reports fit with this notion, in that they were satisfied with their relationships before swinging and believed they were strong. Specifically, they perceived intimacy in

their relationships, trusted one another, maintained communication, enjoyed shared activities, and didn't argue very often. Participants believed that sex was a form of pleasure to be shared with more than one person and reported that they were able to successfully separate sex from love. Also, they derived excitement from their sexual activities and found that swinging enhanced the connection they felt with their spouse, increased their sexual excitement, and improved their self-esteem. As Buunk (1984) reported in his study, marriage was perceived by these participants as an intimate, loving bond with only one other person that was safeguarded through strong communication, trust, and adherence to mutually agreed-upon rules.

The literature indicates that swinging may be a way for married couples to try to improve a relationship that was not satisfying or was lacking in intimacy (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Knapp, 1975). However, all 14 participants said that they disagreed with this idea. They did not believe that swinging could be successful if a relationship were not already strong enough to support incorporating other people into their sexual activities. For the participants, swinging was not about filling a void in their relationship or trying to overcome an unsatisfying sex life. Rather, they characterized their activities as a form of recreation that allowed them to change an already-satisfying sex life into an even more exciting one (Varni, 1971; Symonds, 1971). The excitement they sought came from having variety in sexual partners and experiences.

Intimacy was very important to these couples. All 14 believed that their relationships involved a high level of intimacy (as compared to previous relationships they had been in) before swinging, but recognized even higher levels after they began. This belief reinforces Peabody's (1982) finding that swinging couples perceive an

increase in intimacy with their spouse after beginning swinging. Specifically, participants

identified the constructs of honest communication and trust as the hallmarks of a strong

relationship, and the most important for their own intimacy. Honest communication

involves sharing thoughts and feelings, mutual respect, and discussing problems

together (Robinson & Blanton, 1993). Participants stated that their marriages were

strong because they maintained open lines of communication. Also, they felt that their

communication increased because they spent time discussing their sexual experiences

and how they felt about them (e.g., what they enjoyed, or what they would like to try

sexually).

Despite the claims of all participants about the high level of intimacy within their

relationships, Rachel disclosed that she had developed feelings for another man. When

discussing her relationship with Martin, she described it as an intimate one, and

highlighted the importance of honesty and communication. However, she also

acknowledged that she was "in love with two men", and that she had not told Martin

about her feelings. Thus, she gave contradictory messages, illustrating the fragmented

nature of her meaning-making about intimacy.

An important aspect of participants' relationships was trust. Trust is considered a

pre-requisite for intimacy in a relationship as it increases security and reduces

inhibitions and defensiveness (Jenks, 1998; Bergstrand & Williams, 2000). Participants

reported that they trusted one another entirely. Sexually, just as participants in Buunk's

(1984) studies described, the participants in this study trusted that their spouse would

not break the rules that the couple had created to safeguard their relationship.

These couples have re-constructed the meaning of trusting their spouse to be more facilitating for their sexual practices. For them, trust does not have to do with their spouse avoiding sex with others, rather it means that they will not keep their activities a secret. Symbolic interactionsim and social constructionism provide frameworks for understanding how the participants assign meaning to, and have re-constructed their notions of trust. The meaning that participants attach to trust are the outcome of the dialogue that they have engaged in with their spouses and swinging partners, and even through the information that they have accessed through swinging publications and online sources. As a result of these re-constructions, participants have prescribed a positive connotation to their practices and their relationship.

One construct that has been shown to inhibit intimacy is jealousy. Jenks (1985) found that participants in his study scored lower on a jealousy scale than a control group, and Bergstrand and Williams' (2000) sample reported that jealousy was not a problem in their relationship. In this study, participants did acknowledge that jealousy about their spouses' involvement with others could potentially be a factor for them. If jealousy were to occur, it would be because they perceived that their spouse was paying more attention to someone else or developing emotional feelings for them. However, no one reported having yet experienced a situation where they perceived that this was happening. When asked how they might address jealousy if it occurred, all participants believed that they had the capability to communicate with their partner, and that they could find a way to resolve it before it caused problems in the relationship.

How is Power Negotiated in Swinging Relationships?

Reinforcing Heteronormativity

The previous literature on swinging relationships has failed to recognize the ways in which swingers reinforce heteronormativity. Oswald, Blume, and Marks (2005) identify heteronormativity as an ideological composite of three binaries: gender, sexuality, and family. Each of these binaries intersects with the others and contributes to the social construction of appropriate social actions. First, the gender binary identifies the value that society places on "real" men and women and dictates how they should behave. This would include expectations about what is expected of "good" husbands or wives. Next, the sexuality binary emphasizes heterosexuality as "normal" and "pathologizes other forms of sexual behavior" such as bi-sexuality. Finally, the family binary recognizes a family's biological and legal ties as genuine, as compared to any other "pseudo" form of relating (pp. 145-146). Much of the swinging literature touts swinging as a great equalizer that levels the status of genders and defeats the double standard (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Cole & Spanier, 1973; Fang, 1976; Ramey, 1972). This is not evident in this study. Rather, participants' actions demonstrate their attempts to "accommodate heteronormativity", rather than resist it (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005).

In this study, heteronormativity is expressed in the participants' descriptions of the power in their relationships, their experiences with bi-sexuality, and the privacy they engage in. First, gender differences related to the power within the couples' relationships were not verbalized during the interviews, but were evident in their descriptions of initiating swinging. Typically, husbands usually introduce the possibility

of swinging to their wives through a long series of sensitizing suggestions (Gould,

1999). The participants' descriptions of a similar process brought to light the ways in

which the couples reinforced gender conventionality and an imbalance of power. Also,

in previous studies on swinging relationships, female participants perceived an increase

in their power after beginning swinging (Ramey, 1972; Gould, 1999). In this study,

however, all seven women reported that their relationships were egalitarian prior to

swinging, and identified no change after they began.

However, if the process that the participants underwent when initiating swinging

is analyzed, a reinforcement of gender conventionality is apparent. Consistent with the

literature, husbands were most often the ones to introduce the idea of swinging (Cole &

Spanier, 1973; Jenks, 1998). Only two couples report that both members of the couple

knew about swinging and were equally interested in trying it from the beginning. Among

the other five couples, one partner was more interested and had to convince his or her

spouse to try it. Just as Gould (1999) described, husbands in this study often hinted

about their interest in trying swinging many times before eventually asking their wives if

they would be willing to do it. The participants' accounts of beginning swinging

demonstrate an adherence to patriarchal values that provide the husbands with "power,

advantages, and privileges" when making sexual decisions (Philaretou, 2004, p. 20).

In regards to the sexuality binary, a double standard is evident in the participants'

discussions about bi-sexuality. Typically, female bi-sexuality is commonly accepted (and

often encouraged) by swingers, but male bi-sexuality is not (Bergstrand & Williams,

2000). Within this study, only two of the women report that they consider themselves bi-

sexual, although all seven of the women report that they have had experiences with

other women in the course of play with other couples. Consistent with Bergstrand and Williams' (2000) findings, all of the reported bi-sexual experiences were limited to occasions when a male (usually the husband) was also present. Either the women were unwilling to label themselves as bi-sexual (accommodating heterosexual ideals), or they participated in these activities only for the enjoyment of their spouse (reinforcing patriarchy). In the latter case, these women's sexual activities are being controlled by their husbands' desires. This control demonstrates that the relationships may not be as egalitarian as they are perceived to be.

What is clear is that the literature is accurate about male bi-sexuality being discouraged within swinging. Male-to-male sexual behavior is not common, nor generally accepted (Dixon, 1985). Only two of the men, as compared to six of the women, report having bi-sexual experiences. Although the couples have constructed their understanding of sexuality within marriage to include multiple partners, they uphold the belief that these interactions should be primarily heterosexual. This belief reinforces the heteronormative ideal of masculinity, as males restrict their sexual encounters to fit within socially acceptable boundaries (only female-to-male encounters) (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). This standard is sanctioned by the couples in this study as the majority did not even make mention of male bi-sexuality.

Finally, the swinging activities of these seven couples took place within otherwise traditional marital and familial contexts. Because a requirement of participation was that couples be legally married, it is possible that there was a selection bias related to this theme. However, the participants reinforce the family binary in more ways than simply being married. The participants all valued legal and biological family ties. Every couple

made the choice to be legally married and was either raising children or expressed a

desire to do so in the future. Also, despite their non-monogamous sexual activities,

these couples expected that each member of the dyad would remain faithful

emotionally. In addition, all participants can be categorized as *recreational* swingers

(Varni, 1974; Symonds, 1971) that perceive their activities simply as a form of

entertainment and sexual variety. They did not resist heteronormativity, rather they were

in favor of maintaining the status quo and not challenging the current social order.

Privacy About Swinging

Swingers engage in different levels of communication about their sexual

practices with their families, children, co-workers, and society. Frisdl's (1994) distinction

between repression and privacy is important for understanding the participants'

motivations. First, repression is considered a social mandate that requires someone to

conceal information in order to avoid persecution (Foucault, 1981). Privacy, on the other

hand, is a form of accepting heteronormativity in which individuals choose not to

disclose in the interest of avoiding embarrassment or shame from others. Thus, the

distinction is one of choice. The participants in this study said that they did not believe

that they had to conceal their swinging activities for fear of persecution. Rather, they

chose to withhold the information in most contexts to avoid embarrassment or shame.

Symbolic interactionism and social constructionism provide a framework for

understanding the participants' choice of privacy. While the interviewees verbalized

positive experiences and no regrets for their lifestyle, they are reluctant to disclose their

lifestyle to many people outside of the swinging world. Based on their understanding of

the generalized other (Mead, 1956), they anticipate that family members or co-workers

have constructed a negative opinion about their sexual practices. So, in these contexts, they engage in privacy to avoid the negative responses from people who, including themselves, adhere to heteronormative ideals.

The swingers in this study closely monitor their disclosure about their lifestyle (Frisdl, 1994). With the exception of one, participants made careful decisions about who should know. According to participants, these decisions were guided by the belief that their lifestyle is private. Analysis of the transcripts, however, reveals a higher level of discomfort with disclosure than the interviewees verbalized. After anticipating the responses that others may have, they may constrain their disclosure in certain contexts based on the response they expect to get. It seems that the participants would like to believe that they could openly share their lifestyle with anyone they wish, but the fear of losing the power, or status that they achieve by accepting heteronormativity prevents them from doing so (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005).

Michel Foucault (1981) emphasized secrecy about sexuality and the repressive hypothesis in his work. He stated that for the past 300 years, Western society viewed sex as a private event that ought to occur only between a husband and wife. Also, he identifies an effort to repress sexuality that occurs in other contexts. Foucault's *repressive hypothesis* identifies the power that society exerts in order to limit and control open expression of sexuality. Following the logic of this hypothesis, it is the participants' fear of losing their privileged status in their families or community that may be a motivation for their continued privacy. Therefore, sex that occurs outside of this context must be repressed. Participants were most cautious about maintaining privacy within the context of discussions with family members and casual acquaintances. This caution

indicates that they perceived themselves as having the most to lose from disclosure to these particular groups.

Participants were doubtful that anyone in their family or at work would even ask if they were involved in swinging. They believed that they had successfully maintained their privacy about the lifestyle, and that the image that they portrayed to others would give no indication about their sexual practices. When they were asked how they would handle the rare situation when someone did ask, they would more than likely respond with denial or avoidance. Because of an awareness of the negative connotations associated with swinging and the belief that swingers are deviant (Jenks, 1998; Maykovich, 1976; Rubin, 2001), the only context within which participants would be in favor of full disclosure would be if the person(s) asking were interested in trying the lifestyle for themselves. If the person(s) already indicated some approval of their lifestyle and sexual practices, the participants would feel more at ease sharing information. This emphasis on the reasons for disclosure demonstrates that participants were more concerned about other people knowing about their lifestyle than they acknowledged.

Participants were more willing to forego secrecy about swinging with their children (when they were "old enough to understand") than any other group. If their child(ren) were to ask them about swinging, they believed that it would be important to answer honestly. Participants felt that it would be important that their children understood why they were swingers and knew that their parents' marital relationship was not being threatened. Also, participants believed that honesty with their children would reassure them that the negative things they may see about swingers in the media

(Rubin, 2001) are not necessarily true. This concern highlights the importance that these couples placed on the way that their child(ren) perceived them.

Future Research Directions

This sample consisted of a group of volunteers that were positive about their experiences with swinging. Finding access to a large population of swingers would enable random sampling to be used and would eliminate any possible volunteer bias. Also, the participants were so optimistic about their lifestyle that they did not perceive a change in the future. Finding access to couples that had tried swinging but then dropped out would paint a more nuanced picture of the lifestyle and the feasibility of its sustainability. Next, the information comes from a snapshot of couples that were fairly young and had been involved in swinging for a maximum of six years. It is possible that in the future they could change their minds and stop swinging. Conducting a longitudinal study on a sample of swingers would encompass more of the ups and downs of the lifestyle, and provide a description of the trajectory of a swinging relationship. Also, this sample was small and restricted to one geographic area. Expanding a sample to include more participants from different locations would provide a greater breadth of experiences. Finally, the participants in this sample were characterized as recreational swingers who reinforced heteronormativity and did not seek to challenge the current social order. Interviewing individuals or couples who are communal or utopian types of swingers could uncover ways in which they reject heteronormativity, and how this rejection affects their power and status.

APPENDIX A

Initial Interview Protocol

Couple #: _____

Pseudonym: _____

Location: _____

Demographic Information:

Age:

Gender:

Race/Ethnicity:

Spiritual/Religious Practices [Prompt: what are your spiritual practices? Do you attend services?]:

Occupation:

Education:

Income:

Children? Y/N

      Age(s)?

      Live with interviewee?

Length of time married to current partner:

Length of time swinging with current partner:

How often do you swing? [Frequency/Duration]:

Describing Swinging Marriages

1) How would you describe the quality of your relationship prior to swinging being introduced in your relationship?

2) How did you first hear about swinging? [Prompt: friends, media, family member, previous relationships, current partner?]

3) Who introduced swinging in your current relationship, you or your spouse?

4) How did you or your partner go about introducing it? If you were to break it down step-by-step, how did it happen?

5) How did you feel about introducing swinging/having swinging introduced to you?

Gender Relations and Power in Swinging Relationships

6) What kind of power do you believe you have in your relationship? Give examples of what that looks like for you? [Prompt: who makes decisions about if you are going to meet a couple, if you will go to swing clubs, who you sleep with?]

7) Do you feel more powerful in your marriage since you've begun swinging? Do you attribute that feeling to the fact that swinging is a part of your marriage?

Intimacy in Swinging Relationships

8) How close are you to your partner? Tell me about a time when you felt especially close with your partner?

9) How has your closeness with your partner been affected since you began swinging?

Secrecy

10) Who do you talk to about swinging? [Prompt: family, friends, neighbors?] Which aspects of swinging do you disclose to them? [Prompt: do you simply acknowledge that you are a swinger, do you discuss meeting people, do you share intimate details?]

11) Is there anyone you don't tell? What has influenced your decision to not tell them? [Prompt: what do you believe you can lose with disclosure? socially? legally?]

Wrap-up

13) What would you change about swinging? [Prompt: if something were going to make you stop, what would it be?]

14) What do you like most about swinging? [Prompt: what makes you continue to do it?]
15) Do you imagine a time in the future when you would give swinging up? What might influence that decision?

16) What would you tell others who are considering swinging?

17) Finally, is there anything else about your experience with swinging that I have not asked about, which you feel is important for my understanding the lifestyle?

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol for Follow-up Interviews

4. If you were to come up with a definition of intimacy for the dictionary, how would you define it?

    a. What are three specific components that are important for intimacy in a relationship?

    b. Which of those components do you have in your relationship? Examples?

2. How do you define adultery?

    a. What makes swinging different from adultery?

3. How would you respond in the following situations:

    a. If you were at work, having a conversation with some co-workers or your boss, and they asked you directly if you were a swinger.

    b. If you were at a family gathering and a relative that you aren't very close to asked you if you had ever tried swinging.

    c. If you were at a family gathering and a close relative asked you if you had ever tried swinging.

    d. If your child(ren) accidentally read your email or an instant message that reveals that you are a swinger.

5. Before you began swinging, what could your partner do that would make you experience jealousy? (probe until at least one example is given)

6. Now, what could your partner do that would make you feel jealous? (Prompt: break the 'rules')

7. When or if jealous arises in your relationship, how do you address it? (Do you tell your partner, give him/her the 'cold shoulder', ignore the feeling, etc.?)

APPENDIX C

Final Coding Scheme

1. How do individuals who participate in swinging describe or assign meaning to the experience?

    1A. Description of Swinging
        A couple activity or swing separately
        Bisexuality
        Rules of swinging
        Swinging is recreation
        Excitement
        Variety of people
        Need for expanded sexual experiences

    1B. Positive and Negative Aspects of Swinging
        Positive
            Best thing about swinging
            Reasons for swinging
            Self esteem, self esteem improved, attention from others,
            low self-esteem, Friendship out of swinging partners

        Negative
            Reasons for swinging separately
            Hard to find other couples

        Stopping Swinging
            Reasons to stop
            Only stop when old
            Reluctant to stop
            What would you change about swinging

2. How do swinging couples engage in intimacy?

    2A. Closeness
            Change in Closeness, closeness to partner, closer
            after swinging, good relationship before swinging, not a fix for ailing
            relationship, we always go back to us, honesty

    2B. Improved sex life with partner, physically affectionate, rekindled passion

    2C. Jealousy

3. How is power negotiated in swinging relationships?

    3A. Relationship Power Dynamics
        Power dynamics
        Non-sexual power equal
        Power in relationship changed or didn't with swinging
        Process of introducing it to spouse
        Sexual power equal
        Brought it up together
        Being excluded

    3B. Privacy About Swinging

        Reasons for disclosure
        Reasons not to disclose

        Family
            Family doesn't know
            Family knows/Mom knows
            Telling children

        Society
            Not hiding or doing something wrong
            Only tell swinging friends
            Army – keep it to rumors
            Content of conversations with others
            Denying lifestyle to others
            Secrecy

APPENDIX D

Participant Demographics

Couple #	Names	Age	Race Ethnicity	Spiritual/Religious Practices	Occupation	Education	Annual Income	Children	Years Married	Years Swinging	Freq. of Swinging
Couple 1	Cherisse	24	White	Christian	Teacher	M.S.	$35,000	No	4	3	1x every 1-2 months
	Drew	33	White	None	Fed. Govt.	B.S.	$35,000	No	4	6	1x every 1-2 months
Couple 2	Rachel	34	White	None	Homemaker	H.S.	$0	Yes, age 9	11	2.5	1x per month
	Martin	35	White	None	Police Officer	Some College	$85,000	Yes, age 9	11	2.5	1x per month
Couple 3	Rose	26	White	Catholic	Structural Engineer	M.S.	$46,000	No	5	4	1x every 2 months
	Gene	29	Pacific Islander	Christian	Teacher	B.A.	$30,000	No	5	4	1x every 2 months
Couple 4	Kitty	45	White	Christian	Admin. Assistant	H.S.	$35,000	Yes, aged 16/18	21	2	1x per month
	Spoke	45	White	Christian	Air Force	Assoc. Degree	$42,000	Yes, aged 16/18	21	2	1x per month
Couple 5	Carrie	31	White	Catholic	Tax Professional	B.S.	$85,000	Yes, aged 3/5/9	6	1.25	1x per week
	Harley	30	White	Catholic	Government	Assoc. Degree	$85,000	Yes, aged 3/5/9	6	1.25	1x per week
Couple 6	Dee	34	White	Wiccan	Disabled Veteran & Student	Some College	$17,000	No	1.5	1	1x per week
	Melvin	22	White	"Just a good person"	Mechanic & Student	Some College	$17,000	No	1.5	1	1x per week

Couple 7	Jennifer	34	White	Christian	Administrator	Some College	$35,000	Yes, aged 3/9	3.5	1	1x every 2-3 months
	Stan	36	White	Christian	Military	Tech. School	$30,000	Yes, aged 3/9	3.5	1	1x every 2-3 months

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•**Behavioral Health Counselor**, Sangre de Cristo Community Health Partnership
August 2005-present
- •1 Conduct substance abuse screening, using the 'Healthy Lifeways Questionnaire for Teens' on all patients at two school-based medical clinics
- •2 Provide brief intervention and treatment to patients who receive a positive screen score on the HLQ
- •3 Utilize Motivational Interviewing and the Community Reinforcement Approach, PHQ-9, Drinker's Check-up, URICA, and other tools as appropriate
- •4 When necessary, provide referral to treatment to patients in need of medical detoxification

•**Graduate Research Assistant**, Virginia Tech
Fall 2003-Spring 2005
- •1 Literature review of mother's reentry from prison literature
- •2 Designed poster for National Conference on Family Relations' 2004 Annual Conference
- •3 Literature searches for various topics related to advisor's research

•4 Collection of journals and books from library and online sources

•**<u>Graduate Teaching Assistant</u>**, Virginia Tech
>Fall 2003-Spring 2005
>>•1 Preparation of study guide and exams for Gender & Family Diversity and Human Sexuality classes
>>•2 Entering of attendance and other grades on Blackboard
>>•3 Presentation of guest lectures when professor was unavailable
>>•4 Review of potential textbooks

•**<u>Assessment Specialist</u>**, Lewis-Gale Medical Center Pavilion, Salem, VA
>Spring 2004-Summer 2005
>>•1 Crisis intervention for patients at Montgomery Regional Hospital and Pulaski County Hospital
>>•2 Conduct psychosocial assessments and provide recommendations regarding necessity of admission
>>•3 Consultations with staff psychiatrists regarding patient admissions

•**<u>Project Coordinator</u>**, Virginia Tech, Mother's Reentry Study
>Spring & Summer 2004
>>•1 Assisted with creation, editing, and production of interview protocol and other materials
>>•2 Coordinated scheduling of team meetings and participant interviews
>>•3 Maintained regular communication with probation offices and participants
>>•4 Entered qualitative data into database for analysis

•**<u>Therapist Assistant</u>**, Mesilla Valley Hospital, Las Cruces, NM
>Fall 2002-Summer 2003
>>•1 Assisted as needed with intakes, individual, family and group therapy sessions, documentation and planning aftercare for adolescent and adult patients at the Residential Treatment Center and on the Acute Units.
>>•2 Completed psychosocial assessments, treatment planning, and discharge planning for patients.
>>•3 Participated in bi-monthly staffing meetings with all members of the treatment team.

•**<u>Graduate Assistant</u>**, New Mexico State University
>Fall 2001-Summer 2003
>>•1 Instructor for UNIV 110, a one-on-one class designed to help students with individual study skills. Also instruction of UNIV

113, a class to teach students Speed Reading skills and UNIV 112 (Academic and Personal Effectiveness), a class to help students with improved study and interpersonal skills. And,

- •2 Instructed UNIV 150 (The Freshman Year Experience) for the Upward Bound program.
- •3 Presented workshops on various study skills such as; Time Management, Stress Management, Speed Reading, GRE Preparation, Memory and Concentration, and LSAT Preparation.

Publications:
None to date.

Professional Presentations:
Few, A. L., Arditti, J. A., & Vaillancourt, K. T. (2004, November). Mothers' reentry into family
      life following incarceration. A poster presented at the annual meeting of the National
      Council on Family Relations, Orlando, FL.

Outreach:
- •1 GRE Preparation Mini-course, RISE & Upward Bound Program, New Mexico State University, Summer 2002

Grants and Awards:
- •1 Hot Topics Grant, 2002, "Play Therapy for Children of Alcoholics" at New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM, United States Department of Health and Human Services: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), $1500.

Honor Societies and Professional Memberships:
- •1 American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists
- •2 Gamma Beta Phi Honor Society
- •3 Gamma Sigma Alpha Honor Society
- •4 Gamma Sigma Delta Honor Society

Service:
- •1 Student Reviewer, *Qualitative Review*, Fall 2004-Present

Teaching Experience:
AXIA College of Western International University:
BEH 221 Introduction to Behavioral Science
CRT 201 Critical Thinking
ETH 123 Cultural Diversity
HHS 300 The Human Service Administrator
HHS 320 Health and Human Services in the United States
HHS 330 Legal and Ethical Issues in Health and Human Servic

HHS 340 Public Policy Development in Health and Human Services
HHS 350 Technology in Health and Human Services
HUM 127 Religions of the World
INS 301 Introduction to World Cultures and Social Environments
LIT 205 World Literature

Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University:
HD 4364 Gender & Family Diversity, Guest Lecturer, Fall 2003
HD 3314 Human Sexuality, Instructor, Spring 2004 & Summer 2004
HD 4344 Community Programs in Family Life, Instructor, Fall 2004 & Spring 2005

New Mexico State University
UNIV 112, Academic & Personal Effectiveness, Spring 2003
UNIV 113, Speed Reading, Fall 2002 & Spring 2003
UNIV 150, The Freshman Year Experience, Summer 2002

Trainings conducted:
- •1 Provider training for Healthy Lifeways Program at two La Clinica de Familia sites
- •2 Procedures for interviewing participants (Mother's Reentry Project) for undergraduate research assistants
- •2 Basic uses of SPSS for undergraduate research assistants (Mother's Reentry Project)

Trainings attended:
- •1 Motivational Interviewing, August, 2005, Santa Fe, NM
- •2 Institutional Review Board: Training in Human Subjects Protection (online)
- •3 National Safety Council, CPR and First Aid
- •4 Ethics & Compliance Training for Lewis-Gale Medical Center employees