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The Swinging Paradigm: An Evaluation of the Marital and Sexual Satisfaction of Swingers

Chapter I: Introduction

Development of Personal Interest in the Topic

My personal interest in swinging began in 1998 with an article I read about swinging and swingers in the Canadian magazine *Saturday Night*. In the article the author, Terry Gould, posed the question “Can family values survive sexual adventure?” Gould was referring to what he reported as the steady rise of swinging among the North American population. The article posited that the swinging lifestyle, a context in which married individuals engage in consensual sexual interactions with other individuals, was fast becoming part of the socio/sexual schema of marital relationships (Gould, 1998). Gould argued that swinging was perceived by a large part of the general population as a morally depraved behavior, a threat to the institution of marriage and the fabric of the family unit (Gould, 1998). However, Gould's investigation revealed that couples that participated in swinging activities reported having strong, loving, and committed relationships, and lived otherwise traditional family lives. In other words, swingers were extraordinarily ordinary in all aspects of their lives except in the co-marital, non-monogamous, sexual aspect. Thus, Gould posited, perhaps swingers had found a happy alternative to adultery and sexual boredom (Gould, 1998).

However, the assertions made by Gould were anecdotal at best and relied on his interviews with a small number of swingers at a swinger's resort in the west coast. Gould's assertions were by no means the product of a studious and rigorous process of scientific inquiry. Nevertheless, Gould's findings were, to say the least, provocative and suggestive.

I decided to explore the research literature in an effort to find out what were the findings of prior studies on swinging. I was curious as to the relationship between swinging, marital satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. I was interested in evaluating some of the claims made by Gould in his article that swingers were indeed happy with their relationships. Moreover, I wanted to explore whether there was a relationship between swinging and the stability of the couple's emotional relationship. I wanted to know if negative consequences of swinging on the family unit had been identified, and if swinging had indeed brought a new dimension to the marital relationship. Did swingers have, overall, stronger and happier relationships than non-swingers? Was swinging the new marital paradigm of the future?

Further investigation revealed that although there had been some research on swinging, there was very little continuity to this research. Moreover, consistent, longitudinal data were lacking. Some of the reasons given to explain the lack of research with this population included the illusive, and secretive, demeanor of the swinging population, which made it extremely difficult to identify. Because of careful

anonymity cultivated by individuals in the swinging lifestyle, it was difficult to collect a randomized sample from this population; as well, it had proven extremely difficult to follow individual swingers over a sustained period of time (Jenks, 1985).

Nevertheless, I questioned why, despite the problems suggested by Jenks, researchers had neglected researching the swinging lifestyle since other alternative lifestyles, such as homosexuality which also carried an element of anonymity and secrecy, had received much stronger attention from the research community. If swinging had indeed increased in popularity, as suggested by Gould, why was there not more research on the topic? Since my initial interest on this topic in 1998, several media investigative reports on swinging have come to light.

In an episode of *Real Life Desperate Housewives*, aired on *ABC News 20/20* on March 18, 2007, the swinging couples interviewed by the reporter John Stossel reported that what they were doing was consensual co-marital sex and that their marital relationships had become stronger, and happier. They attributed the increase in happiness to their ability to have their sexual fantasies fulfilled in a context that involved themselves and their spouses without having to resort to lying or engaging in affairs outside the relationship.

Additionally, in an article in the English newspaper *The Independent*, Saturday, July 22nd, 2006, titled *Behind closed doors: The swinging Noughties*, it was reported that the continuing rise of swinging was due, for the most part, to the ease of communication among people provided by the Internet. Moreover, the article suggested that swinging is multidimensional and appeals to a diverse group of individuals, allowing some to fulfill their sexual fantasies within the context of the marital relationship. Moreover, the article posited that swingers engage in extra-dyadic sexual activities free of guilt and with the involvement of the other partner, which contributes, according to the author, to the strength and happiness of the primary relationship. Interesting to note that relationship *happiness* was mentioned in both articles by the swinging individuals interviewed.

When considering the available academic literature, it appears that the bulk of the research on swinging is restricted to journal articles and other publications dating back to the 1960s and 1970s. Most recently, R. J. Jenks, a sociologist, has shown some interest in the topic and has published a handful of articles starting in the late 1980s and continuing until the 1990s. However, in the last ten years, only two academic studies on swinging have been published. Thus, I concluded that further research on swinging was needed and would add to the existing literature.

I was also intrigued by the motivation behind swinging beyond the *happiness* assertions made by individuals interviewed in the popular media. In a recent article on the sexual arousal and motivation of men, Goetz, Shackelford, Platek, Starrat, and McKibbin (2007) posited that some married males encourage their partners to copulate with other males. The authors proposed that swinging is an example of a context in which males encourage their mates to engage in sex with males. *Encouraging one's partner to copulate with other men appears to be a maladaptive strategy that increases the risk of cuckoldry; however, in some contemporary societies some men do just this – such men often report sexual arousal to the sight of their partner interacting sexually with other men* (Goetz et al., 2007, p. 11).

Since sexuality is such a central element of long-term relationships, sexual compatibility, sexual satisfaction, and commitment are all indicators of the longevity of the relationship (Lawrence & Byers, 1992). Moreover, sex and intimacy are usually associated with a passionate relationship (Love, 1999). Brown and Amatea (2000) define commitment as: *The commitment component refers to the short-term decision to label our attitude towards another as love and also the long-term decision to try to maintain that love into the foreseeable future. Thus the commitment involves cognitive acts, rather than emotions, and may include conscious intention and will-power* (p.40).

It follows that it would be of interest, from a socio-psychological perspective, to evaluate a couple's motivation, and rationale, for engaging in sex with other individuals. When the sexual needs of an individual are not been met within the primary relationship individuals are more likely to look elsewhere for sexual satisfaction (Hoff, 2006). Are swingers dissatisfied with their sexual relationships? Are swingers lacking passion and intimacy in their marriage? Or are they consciously deciding that the swinging experience benefits both partners? And how does swinging affect the emotional bond between the married partners? Moreover, how do swingers justify their swinging activity since it challenges societal norms? After all, swinging is considered a deviant, maladaptive, adulterous behavior by society's standards. Thus, if society's norms condemn extra-dyadic sexual behavior, how do swingers deal with possible cognitive dissonance resulting from such behavior? Is swinging a male-dominated activity in which women are pressured to participate by their male counterpart, or do both partners willingly consent to participation? These are relevant questions when considering the swinging lifestyle.

Background to the Study

Sexuality and sexual behavior are central to the understanding of the human experience. Extra-marital sex is usually an indication of marital problems and can, most often, bring about the dissolution of the relationship. Thus, it is important to understand how swingers adjust to their swinging activities, and justify their behavior. As suggested before, there is not an extensive body of literature concerning the swinging lifestyle.

Rubin (2001) posits that although the study of alternative lifestyles received some attention from the science community during the social changes of the 1960s and 1970s, it declined thereafter. In the 1970s, investigations of alternative lifestyles, such as that conducted by the Groves Conference on Marriage and the Family, which examined non-traditional family forms and personal living arrangements and lifestyles such as cohabitation and stepfamilies, became mainstream topics of scholarly research for a short period. However, since then, social groups considered to be on the fringes of acceptable sexual behaviors (swinging, open marriages, group marriages, polyamory, and communes) have been largely ignored by the research community. The justification given for the lack of research is the difficulty in getting research funding for these topics, little academic reward or recognition for researchers, and the assumption that a fear of AIDS has restricted, or eliminated, these behaviors (Rubin, 2001). According to Rubin, the neglect in research on alternative socio/sexual lifestyles, and mostly swinging, continues in spite of the evidence that swinging may be as prominent now as in the past four decades.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to explore the level of marital and sexual satisfaction of male and female swingers. In addition, the study proposes to identify the current demographic of swingers; to evaluate swinger's attitudes towards swinging, and to explore specific sexual behavioral characteristics of swingers.

A comprehensive understanding of swinging is necessary to determine how the behavior affects the personal relationship of the couples involved in this lifestyle. Problems associated with sexuality often affect relationships. Sexual desire of one partner may not coincide with that of the other partner. Sexual dysfunction by either partner may affect the sexual enjoyment of the other (Kaplan, 1987). Moreover, the sexual self is paramount to an understanding of the self and it is central to the development and maintenance of relationships (Hoff, 2006). In this study, the sexual satisfaction of the individual participants in the confines of the marital relationship is explored.

Most of the available data refers to swingers as a group. Since there is little information regarding how

individual male and female swingers evaluate their swinging experience, this study considers individual men and women swingers and not *couples*. Moreover, it is important to develop an understanding of the individual characteristics of swingers to determine if there are differences between males and females in their evaluation of their swinging experience, and to explore if marital and sexual satisfaction plays a role in an individual's decision to engage in swinging.

The following are some of the questions addressed in this study:

- What are the current demographics of swingers?
- What are the levels of marital satisfaction of men and women swingers?
- What are the levels of sexual satisfaction of men and women swingers with their primary relationship?
- What are the attitudes of men and women swingers towards their swinging experience?
- What sexual activities are common in the swinging population?

Significance of the Study

The contribution of this study to the current literature is of great significance. The results will allow for a more complete understanding of swingers in the context of today's society and provide a better understanding of the rationale used by swingers to justify their swinging activities. As previously stated herein, research on swinging has lagged behind the rising incidence of swinging (Roberts, 2003). Past research has not empirically evaluated the marital and sexual satisfaction of swingers using well-established research instruments. Most of the information has been, at best, anecdotal. Thus, this study will provide much needed and valuable information by analyzing, and comparing, the marital and sexual satisfaction of male and female respondents.

Limitations of the Study

This study does not address the psychopathology of swingers. There is no attempt to evaluate the mental health of the participants or to identify whether swinging can be considered maladaptive or dysfunctional behavior, or to evaluate the possible cognitive dissonance experienced by swingers. Moreover, the study does not address the topics of romantic love, emotional attachment, or factors related to the dynamics of individual relationships. The unit of measure in this study is individual swingers and not couples. In addition, this study does not identify and evaluate a particular cohort. It is beyond the scope of this study to identify, and evaluate, individuals who may have desisted from swinging activities.

This project is divided into five chapters. In Chapter I the main topic of interest is stated as well as the rationale for the study.

Chapter II consists of the literature review and provides a summary of the literature regarding swinging and other related topics. Empirical and theoretical topics related to swinging are examined: the historical role of sexual morality and social expectations on the relationships; the connections between sex, love, and monogamy; the history of swinging in North America; the rationale for swinging and the characteristics of swingers vis-à-vis demographics and swinging experience; and an evaluation of marital and sexual satisfaction within the confines of the marital relationship.

Chapter III delineates the research methodology used in this study. The research design explains the selection of the sample, the process of data collection, and data analysis procedures. It explains the theoretical foundations for the study, details the methodological approach to hypothesis testing, and explains the development of the research instrument.

Chapter IV presents the results of the data analysis and their statistical significance.

Chapter V evaluates the theoretical implications of the results, discusses the relevance of the results concerning the sample population, and suggests future research possibilities.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Introduction to the Review of Literature

This chapter will review the literature on marital and sexual satisfaction, present an overview of marital expectations, sex, love, and morality, explore the conditions of marital infidelity, and present an overview of the historical evolution of swinging in North America including demographics and swinging experiences.

In a marital relationship, the sexual satisfaction and sexual compatibility of the partners play an important role on the longevity of the relationship (Lawrence & Byers, 1992). Sex and intimacy are often thought of as relevant components of a passionate relationship (Love, 1999). However, there are relationships in which sex is not the central focus. In many long-term relationships sex, becomes less and less frequent to the point that the relationship becomes a companionate partnership although often one of the partners may feel that something is missing (Hoff, 2006). Moreover, problems dealing with sexual desire, or sexual dysfunction, often arise within relationships. Sometimes a partner's sexual desire, or fantasy, may not match the other's, such as when one partner wants to engage in specific a sexual activity while the other partner feels uncomfortable, threatened, or disturbed by the proposed activity (Newman, 1997). One could ask, do swingers engage in sex with other individuals to compensate for something that is missing in their marital relationship? Does one of the partners pressure the other to participate in swinging?

Sexual behavior that does not conform to a model of procreative sex has been stigmatized throughout history (Hoff, 2006). Moreover, sexual commitment to the relationship is suggested as another important factor in determining whether or not a couple may stay together. Commitment, as defined by Brown and Amatea (2000) is described as:

The commitment component refers to the short-term decision to label our attitude towards another as love and also the long-term decision to try to maintain that love into the foreseeable future. Thus commitment involves cognitive acts, rather than emotions, and may include conscious intention and will-power. So commitment is a cognitive component of love” (p.40).

Thus, commitment seems to be based on an individual's cognitive evaluation of the *love* relationship. One could ask, does the expected couple's exclusivity of the sexual interaction play a role in the experience of commitment and satisfaction of individuals in the relationship? Or does extra-marital sexual activity indicate that the commitment of individuals in their relationship is waning?

The chapter starts with an overview of literature on marriage, infidelity, and the social repercussions encountered by individuals that deviate from accepted social norms. Further, the history of the development of sexual morality in the United States is also explored. As well, the connection between sex, love, and monogamy is explored. With regards to the literature review considers the background

and genesis of the swinging paradigm in today's society, as well as the history of the development of swinging in the United States. Moreover, an evaluation of the incidence of swinging in the general population, an exploration of the rationale for swinging, and an evaluation of the demographic characteristics of swingers as presented in past research is considered. Finally, the research literature on marital and sexual satisfaction is explored. The chapter finishes with a literature review integration that summarizes the material reviewed, highlights the past research contributions to the literature on swinging, and delineates the areas that require further research, including the research questions addressed by this study.

Overview of Marriage, Infidelity, and Morality

Marriage has been traditionally regarded as the only context in which sexual behavior and sexual expression receive societal approval. In the United States, legal marriage is the prerequisite to an adult sexual lifestyle and is the context in which most sexual experiences are expected to occur (Mosher, 1923/1980). It is widely believed that effective sexual functioning in a marriage is related to marital satisfaction and critical to the longevity of the relationship (Frank, Anderson, & Rubinstein, 1979). Any behavior that deviates from this accepted paradigm is considered socially unacceptable and hence discouraged.

There are several operational definitions of infidelity found in the literature (Blow & Hartnett, 2005; McAnulty & Brineman, 2007). Concepts of infidelity include such expressions as "*cheating*," "*having an affair*," "*being unfaithful*," "*stepping out*," and "*extra-dyadic sexual involvement*," which have ambiguous meanings (McAnulty & Brineman). Some of the early research relied on a narrow definition of infidelity as it applied to a person engaging in sexual intercourse with a person other than the primary partner (Lieberman, 1988; McAnulty & Brineman, 2007). However, for the purposes of this study *infidelity* will refer to romantic emotional involvement or sexual activity with a person other than the primary partner.

In 1953, Kinsey and his research team brought about a great deal of controversy when they reported that about one-third of married men and over a quarter of married women admitted having been unfaithful at least once by age 45 (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). Kinsey posited that 36% of the husbands and 25% of the wives surveyed for his study on the sexual behavior of females reported having been unfaithful (Kinsey et al., 1953). To the society of the 1950s, which disapproved strongly of extra-marital sexual activity, the reported rates of infidelity suggested by the Kinsey reports were far higher than anyone had suspected and caused great consternation, culminating in accusations, some from the scientific community, of biased or faulty research. Research that is more recent has revealed that the great majority of people in the United States still disapprove of marital infidelity (Davis, Smith, & Mardsen, 2003; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994).

However, although research on marital sexuality has been scarce, infidelity remains a topic of great interest in popular culture that is often featured in the popular media in situation comedies and talk shows (Greenberg & Busselle, 1996; Greenberg, Sherry, Busselle, Rampoldi-Hnilo, & Smith, 1997; Greenberg & Woods, 1999). Smith (2006) posited, "There are probably more scientifically worthless facts on extra-marital relations than any other facet of human behavior" (p. 108). Strong and DeVault (1994) reported that only nine of 553 articles on sexuality in scholarly journals between 1987 and 1992 concerned marital sexuality. Most of the research on marital sexuality has focused on couples in sex therapy (Reinisch & Harter, 1994).

Is sex therapy the context in which we are to understand marital sexuality? If so, what does the research tell us about the dynamics of sex within the marital relationship? Does sexual frequency predict marital and sexual satisfaction? In 1923, Clelia Duel Mosher conducted one of the first sex

surveys in the United States, albeit her findings were not published until 1980. Mosher interviewed 45 married women about their sexuality and found that most women reported that they found sex to be pleasurable and necessary for both men and women (Mosher, 1980). Thirty years later Kinsey et al. (1953) found that sexual activity was an important indicator of the marital relationship satisfaction and that, for the most part, the frequency of sexual activity remained constant for the first years of marriage. The rates of sexual intercourse reported by Kinsey averaged at least twice weekly. He found that these rates declined only after about ten years of marriage, to an average of once a week, and that marital satisfaction decreased at the same rate (Kinsey et al., 1953).

More recently, marital sexual frequency research has yielded more conflicting results, depending on whether the information was collected from small samples or larger national samples (Bell, 1971; Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Hite, 1976; Trussell & Westoff, 1980). Although married women reported lower levels of marital sexual frequency than men did, about one third of the women reported that they would like to have sex at least daily, while another third reported wanting to engage in sex two to five times a week (Hite, 1976). Moreover, Hite (1976) posited that most women found closeness, orgasm, coitus, and foreplay to be best indicators of marital sexual satisfaction.

Does sexual satisfaction predict marital satisfaction? It seems that there is a connection between marital satisfaction and sexual satisfaction. Although these two themes will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter, it is important to the present discussion on infidelity to consider the relationship between the two factors.

A majority of Americans report satisfaction with their marital sex life (Laumann et al., 1994). Research suggests that the ideal sexual frequency and the actual frequency of sexual relations in a relationship may indeed affect marital satisfaction (Frank et al., 1979). Dickinson and Beam (1933) reported that in their study of over 1,000 men and women, sexual dissatisfaction was a stronger predictor of marital satisfaction than money and children. Hite (1976) concluded from a study of married men and women that an unsatisfactory sex life was the principal cause of marital discord and dysfunction. Moreover, Kinsey et al. (1953) found that the likelihood of divorce was directly related to a decrease in the wife's orgasm frequency, which does suggest that sexual satisfaction is correlated to marital satisfaction. Hunt (1974) reported a strong positive relationship between a couple's level of sexual frequency and sexual satisfaction. However, other research findings suggest that a higher frequency of intercourse is not always related to either marital or sexual satisfaction (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). Longitudinal studies of married couples have yielded evidence that sexual frequency decreases over time and length of relationship (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Edwards & Booth, 1976; Hunt, 1974; Trussell & Westoff, 1980). Retrospective studies of couples considering their sexual frequency over the course of marriage have produced similar results (Greenblat, 1985).

Although the rules for marital infidelity are generally well understood by the marriage partners, presently it appears that adulterous behavior occurs more frequently among younger individuals (McAnulty & Brineman, 2007). It appears that younger individuals are finding that the transition between having several sexual partners during their single days to becoming involved in an expected monogamous relationship is a difficult one (Smith, 2006). This may reflect a behavior pattern left over from their dating days that included a plurality of sexual partners, suggesting that dating patterns may be predictive of marital adjustment concerning monogamy (Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999; McAnulty & Brineman, 2007).

Conditions for Marital Infidelity

A concern with the marital infidelity of spouses has traditionally been part of the history of human existence (Harvey, 1995). Civil codes in the ancient world have long prohibited adultery: the Code of Hammurabi, in Babylonia, (circa 900 B.C.E.); Draco, in ancient Greece (circa 620 B.C.E.); and Solon,

in Rome (circa 590 B.C.E.). Moreover, some religious writings have not only condemned but prohibited adultery. The religious tradition of the Jewish Torah, which has served as a model for current Western civil law, provides its clear condemnation of infidelity (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21; 22:22-29; Leviticus 20:10). However, for the most part, only women were expected to restrict their sexual activity to one man, their husband. Since a woman was considered a possession, the laws were meant to protect the property rights of the husbands and fathers. The same prohibitions generally did not apply to single or married men, who were expected to limit their extra-marital sexual activities to unmarried women, widows, concubines, servants, or slaves (Francoeur, 2006).

The societal views of women and marriage have changed over the years, and so has the concept of adultery. The idea of marriage as a social, economic, or strategic arrangement between families has given way to a more accepted view of marriage as reflective of romantic love. Family historians suggest that, in the 1880s, the Victorian period in America, the idea of extramarital sex became part of the fabric of American social culture. Popular literature glorifying romantic and marital love had become popular and encouraged men and women to satisfy their partner's sexual needs (Francoeur, 2006).

However, the pervasive religious dogma that controlled social morality while tolerating the idea of divorce had strong prohibitions towards adultery and extramarital liaisons (Francoeur, 2006). The negative social values held towards extramarital sex rest with the idea that infidelity is a strong threat to the marital relationship (Bell, Turner, & Rosen, 1975). Moreover, infidelity in the context of a marital relationship is considered a violation of the norms that regulate the level of a couple's emotional and physical intimacy and often leads to divorce, spousal battery, and homicide (Daly & Wilson, 1988; Drigotas & Barta, 2001). Societal rules proscribe infidelity as part of other unaccepted and deviant sexual behaviors. Some descriptive studies have suggested that in the past, research merely identified the unfaithful partner and the prevalence of the behavior within particular cultures or contexts (Drigotas & Barta, 2001). With the growing proliferation of non-traditional behaviors (such as cohabitation, pre-marital sex, and extra-marital sex), there has been a resurgence of interest on the phenomenon of extra-marital sex (Drigotas & Barta, 2001; Glass & Wright, 1977).

In a National Health and Social Life Survey, Laumann et al. (1994) reported that 25% of married men and 15% of married women admitted to engaging in sexual intercourse at least once with someone other than their marital partner. From the findings of the NHSLS study, one could conclude that the incidence of extramarital sex applies to about one quarter of males and one sixth of females. Tafoya and Spitzberg (2004) found that one out of every five wives and one out of three husbands have been unfaithful. Additional findings suggest that between 50% and 70% of married women, with five or more years of marriage, have engaged in extra-dyadic sexual liaisons (Hite, 1988). Furthermore, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) found that extra-marital sexual activity in younger females had increased and was becoming more comparable to that of males. In contrast, Choi, Catania, Dolcini (1994), and Forste and Tanfer (1996), found that less than 4% of all married people in their sample had engaged in extra-marital sex. Their findings seem to be skewed in relation to prior research, which suggests possible methodology flaws such as sample bias.

Despite the evidence that Americans engage in extra-marital liaisons, there is still a widespread disapproval of extra-marital sexual relationships, which tend to be viewed as a threat to the marital relationship (Davis & Smith, 1991; Glenn & Weaver, 1979; Laumann et al., 1994; Thompson, 1984; Weis & Slosnerick, 1981).

In conclusion, the evaluation of sexual behaviors is subjective and susceptible to the particular narrative of expected social norms (Hostetler & Herdt, 1998). The sexual culture binds communities in a social and psychological process that regulates sexual conduct and behavior, thereby establishing accepted guidelines for the rules of sexual conduct (Parker, Carballo, & Herdt, 1991). Cultural rules,

beliefs, and norms provide an individual with membership in the community by serving as the measure by which individual behaviors are sanctioned. Deviance from the rules will provide for an individual's exclusion from participation in the society (Herdt, 1999). Thus, the acceptance or rejection of sexual fidelity is part of the larger understanding of the norms that make acceptance, or rejection, of the behavior a part of the societal paradigm.

Overview of the History of Sexual Morality in the United States

In order to understand the progression of the moral code regarding co-marital sexuality, we can start by examining the behavior of the early American colonialists. Talese (1980) reports that cases of extra-marital sex and pre-marital fornication in Colonial New England were numerous enough to have been officially recorded. Even prostitution never completely disappeared during those early days of sexual prohibitions in the colonies of New England. In the 1660s, the Puritans of the Colony of Massachusetts enforced a strict sexual moral code, and any literary work that described sexual themes, or promoted sexual behavior, was deemed obscene and banned. These early interpretations of obscenity included not only sexual terminology, but also any form of speech considered offensive to the established religion, such as blasphemy (Talese, 1980).

By the second half of the nineteenth century sexual morality and prostitution had become national concerns (Denfeld & Gordon, 1970). The Social Purity Movement, created in the latter part of the nineteenth century in the United States, had as its main goal the elimination of prostitution, considered one of the most prevalent and damaging of all social evils (Pivar, 1965). Moreover, at the time North American society regarded prostitution as emblematic of the moral decay that permeated America. Religionists and moralists maintained that moral decay was present in all sexual relationships between men and women, as well as in any writing containing allusions to sexual behavior (Talese, 1980).

This moral revival brought on by the Victorian era in the United States in the 1870s culminated with the rise to prominence of Anthony Comstock, considered then the purveyor and defender of social morality (Talese, 1980). Anthony Comstock, together with his associates such as J. P. Morgan and Samuel Colgate, convinced the American Congress to pass a federal bill banning the distribution of obscene or lewd materials through the mail. Congress appointed Comstock as a special anti-obscenity agent for the Federal Post Office Department, a position that endowed him with police powers such as the right to arrest any individual, or individuals, attempting to distribute obscene material using the United States mail. Later, in 1875, Comstock went on to form the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, which became the backbone of the institutions that supported, and enforced, the moral code at time (Talese, 1980).

A commonly held attitude towards marital sex in the nineteenth century presumed that sexual intercourse between a man and his wife was, at best, an unhappy event, and required only for the purpose of procreation (Gordon, 1971). Moreover, indulgence in intercourse among married couples could result in the development of nervous or other physical disorders.

Not surprisingly, the beginning of the twentieth century witnessed a movement by some social scientists equating social disease or deviance with physical malaise or disease of the body. These social scientists advocated finding remedies or cures to minimize, or eliminate, any form of social pathology (Denfeld & Gordon, 1970; Smith, 1911). Social deviance was equated with social disorganization and was considered a form of social pathology, one that had to be dealt with and remedied at all costs (Smith, 1911).

In 1948, Kinsey argued that most of the social organization in our society was based on a code of morals dictated by religion that influenced the development and implementation of marriage customs and expectations (Kinsey et al., 1948). According to Kinsey the development and enacting of the legal

code as applied to sexual behaviors was based on this morality. Hence, the legal code provided for the legal prescriptions and proscriptions of specific sexual behaviors as a reflection of the societal zeitgeist (code of morality). Deviance from this expected code had both punitive legal consequences and social repercussions (Kinsey et al., 1948).

In 1959, Cohen proposed that the role of social deviance could be positive by bringing about social change. Moreover, Becker (1963) argued that deviance was part of the social process and supported social order. Erikson (1966) argued that controlled deviant behavior may be one of the prerequisites for preserving the stability of social life by marking the outer edges of group social life and helping individuals within the group reshape the framework for the development of novel cultural identities.

Sex, Love, and Monogamy

For most individuals sex appears to be inextricably connected to love and commitment, while for some sex does not require love (Brehm, Miller, Perlman, & Campbell, 2002). Research suggests that these connections emerged because of our socio-sexual orientations, which consist of a collection of beliefs and behaviors that describe our feelings about sex (Simpson, Wilson, & Winterheld, 2004). Widmer, Treas, and Newcomb (1998) posited that most societies around the world have a negative view of extra-dyadic sex. Most extra-marital sexual relationships are considered adulterous behavior and are discouraged by laws or customs.

In Western society, monogamy is often considered as the socially accepted zeitgeist, the preferred behavior pattern designed for human pair bonding (Buss, 1994; 1998b). However, the type of monogamy practiced by humans is often more of a serial monogamous process rather than a life-long pair bond (Buss, 1994; 1998b). A cross-cultural survey conducted with several societies across the world, industrialized and aboriginal, found that only 16% of those societies were strictly monogamous, while 84% were polygamous; however, in those cultures that that practiced polygamy only about 10% of men had more than one wife (Schmitt, 2005).

In societies that adopted a monogamous, pair-bonding approach, about 73% of both men and women surveyed admitted having had extramarital affairs (Schmitt, 2005). Despite this overwhelming evidence that humans are not naturally monogamous, most societies continue to expect their members to be monogamous, perhaps as a strategy to reduce social tension and conflict brought about by licentious sexuality (Schmitt, 2005).

Because the serial monogamy practiced by humans today is not representative of the polygamous “state of nature” that humans seem to prefer over time, it has been suggested that our ancestors, perhaps as early as two million years ago, lived in small groups made up of unrelated females and related males (Buss, 1994; 1998a). There is also some evidence that our ancestors may have practiced polygyny, a form of serial monogamy that is common to some primates such as pygmy chimpanzees (bonobos) (Buss, 1994; 1998b).

According to this mating strategy, males and females form consort pair bonds for as long as it is necessary to raise a child, and remain with one another, although not necessarily exclusively, throughout the duration of this period (Buss, 1994; 1998b). Ghiglieri,(1987) suggested that this fits well with the popular *four-year itch* concept (in some societies the *seven year itch*) as representative of a four-year term that is usually necessary for a human male and a female to remain together to raise a child.

In this explanation of monogamy, a pair is monogamous only for the sake of child rearing and then each individual is free to move on to the next mate. The necessary time for child rearing in human society has lengthened, especially in industrialized societies. This may serve to extend but not

strengthen the pair bonding shared by humans in monogamous relationships (Buss, 1994; 1998a).

The idea that sexual non-monogamy can co-exist within a strong emotional/love monogamous relationship seems at the outset to be deviant from the westernized version of romantic love and marriage that promotes sexual and emotional monogamy as indivisible entities (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Boekhout, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1999). Moreover, the suggestion that consensual, extra-dyadic sex should become part of an accepted sexual paradigm challenges the accepted societal norms that attempt to either marginalize or banish altogether perceived deviant sexual behaviors.

At a recent sexology conference in Montreal, Canada, sociologist Pepper Schwartz suggested that non-monogamy would at some point become part of the American sexual cycle (Schwartz, Frazer, & Clement, 2005). She posited that some individuals already either live a polyamorous lifestyle (defined as an intentional multi-partnered open relationship) or agree to open relationships. In addition, Schwartz suggested that, even if individuals profess a desire for monogamy, as a society we are becoming much more tolerant of non-monogamous behaviors (Schwartz, Frazer, & Clement, 2005; Alexander, 2005). Further, Schwartz argued that women have traditionally been the moral gatekeepers of society. However, women have now taken the lead in exploring open, non-emotional sexual activities, perhaps reflecting a more permissive attitude towards open sexuality (Schwartz, Frazer, & Clement, 2005; Alexander, 2005).

Malcolm Potts, an expert on the biology of sex at the University of California, Berkeley, suggests that although monogamy is relatively recent in our civilized human history and often a struggle, most people aspire to it. Potts suggests that even if individuals have to work at being monogamous, monogamy will remain the ideal form of socially accepted pair-bonding relationships (Alexander, 2005).

There is a common view in our society that the sexual involvement of one's partner in an extra-dyadic sexual relationship, and the jealous feelings that most often follows such behavior, is a serious threat to the intimacy and exclusivity of the relationship and brings about negative emotional reactions (Buunk, 1995; Buunk & Baker, 1997). Evolutionary theory argues that the strong emotional response to infidelity is an evolutionary mechanism designed to ensure male paternity in species where female oestrous is hidden. Thus, hidden ovulation suggests the evolution of a strategy by which a male is sure to be the father of any of the offspring of his mate; that strategy is jealousy (Buss, Larsen, Westen, & Semmelroth, 1992). Women would have an advantage of keeping their mates close by to provide resources and protection, since men would not be aware when their partners were ready to conceive, and hence the chance for cuckoldry. This is often referred to as "mate-guarding". Moreover, cross-cultural research suggests that the strength of male sexual jealousy provides evidence for an evolutionary history of female infidelity (Buss, Larsen, Westen, Semmelroth, 1992; Daly, Wilson, & Weghorst, 1982; Symons, 1979). Current estimates of worldwide rates of cuckoldry range from about 1% to more than 30%, with a mean of about 4% (Anderson, 2006; Bellis, Hughes, Hughes, & Ashton, 2005). Current estimates only provide an estimate of female infidelity. Any change for cuckoldry would provide a plausible explanation why ancestral males would benefit from development jealousy. Conversely, a woman would be deprived of resources and protection if her mate left her for another woman.

However, compared to women, men seem to hold more favorable attitudes towards extramarital sex (Seal, Agostinelli, & Hannel, 1994) and are much more likely to engage in extramarital sex themselves (Tafuya & Spitzberg, 2004). Further, men who commit adultery tend to have a greater number of "casual" sexual partners than adulterous women do (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). Perhaps, this may be because a man that mates with several women has an evolutionary advantage of passing on his genes to future generations (Buss, Larsen, Westen, & Semmelroth, 1992).

Research in the rationale for adulterous behavior suggests that predictive patterns of extra-marital sexual activity are related to an individual's perceived quality of the relationship (Treas & Giesen, 2000). Individuals who report unhappiness with their relationships also report less commitment to the relationship and are more likely to procure alternate sexual partners (Treas & Giesen). Conversely, those with high commitment and higher levels of satisfaction are less likely to engage in extra-dyadic sex (Drigotas et al., 1999). Moreover, the proponents of equity theory suggest that there are relationship factors associated with sexual infidelity (Waltster, Trauspam, & Walster, 1978). According to the theory, a lack of perceived equity in a relationship may lead individual partners to seek sex outside the relationship (Prins, Buunk, & VanYperen, 1993; Waltster et al., 1978).

When relationships are not stable or satisfying to the individual, the proportionality of the effort invested to maintain the partnership is compromised (Prins et al., 1993). That is, a perception of “over-benefit” by one partner and “under-benefit” by the other precipitates unbalance in the relationship. Walster et al. (1978) found that under-benefited partners were more likely to report having engaged in extra-marital sexual liaisons than those who considered themselves “over-benefited” or equitable (Prins et al.).

Swinging: Concepts and Background

If any extra-dyadic sex is considered adulterous in our society, then swingers must be part of the adulterous population. Swinging is a behavior that involves consensual extra-marital sexual relationships; however, it falls within the realm of marital non-monogamy, if not marital infidelity. But swingers do not perceive their extra-dyadic sexual behavior as adulterous. Only an extended and comprehensive study of swingers offers an opportunity to understand the rationale for swinging (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Jenks, 1998).

Both Bergstrand and Williams (2000) and Jenks (1998) suggest that swinging activities have been on the rise in the past decade. However there is still a lack research on the topic especially as it relates to determining the incidence of swinging in the general population. Studies on the incidence of swinging, the demographics of swingers, and the social impact of swinging on the family unit have lagged well behind the perceived expansion of the behavior. Bergstrand and Williams (2000) and Jenks (1998) also recommend that more information on swingers, and the swinging lifestyle, should be collected in order to understand the motivation for the behavior and its implications on society.

In order to understand the role of swinging in today's Western society, it is important to understand the social context in which the behavior occurs. Moreover, it is imperative to evaluate the impact that swinging may have on the social paradigm that it challenges (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Jenks, 1998). To evaluate the impact of swinging it is important to have a defined definition of what swinging is. As it stands, there is no standard definition of swinging. Swinging can be described as a context in which married couples, or couples in committed relationships, consensually exchange partners solely for sexual purposes (Bartell, 1970; Bergstrand & Williams; Denfeld & Gordon, 1970; McGinley, 1995). In swinging, emotional monogamy and the love relationship remain the primary focus of the relationship. The extra-dyadic sexual activity is considered as recreational sex only and ideally does not affect the primary relationship of the couple (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000).

Several articles in the popular media suggest the possible beneficial effects of

a swinging lifestyle (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000): *GQ*, (Newman, 1992); *New York* (Gross, 1992); *Los Angeles Times*, (Maher, 1998); and *Saturday Night* (Gould, 1999). In his book *The Lifestyle*, Gould suggests that swingers tend to have a stronger sense of family values than non-swingers do (Gould, 1999). Family values in this case are understood as the commitment of an individual to the emotional well-being and social and material welfare of the family unit. Swingers have been shown to

put the care of the members of their families above all other concerns. This assumption has been supported by previous academic research on the influence of swinging on marital satisfaction and family values (Bartell, 1970; Bergstrand, & Williams, 2000; Denfeld & Gordon, 1970; Gilmartin, 1975; Jenks, 1998; O'Neill & O'Neill, 1972). Moreover, Bergstrand and Williams and Jenks argue that amidst the rise of divorce rates and the incidence of extra-marital affairs, swinging provides a context that may sometimes strengthen the bond between the members of a couple and stabilize the relationship. If this is the case, it is of interest to social scientists to explore a possible shift from the current zeitgeist of sexual monogamy to a more permissive paradigm that includes extra-dyadic sexual involvement.

Cross-culturally, social sexual behavior suggests that humans have a propensity towards a diversity of sexual customs and mores (Gould, 1999). Several studies show that public sexual activity as well as group sex was popular in certain South Sea Island societies albeit the influence of Western culture has changed some of these customs. This type of sexual behavior may have involved public displays of sexual interaction with individuals other than spouses (Murdock, 1949; Sumner, 1906). In some societies displays of friendship amongst society members included openly exchanging spouses; while in other societies, group sex was an integral part of their religious hospitality (Butler, 1979).

Perhaps swinging in America reflects behaviors that were accepted and encouraged in other societies. However, as discussed in this study, there is strong social opposition towards sexual behaviors that are deemed to be deviant and threaten the status quo, that is, marital monogamy. In the following section the history of swinging in North America will be examined.

History of Swinging in North America

There is no seminal event that can be identified as the marker for the onset of swinging in North America (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Butler, 1979). Rather, it appears that swinging was the natural progression of a movement that started in the 19th century that produced *free love* as a practical concept. This movement, the Bohemian free love movement, took root especially in the popular Greenwich Village district of New York City between 1915 and 1925 (Pedersen, 1991). These bohemians were referred to as *love radicals*. This movement continued to take shape well into the late twenties, producing, among other events, the onset of petting *parties* where individuals engaged in open sexual activity (Pedersen).

Gay Talese (1980) in his book *Thy Neighbor's Wife* explored the emergence of "key clubs" during the period following World War II. According to Talese, key clubs were created during World War II by Air Force fighter pilots who had moved their families to live with them near bases where they were stationed. Key clubs got their name after house keys were put in a hat at the end of social parties at the base; husbands would retrieve the keys by chance to determine who among the wives would be their sexual partner for the night. It was in these pilot communities that the concept of sharing began to include spouse sharing. It was common to find couples engaged in non-monogamous, casual sex interactions, and wife swapping became common and acceptable (Gould, 1999; McGinley, 1995).

The 1950s witnessed the emergence of more organized mate swapping clubs in suburban America. The popular media started to explore the rumors of suburban sex clubs, dubbed *wife-swapping clubs*, where group sex took place. Several investigative articles were written on the subject and swingers were portrayed as immoral, deviant individuals showing a psychopathological behavior (Butler, 1979).

However, the term *swingers* came about in the early 1970s and superseded the previous terminology of *wife swapping*, used by the media. *Wife swappers* was a term considered by the adherents of co-marital sex to imply sexual inequality since it presumed that husbands swapped their wives as merchandise or possessions, and that the wives were unwilling participants and merely obeyed the wishes of their

husbands who *swapped* them as they saw fit (Denfeld & Gordon, 1970).

In the 1960s, the modern swinging movement took shape and started in earnest (Gould, 1999). The first organization to acknowledge the swinging movement was the Sexual Freedom League in Berkeley, California. At that time, the only means of communication for swingers looking for other same-minded individuals was through the placement of ads in local magazines and newspapers (Gould, 1999; McGinley, 1995).

In the early 1970s, the evolution of open marriages based on the concept of non-possessiveness was taking root. In some marriages spouses accepted each other's infidelity and extra-marital adventures. The concept seems to have been a natural progression of the free love theory of the late sixties (O'Neill & O'Neill, 1972). The concept of having more than one loving relationship at a time also made its debut in the sixties and may be responsible for the sexual philosophy active in many hippie communities of the time (Wesp, 1992).

In the 1970s, the North American Swing Clubs Association in the United States was established to serve as an umbrella organization representing swingers and swinging clubs throughout the country. The Association's official definition of swinging states that *swinging is the popular and internationally accepted term for recreational, social sex between consenting adults* (McGinley, 1995; NASCA International, 2000, p. 9). In 1972, George and Nena O'Neill (1972) conducted an anthropological study of the emerging swinging community in Manhattan and referred to swingers as

...an emerging sub-cultural group characterized by 'amorphous' cliques. These groups were composed of members of diverse clans and unrelated kinship groups who gathered on specific occasions to partake in a communal rite involving displays of togetherness and group relatedness consisting primarily of sexual interaction" (p. 101).

The O'Neills were interested in exploring the psychodynamic aspects of open marriages, their psychological motivation, fantasy development and realization, and the effects of such behavior on self-esteem and self-perception.

In the 1980s, the swinging community participants started to refer to their engagement in extra-dyadic sexual behavior as *the lifestyle* in order to shed the stereotypical term *swingers* commonly used by the popular media (Gould, 1999). The name-shift expressed the feeling shared by most swingers that their behavior was not an aberration or deviance, but rather part of a larger event in which extra-dyadic sex was an integral part of the couple's *lifestyle*. Some of the social clubs organized by the swinging community adopted the term *playcouples* to describe the involvement of both partners in extra-dyadic, playful, sexual experience (Gould, 1999).

When asked about the concept of swinging, many people in mainstream society disapprove of the behavior because they equate it with infidelity or "cheating" (Jenks, 1998). Moreover, there is still a widely accepted perception in the general population that swingers are unhappy individuals looking to fix or remedy unhappy marriages, or that swingers are deviant, socio-pathological individuals in need of marriage counseling (Jenks, 1998). Gilmartin (1975) asked non-swingers how they would feel if a swinger moved into their neighborhood. A large portion of the people sampled voiced strong objections. Likewise, Jenks (1985) asked non-swingers how they perceived swingers concerning their overall behaviors and attitudes. He found that non-swingers, for the most part, perceived swingers as non-whites who were habitual drug and alcohol users (Jenks, 1998).

Incidence of Swinging

Although there are suggestions as to what percentage of the general population engage in swinging

activities, there are no definite statistics (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Jenks, 1998). In 1964, William and Jerrye Breedlove published the results of their research with swingers. They concluded that about eight million couples in the United States had exchanged partners for sexual purposes (Breedlove & Breedlove, 1964; Denfeld & Gordon, 1970). Their findings were based on a sample of 407 couples. Moreover, their analysis of swinging publications indicated that over seventy thousand couples had placed ads in national swinging magazines and newspapers in the previous year; they estimated that about two and half million couples had engaged in swinging activities at least once. However, it could be argued that their conclusions were based on a small sample sizes and that their estimates were unrealistic. Since the Breedlove's estimation relied mostly on anecdotal evidence, there is the possibility that the proposed number of estimated swingers and those that had actually engaged in swinging activities at least once, were quite different.

Other estimates suggest that swinging couples could comprise about 4% of the general population (Hunt, 1974; Weis, 1983). Bartell (1970), and Cole and Spaniard (1974) put the figure at 2%. Some estimates go as far as to suggest that at least 25% of all married couples have engaged in swinging at least once (Weis, 1983). However, most studies have relied on small sample sizes and have been restricted to samples from specific geographical areas.

Nevertheless, the last ten years have witnessed an increase in the number of swingers' clubs. A perusal of the Internet sites dedicated to swinging reveals hundreds of clubs, which seem to increase in number every day (Jenks, 1998). These websites include swinging dating sites or bona fide organized social clubs with a physical location where weekly or monthly meetings for swingers are held (Jenks, 1998). The organizations have become forums for the advocacy of swinging and have established national lobbies (Jenks, 1998). Swingers' clubs exist in almost every state in the United States, Canada, England, France, Germany, and Japan, and other countries (Jenks, 1998).

Rationale for Swinging

People contemplating marriage at this juncture in our society are faced with a rising divorce rate in the United States that is expected to increase to 64% in the near future (Fowers, Lyons, Montel, & Shaked, 2001). In fact, more than half of all marriages end in divorce, even though unmarried individuals estimate their chances of divorce to be below 10% (Baron & Byrne, 2003).

Some of the causes for divorce are dissimilarity between the spouses, desire for independence, attachment styles, neglect of on-going relationship problems, lack of willingness to compromise, as well as other extraneous factors (Baron & Byrne, 2003; Baxter, 2004). One could assume that swingers are individuals attempting to deal with dysfunctional relationships or find a quick fix for their marital problems. However, that is often not the case (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Jenks, 1985, 1998).

Jenks (1985) suggests that 26% of swingers engage in the behavior as a way to explore different sexual partners and engage in different sexual experiences or behaviors. In his study of swingers, Jenks also found that a common reason given for engaging in swinging was the willingness of the participants to challenge moral and societal codes. Another reason given in the Jenks study was the opportunity for individuals to interact socially with new people in a novel social context.

Demographic Characteristics of Swingers

Who are swingers? According to current available data, swingers are mostly middle-class white married individuals (couples) holding, for the most part, conservative views. In Jenks's research, 32% of swingers consider themselves politically conservative, 41% politically moderate, and only a small minority, 27%, considered themselves liberal (Jenks, 1985). Swingers also show a more permissive

attitude towards topics such as sexuality, divorce, pornography, homosexuality, pre-marital sex, and abortion (Jenks, 1985).

In a recent study, Bergstrand and Williams (2000) found in their sample of swingers that 85% of the respondents were married or in committed relationships. The average age of their respondents was 39 years. The majority had at least two years of college education. Most were presently married and had been involved in swinging for an average of five years. In their sample, 90.4% were white, 4.9% were black, and 3% were Latino (1.5 % indicated "other" in the selection of race).

The racial background of a sample of swingers in studies by Bartell (1971) and Jenks (1985) was mostly white (90%). The mean age of swingers from a sample of attendees at a national swingers' conference was 30, with a range between 28 and 45 (Jenks, 1985). Bartell (1971) and Levitt (1988) found comparable results (mean age of 40.7 years) in their samples of swingers.

An evaluation of the religious background of swingers found that 68% attended church on a regular basis while a growing number backed away from organized religion altogether (Gilmartin, 1975; Jenks, 1985, 1998). About one third of swingers are moderately religious but do not attend church on a regular basis (Bartell, 1971; Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Gilmartin, 1975; Gilmartin & Kusisto, 1973; Hunt, 1974; Jenks, 1985, 1998; Paulson & Paulson, 1972). However, Bergstrand and Williams found that swingers were more likely than non-swingers to belong to religious organizations.

Most swingers have above average education (Gilmartin, 1975; Jenks, 1985, 1998; Levitt, 1988) and were employed mostly in professional or managerial positions. Denfeld and Gordon (1970) suggested that swingers did not conform to the stereotypical deviant profile and were indeed like anyone else in the general population. In their sample, 80% were college educated graduates and worked mostly in white-collar professional occupations. Bartell (1970) found similar results in his sample: about 25% of the male respondents were college graduates, while 50% reported being in the marketing or selling professions.

Jenks (1998) profiles swingers as white, middle to upper middle class individuals in their late 30s, conventional in a social sense, community-oriented and responsible civic citizens who do not identify with specific religious organizations. His findings are in line with those of Bergstrand and Williams (2000).

Bergstrand and Williams (2000) explored for the presence of abuse or dysfunctional family backgrounds in the histories of their sample. When compared with data obtained from the general population (General Social Survey Data, 1983-1991), the results showed that there were no statistically significant differences between the groups. Bergstrand and Williams concluded that the results contradicted an assumption that there is a higher incidence of mental pathology among swingers than the general population.

Jenks (1998) has also proposed that further research was necessary to identify wider demographics, perhaps longitudinal studies that could identify the factors that influence the rationale for swinging and evaluate the longevity of swinging behavior within a specific cohort.

Given the fast rise of swinging in the past decade, as suggested by Robert McGinley, director and founder of NASCA International (an association of clubs, events, and services, related to the swinging lifestyle community), it is important to determine if there has been a change in the demographic characteristics of swingers and to explore additional demographic of the swinging population (McGinley, 1995). New research must address the following questions:

Who are the new swingers? What are their current demographics?

What are the sexual behaviors of swingers?

Are there differences in attitudes towards swinging between male and female swingers?

Are swingers satisfied with their marital relationships?

Are swingers sexually satisfied with their primary relationship?

Marital Satisfaction and Sexual Satisfaction .

Marital satisfaction is expected by most married individuals and is often associated with their overall happiness (Young, Denny, Luquis, & Young, 1998). Often, individuals expect to base their choice of a mate on sexual attraction. In addition, sexual satisfaction is used as a barometer for the quality of the marital relationship and is an indicator of marital satisfaction (Farley & Davis, 1980; Gebhard, 1966; Hurlbert, Apt & Rabehl, 1993; Przybyla & Byrne, 1981). Research suggests that the level of sexual satisfaction in the relationship is related to how individuals feel about the whole relationship (Henderson-King & Veroff, 1994).

Considering the high rate of divorce and the marital and sexual dissatisfaction experienced by many couples who decide to remain in the marital relationship, there has been much research designed to identify the factors that positively or negatively affect the sexual satisfaction of married individuals (Frank et al., 1979; Young et al., 1998).

Social Exchange Theory provides a rationale for the association of sexual satisfaction with the general relationship quality (Sprecher, 1998). Sexual satisfaction represents an equitable balance concerning the sexual aspects of the relationship. The difference between rewards and costs compares favorably; that is, there is equality between the partners in their exchange of rewards and costs. Sexual satisfaction in a relationship can lead to an overall increase, and equity, in the quality of the relationship (Lawrence & Byers, 1995). Other research has demonstrated that couples who are satisfied with their sex lives tend to be satisfied with their relationship (Sprecher & Cate, 2004). Moreover, sexual satisfaction may contribute to a more rewarding relationship and increase the level of compatibility of the couple (Sprecher & Cate, 2004). Couples who report higher levels of sexual satisfaction report spending time together in more leisure pursuits (Birchler & Webb, 1977).

Some researchers have investigated the relationship between sexual satisfaction and the physical aspects of the sexual experience such as orgasm consistency and the frequency and timing of orgasms (Darling, Davidson, & Cox, 1991; Darling, Davison, & Jennings, 1991; Young et al., 1998). However, an individual's sexual satisfaction may depend on many other variables (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1979).

There seem to be many variables involved in determining sexual satisfaction, and some aspects of the sexual experience may be more satisfying than others (Young et al., 1998). One of the greatest difficulties for researchers is to operationalize sexual satisfaction in marriage or relationships (Renaud, Byers, & Pan, 1997; Young et al., 1998). Some researchers have looked at sexual satisfaction as a measure of an affective response, derived from a subjective evaluation of the positive and negative aspects of the sexual relationship. Others have restricted their evaluation of sexual satisfaction to coital satisfaction or other aspects of the physiological experience of sexual activity (Ah Song, Bergen, & Schumm, 1995; Farley & Davis, 1980; Young et al., 1998).

Renaud et al. (1997) noted that some researchers use orgasmic consistency to evaluate sexual satisfaction, yet there is a conceptual difference between the two constructs. Darling, Davidson, and Jennings (1991) found that multi-orgasmic women were more likely to be physiologically satisfied with sexual intercourse than single-orgasmic women were, but their overall sexual satisfaction was

not affected. Other researchers suggested that the consistency with which partners reach orgasm is a determining factor in sexual satisfaction (Young et al., 1998). Lief (1980) and Hurlbert et al. (1993) found that female orgasmic consistency was positively related to greater marital satisfaction. Waterman and Chiauuzi (1982) found that, for women, the sexual dissatisfaction increased as consistency of orgasms decreased. They defined sexual dissatisfaction as a measure of lack of interest with the repertoire of the sexual behaviors that the respondents engaged in during their sexual activities. However, sexual pleasure was not correlated with the consistency of orgasm for either partner (Waterman & Chiauuzi, 1982; Young et al., 1998).

Motivation for extra-marital sexual behavior tends to be predicated on marital dissatisfaction for both males and females (Glass & Wright, 1985). Most intimate relationships are characterized by emotional involvement and close attachment between the members of the dyad (Young & Acitelli, 1998). Moreover, individuals with intimacy goals experience greater relationship satisfaction (Young & Acitelli). A person's satisfaction with his/her marriage or primary relationship tends to be a pivotal factor in his/her overall happiness. Thus, sexual satisfaction is an important aspect of marital satisfaction as stated herein (Farley & Davis, 1980; Gebhard, 1966; Hurlbert et al., 1993; Przybyla & Byrne, 1981). Huston and Vangelisti (1991) found in their longitudinal study on the relationships between affection, sexual interest, negativity, and marital satisfaction, that a wife's sexual interest was positively related to the husband's satisfaction; in other words, a married woman would look forward to have sex with her satisfied husband.

Donnelly (1993) researched the frequency of sex within the marital context. She found that sexually inactive marriages were less happy and satisfying than those where there was a higher level of sexual frequency.

In a recent study Litzinger and Gordon (2005) explored the relationship of communication, sexual satisfaction, and marital satisfaction. The results of their study suggest that communication and sexual satisfaction are independent predictors of marital satisfaction. However, they found a strong interaction between communication and sexual satisfaction. Couples who have difficulty communicating, but are sexually satisfied, will experience greater marital satisfaction than couples that have a less satisfying sexual relationship (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005). In addition, religiosity (Davidson, Darling, & Norton, 1995; Paxton & Turner, 1976), gender-role perception or adaptation (Jobes, 1986; Rosenzweig & Dailey, 1989), cultural variables (Ah Song et al., 1995) and a host of other factors have been studied to determine their correlation, if any, to sexual satisfaction (Hatfield, Greenberger, Traupmann, & Lambert, 1982; Hurlbert et al., 1993; Schiavi, Mandell, & Schreiner-Engel, 1994).

As suggested in prior research, there are several predictors of stability and satisfaction in a marriage. Research points to the influence of past and present satisfaction with a spouse's personality, living conditions, premarital relations, autonomy and relatedness (Fowers & Olson, 1992). Studies in the general population have shown that relationship satisfaction declines in the first two to three years of marriage and that marital dissatisfaction does not necessarily result from marital instability (Fowers & Olson).

A study by Fowers and Olson (1992) identified the strengths and weaknesses related to relationship issues, such as expectations, communication, personality, and conflict resolution tactics. Couples with the highest degree of overall marital satisfaction showed effective communication abilities, higher satisfaction concerning affection, sexuality, shared time, finances and a strong belief in religious importance. Communication and relationship satisfaction did result in greater marital satisfaction (Fowers & Olsen).

Overall, couples that relate to each other but still retain a sense of personal independence are more

likely to feel closer and report higher levels of marital satisfaction (Rankin-Esquer, Burnett, Baucom, & Epstein, 1997). In addition, research involving middle-aged, and older couples, revealed that marital interaction is more positive in older couples perhaps due to a feeling of closeness that has shaped their relationship (Levenson, Cartensen, & Gottman, 1994). However, the marital interaction seems to be less physiologically (sexually) arousing for older couples than for middle-age couples. These findings were consistent with other research that showed marital satisfaction increases with age (Guilford & Bengston, 1979). If there is a relationship between marital interaction and satisfaction in marriages, then older couples may interact more positively, but less sexually due to low physiological arousal.

If sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction are highly correlated as it appears from the current literature, it seems that if one or both were to decrease, the relationship would be in jeopardy. Indeed, several studies support the notion that individuals engage in extra-marital sex because there is a breakdown in the primary relationship, including marital satisfaction and sexual satisfaction. Thus, as satisfaction decreases, the incidence of infidelity increases (Atkins, Baucom, & Jacobson, 2001). Dissatisfaction with the marital relationship increases the desire for engaging in extra-dyadic sexual relationships (Prins et al., 1993).

Research has shown that, for the most part, swingers place a great importance on their family life, are committed to emotional monogamy in marriage, and value the companionship aspect of their relationships (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000). Bergstrand and Williams found that over 60% of swingers stated that swinging improved their marriage/relationship and only 1.7% suggested that their relationship became unhappy because of swinging activities. Furthermore, 49% of the individuals who were satisfied with their relationship prior to swinging found an improvement afterwards. These results suggest that about half of swingers may perceive their swinging activities as improving the quality of their relationships and marital satisfaction. In addition, swingers rated themselves as happier regarding life satisfaction as compared to the general population, and they appeared to lead happier and more exciting lives than non-swingers (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000).

In this study, two variables, marital satisfaction and sexual satisfaction of swingers, are explored. The levels of marital satisfaction and of sexual satisfaction of swingers with their primary relationship are evaluated.

Literature Review Integration

Swingers are an under-researched phenomenon. The latest research on swinging Bergstrand and Williams (2000) and Jenks (1998, 2001) suggested that little empirical documentation exists to evaluate the psychological or behavioral impacts of swinging on the familial relationships. Prior research on swinging has been sporadic at best and it has demonstrated serious gaps not only in the information regarding swingers. Additionally, there is no research regarding the possible differences between men and women swingers with respect to their marital and sexual satisfaction.

Marital relationships have traditionally been accepted as including an expectation of sexual monogamy (Boekhout et al., 1999). Swinging challenges this assumption. Thus, swinging suggests that perhaps a new paradigm for marital satisfaction that includes extra-dyadic, consensual, sexual interactions may be taking shape in today's society (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Jenks, 1985, 1998, 2001). Research on the consequences of infidelity on the marital relationship has led some researchers to conclude that the behavior is damaging and has long-term negative consequences (Boekhout et al., 1999). In contrast, research on swinging has suggested that consensual sexual behaviors outside of the primary relationship may be beneficial to relationship satisfaction and maintenance (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Jenks, 1985, 1998, 2001).

A comprehensive understanding of swinging and swingers is necessary to understanding the long-term

effects of the behavior. It is evident that infidelity, a behavior that does not involve the consent of both partners to extra-dyadic sexual involvement, can cause negative changes in the dynamics of the relationship and family structure (Baxter, 2004; Boekhout et al., 1999; Brehm et al., 2002; Fowers et al., 2001; Schwartz, 1994; Simpson & Gangestad, 2001). Further, some studies suggest that individuals engage in extra-marital sexual liaisons because something is wrong with the primary relationship such as dissatisfaction with the marital or sexual relationship (Atkins et al., 2001; Glass & Wright, 1985; Prins et al., 1993). Glass and Wright (1985) argue that primary relationship dissatisfaction is due to infidelity. They found a negative correlation between marital satisfaction and infidelity in all types of extra-dyadic activities involving either sexual or emotional relationships, or a combination of both.

In conclusion, this study proposes to explore the levels of relationship satisfaction and sexual satisfaction of men and women swingers in order to determine if indeed there is a negative relationship between marital and sexual satisfaction. Also, the study proposes to explore the attitudes of men and women towards swinging and determine if there is a difference in their responses. As suggested by prior research, men that procure extra-marital activities are usually not satisfied with their marital relationships and are not happy sexually with their partners (Glass & Wright, 1985; Rankin-Esquer, Burnett, Baucom, & Epstein, 1997; Sprecher, 2002). Logically, it could be expected that men that engage in swinging activities would be dissatisfied with their marriage and would show low levels of sexual satisfaction as well.

Moreover, it is important to identify behavioral and psychological characteristics of swingers and ascertain their sexual and marital satisfaction. Most of the literature reviewed herein is dated and in need of reassessment and evaluation. The demographics of swingers seem to be in a state of flux. Demographic characteristics identified by Denfeld and Gordon (1970), Bartell (1971), O'Neill and O'Neill, (1972), Cole and Spaniard (1974), Gilmartin (1975), Hunt (1974), and Weis (1983) seem to have changed considerably, according to the latest research by Jenks (1985, 1998, 2001) and Bergstrand and Williams (2000).

Thus, the purpose of this study is to gather information about male and female swingers, to determine the level of marital and sexual satisfaction, to evaluate attitudes towards swinging activities, and to explore the relationship between attitudes and behaviors. The hypotheses are derived from the assumption, as suggested by prior research evaluated herein, that men and women will differ in their experience of marital and sexual satisfaction. Most research suggests that men's willingness to engage in extra-marital sexual relationships is motivated by a lack of sexual and marital satisfaction. If this is the case, men swingers would be more likely to suggest swinging to their spouses as a way to compensate for their lack of satisfaction in either context. Although in past research swingers report high levels of satisfaction with their marital relationship, that fact has not yet been scientifically researched. Moreover, there is no data on the sexual satisfaction of swingers in their primary relationships; all of the present evidence relies on anecdotal evidence.

Research Questions

There are five research questions considered in this study:

- What are the current demographics of swingers?
- What are the levels of marital satisfaction of men and women swingers?
- What are the levels of sexual satisfaction of men and women swingers with their primary relationship?
- What are the attitudes of men and women swingers towards their swinging experience?
- What sexual activities are common in the swinging population?

Research Hypotheses

Based on prior research, the following hypotheses are proposed for this study.

- Men swingers will score lower on the Marital Satisfaction Scale than women.
- Men swingers will score lower on the Sexual Satisfaction Scale than women.

Chapter III: Method

The purpose of this study is to add to the existing literature by exploring current demographics and gathering information on men and women swingers regarding their marital and sexual satisfaction, and their attitudes towards the swinging experience. Moreover, this study also proposes to establish a research instrument that can be of use in future research with a swinging population.

Procedure

An initial proposal for this study was submitted to Union Institute and University Internal Review Board for approval in November 2007. IRB Approval was received in February 2008 and data collection started immediately.

The data for this study was collected using a self-report survey instrument designed by the researcher and posted on swingers' dating websites and swingers' on-line social clubs. The survey method was chosen in order to gather exploratory and descriptive information from a selected sample of swingers. The survey method traditionally allows for the collection of large quantities of data from specialized populations (Babbie, 1990). Past research using a Web-based methodology has proven practical and expedient (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Jenks, 1998; Vietor & Fernandes, 2005).

In this case, the on-line survey method was chosen because of its ability to access a large sample of swingers in a short period. As well, the use of an on-line survey would facilitate the researcher's ability to gather responses from a large, anonymous, sample of a population that would otherwise not be available through face-to-face interviews or direct mailing. For the most part, swingers resist face-to-face interviews and are not willing to be identified (Jenks, 1998). Prior research on swinging has successfully utilized an on-line format to collect data (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000).

The following are some of the advantages of on-line survey methodology:

- Response and sample size can be maximized within a limited time span
- Surveys dealing with sensitive subjects are more likely to get more responses from potential respondents if identities remain anonymous
- Individuals are more likely to respond truthfully to personal and private questions
- Time required for completion of an on-line survey is usually far less than with any other method.
- The costs incurred in setting up an on-line survey are often minimal.

Considering the sensitive nature of some of the questions in this study and the need for anonymity, the researcher assumed that participants would be more willing to answer the questions openly and honestly in on-line format rather than in a traditional, face-to-face, laboratory setting. However, the on-line format is susceptible to self-selection bias.

The researcher created an on-line survey using SurveyMonkey.com. The service provider utilized software designed to minimize tampering; responses and identification marks were encrypted. The researcher opted to utilize options available on SurveyMonkey rendering the respondent's e-mail or

Intern protocol addresses (ISP) unavailable to the researcher.

Fifteen swingers' dating sites (through their webmasters), and one hundred and seventy two on-line swingers' social clubs were contacted via e-mail and asked to participate in the study by posting a link to the survey on their websites. To maintain a consistent protocol, a template was used to contact the webmasters of the dating sites and social clubs when requesting their participation (see [Appendix A](#)). Of those contacted, three dating sites, one of theman international swingers' site, and twelve social clubs agreed to post the link to the survey on their Web pages or electronic newsletter. The names and Web addresses of the participating sites will remain anonymous as part of an agreement between the researcher and those sites for confidentiality. Only paying members of the dating sites or clubs had access to the survey link. Temporary members or *free* members did not have access to the link. Social club newsletters were distributed only to the club members. To maintain consistency, an additional template was posted with the link to the survey on the participating websites inviting members to participate in the study (see [Appendix B](#)).

Data were collected for a period of five weeks starting on February 26, 2008, and ending on March 30, 2008. At the completion of the collection period the data were downloaded from the hosting site and analyzed.

Participants

Participants for this study are a self-selected convenience sample recruited through advertisements on swingers' dating websites. The unit of analysis for this sample population was individual men and women swingers. No attempt was made to acquire data from couples. In addition, the sample does not represent a true probability sample since it was not obtained through randomization but rather self-selected.

Upon recruitment, the participants were asked to logon to the web site containing the survey and complete it. Upon login to the study's web site, the participants were presented with an informed consent form (Appendix E). Participants were not required to sign the consent form since this was a web-based survey. Participating in the survey assumed consent. After reading the consent form, the participants were directed to continue and complete the survey. Participants were informed that they could stop participation at any time, and none of their responses would be submitted

The subjects were not financially rewarded for their participation. Participants were not asked for any personally identifiable information, and the researcher did not possess the technical capability to trace individual surveys to particular participants. The options allowing for tracing of IPS and e-mail addresses were deactivated on the Surveymonkey website.

Participant Confidentiality

Data were collected and maintained in an on-line data bank at Surveymonkey until the end of data collection. The responses were encrypted for security. Considering the sensitive nature of some of the questions in this study, and the stigma attached to this special population, it is believed that participants were probably more willing to answer questions openly and honestly than in a traditional laboratory, face-to-face, setting.

The results and subsequent analysis were conducted by the primary researcher and consulting faculty (committee).

Instrument

The testing instrument was a survey developed by the researcher. The *Demographic and Behavioral*

Inventory of Swingers (see [Appendix F](#)) is a 59-item questionnaire designed by the researcher that divided into four sections. The first section included demographic questions. The second section included questions designed to ascertain the swinging attitudes, experiences, and behaviors of the participants. Marital satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction were measured using The Index of Marital Satisfaction [IMS] (Hudson, 1997), a modified version of the Derogatis Sexual Satisfaction Scale (Young et al., 1998). To minimize outside tampering the link was available only to actual members of the sites.

Upon completion of the survey, the participants were directed to click a *submit* button at the end of the last page of the survey. The raw data were downloaded into an Excel document later, converted to SPSS format, and analyzed. As per APA requirements, the data will be kept by the researcher for the next five years.

The demographic questions in this survey reflected questions asked in previous research studies with swingers and included new questions regarding education levels, occupation, household income, size and type of community, and geographical location of the respondents.

Marital Satisfaction Scale

The IMS (Hudson, 1997) (see [Appendix C](#)) was used to measure the marital satisfaction of the participants and was included in the survey instrument. The IMS is a 25-item scale designed to measure the degree, severity, or magnitude of problems that one spouse or partner has in the marital relationship. The IMS has two cutting scores. The first is a score of 70 (\pm 5); scores above this point indicate absence of a clinically significant problem in this area. The second cutting score is 30. Scores below this point indicate severe stress in the relationship. The IMS is part of the WALMYR Assessment Scales, and it is scored on a seven-point Likert scale with the following options : 1 – none of the time, 2 – very rarely, 3 – a little of the time, 4 – some of the time, 5 – a good part of the time, 6 – most of the time, 7 – all of the time.

Scores above 70 are considered indicative of satisfaction with the relationship. The IMS has an internal consistency Cronbach's alpha of .96, indicating excellent internal consistency, and an excellent (low) Standard of Error Measurement of 4.00. The IMS has very good known-groups validity, discriminating significantly between couples known to have marital problems and those that do not. The IMS also has good construct validity, correlating significantly with sexual satisfaction and marital problems (Hudson, 1997).

The Sexual Satisfaction Scale

The Sexual Satisfaction Scale (SSS) (see [Appendix D](#)) was adapted from the Sexual Satisfaction Scale of the Derogatis Sexual Functioning Inventory (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1979), and included in the survey. The SSS was used to measure relationship sexual satisfaction of the participants. The SSS is a 10-item scale score on a five-point Likert scale with the following options: 1 - strongly agree, 2 – agree, 3 – undecided, 4 - disagree, 5 - strongly disagree. Responses were recoded so that higher scores reflected higher sexual satisfaction. The possible overall score range was 11-55. The overall score was converted to an average item score (possible range 1-5), with 5 indicating high sexual satisfaction. The scale has excellent internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .93 (Derogatis & Melisaratos; Young et al., 1998).

Swinging Experience

The *swinging experience* was defined for the purposes of this study as the behaviors of swingers in the swinging context and how swingers feel towards those swinging activities. This section of the survey

contained questions regarding the following topics: who first introduced the idea of swinging, length of time engaged in swinging, frequency of attendance at swingers' clubs, strategies used to find other swingers, main reason (rationale) for swinging, attitude towards swinging, frequency of orgasm during swinging sexual activities, sexual behaviors during swinging sexual activities, swinging frequency (how often). These variables were assessed using multiple-choice questions. Questions regarding how respondents found other swingers to interact with and sexual behaviors during swinging sexual activities, albeit multiple-choice, allowed the respondents to choose all the answers that applied to them.

Demographic Variables

The demographic variables were assessed by questions in the following categories: sex, sexual orientation, age group, ethnic/racial background, relationship status, and length of time in the relationship, number of previous marriages, education level, income, occupation, and size of living community, type of community, geographical location, political views, and religiosity.

Data Analysis

The researcher utilized SPSS 15.0 program to complete the data analyses. Data were analyzed using descriptive analyses. T-tests were used to evaluate the responses of men and women in IMS and SSS scales. A level of significance for these tests was set at $p < .05$. Further data analysis included correlations, contingency tables, and chi-squares. Effect size in the Marital Satisfaction Scale and Sexual Satisfaction Scale scores of men and women was measured by using Cohen's d . The Cohen's d statistic measures the difference between the mean of two populations to determine levels of homogeneity.

Chapter IV: Results

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the existing literature by collecting new information concerning the gender differences of male and female swingers regarding marital and sexual satisfaction. In this chapter, the demographic characteristics of the participants are presented. As well, the attitudes and behaviors of the sample within the swinging context are examined. Some of the variables are considered group variables and no attempt was made to distinguish between the responses of males and females. For instance, variables dealing with household income and geographical location are considered group variables since the responses represent the characteristics of the "couple" and not just of the individual respondents.

The demographic and swinging experience data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results of the marital and sexual satisfaction scales were computed according to the protocol outlined in the scales; t -tests were used to compare the mean scores for men and women.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Among the 1,376 respondents, 24% of the respondents were women and 76% were men. Eight in ten of the men identified themselves as exclusively heterosexual; only one-third of the women did so. About one-fifth of the men and about two-thirds of the women identified themselves as bisexual. Less than 1% of both men and women reported being homosexual (see [Figure 1](#) and [Figure 2](#)).

In [Figure 3](#) and [Figure 4](#) respectively the results for the racial profile and age of the respondents are reported. The average range of ages of both men and women was between thirty-six and forty-five years of age, and the sample was predominantly white. Less than 1% of the respondents were under

twenty-five years of age; and about .3% of the sample was over the age of sixty-five.

Approximately two-thirds of the respondents were married or cohabiting, while the remainders were single, widowed, divorced, or other. About half the respondents were in their first marriage, one - fourth was in their second marriage, and the remainder of the respondents reported being married for the third time (see [Figure 5](#)). One-third of the men and women had been in their present relationship between ten to twenty years, while about 5% reported having been in the relationship for less than one year. One-third of the sample had been married for over twenty years (see [Table G3](#)).

The typical respondent had a college education; about two-thirds of the respondents had at least an associate's degree, bachelor's degree, or some post-graduate education (see [Table G4](#)). A majority of the respondents were upper middle class with a reported household income between \$70,000 and \$200,000 (see [Table G5](#)).

With regards to the occupation of individuals in this sample, white-collar workers and office personnel accounted for about one-fifth of the sample for both men and women, while business owners, professionals such as doctors, lawyers, CPAs, engineers accounted for about one-third. In the category of healthcare (nursing and support staff), women were over-represented three-to-one (see [Table G6](#)).

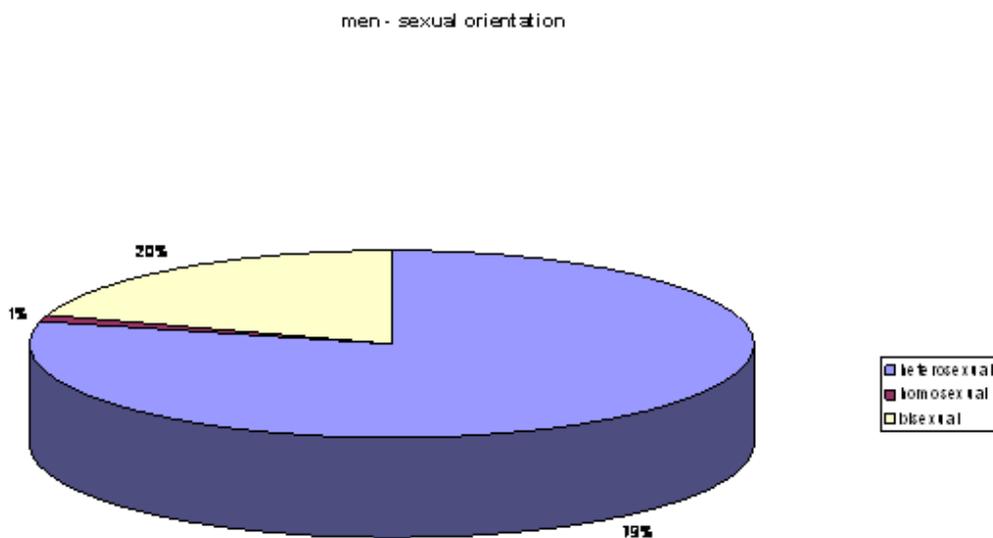


Figure 1. Sexual orientation of the men respondents in the sample.

sexual orientation-Women

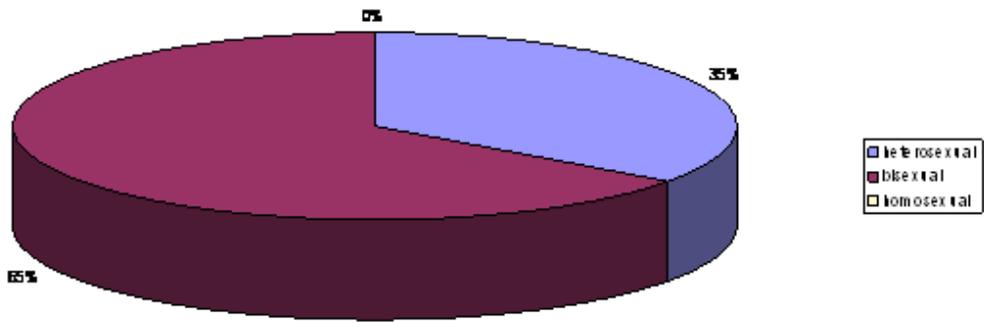


Figure 2. Sexual orientation of the women respondents in the sample.

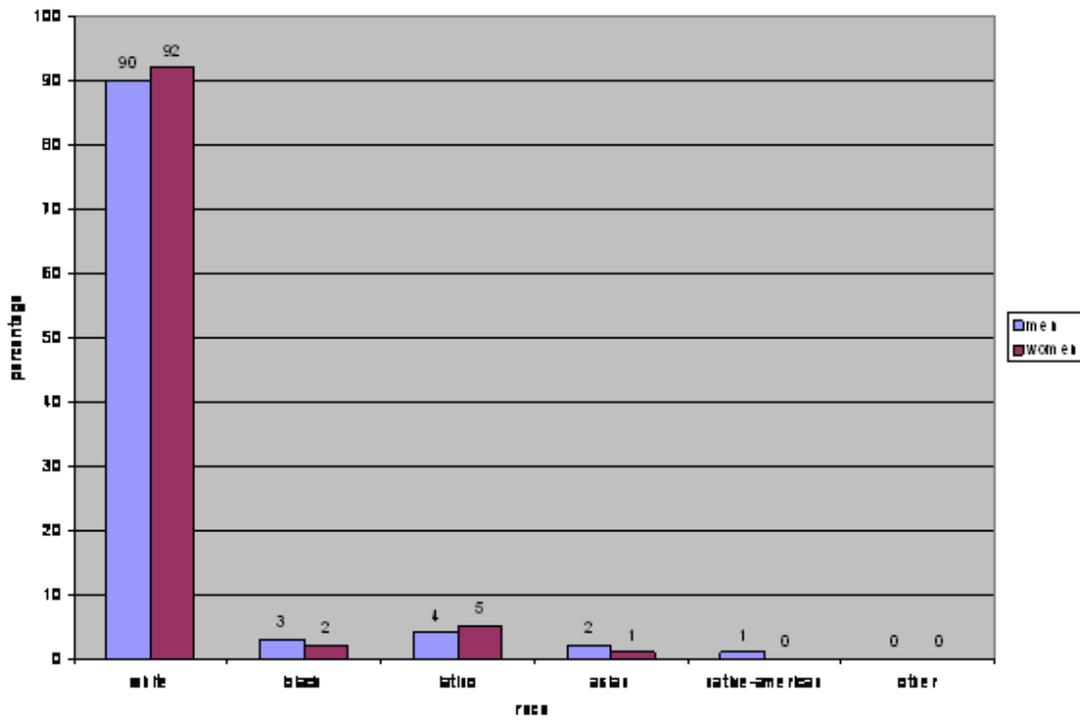


Figure 3. Comparison of the racial profile of the men and women in the sample.

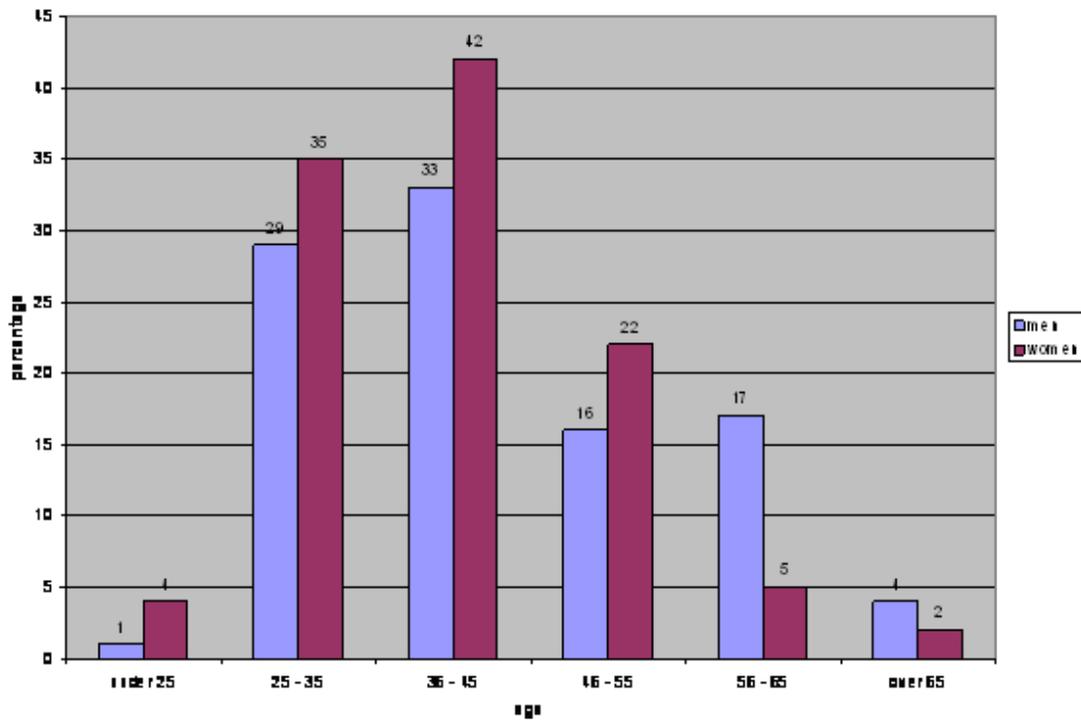


Figure 4. Comparison of the ages of men and women in the sample.

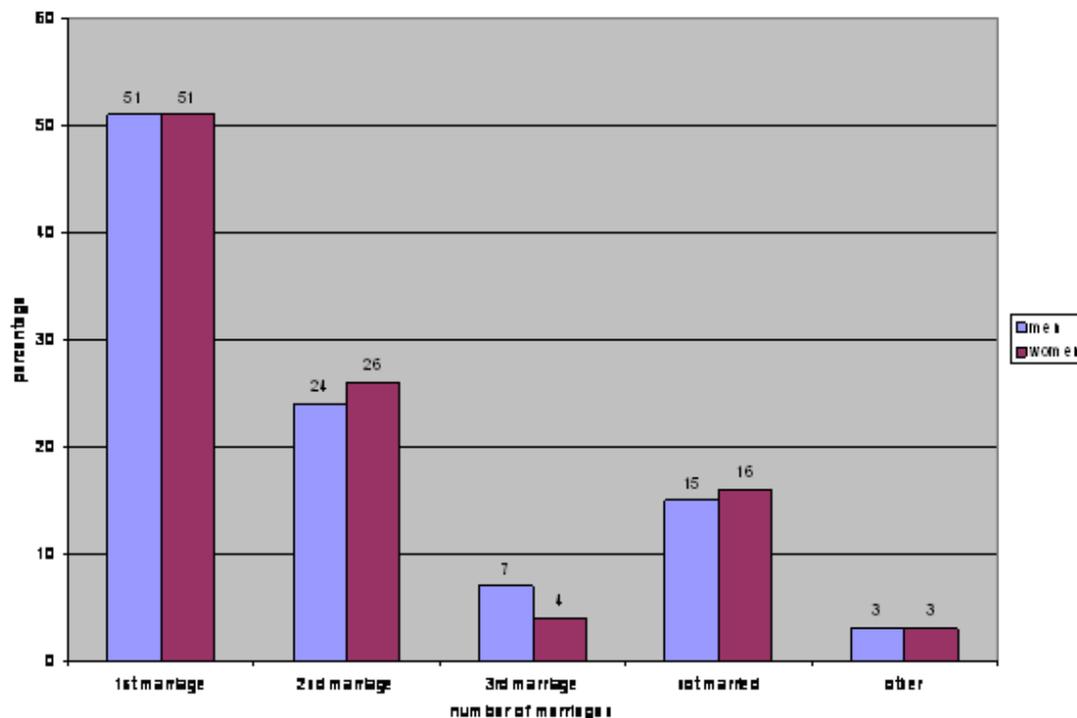


Figure 5. Comparison of how many times men and women respondents had been married.

In previous research on swinging, the geographical location, size, and type of the community of residence of particular samples were not identified. Geographical variables were explored in this study. About two-thirds of the respondents reported living in either urban or suburban communities with a population density between 100,000 or over 1 million people (see [Table G7](#)). About one-fourth reported living in a rural setting with a population density of less than 50,000 people (see [Table G8](#)). The sample in this study was derived from an international population of swingers. Respondents were asked to identify their country of residence. Individuals residing outside of North America were asked to identify their continent of residency. Moreover, residents of North America were asked to give regional information. About two-thirds of the respondents were from the United States, less than one-fifth from Canada and Mexico, one-sixth from Europe and the remaining from Australia, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa. Most of North American respondents reported living in either the northeast or southeast of the continent (see [Table G9](#)).

The swingers in this study embraced a variety of political affiliations and views, and no particular political position dominated. Considering that this was an international sample (albeit the concentration of respondents was from the United States), the traditional standard political divisions common to Americans would not have applied here. About half the respondents considered themselves social moderates, liberals, or Democrats; about two-fifths considered themselves moderately conservative or Republicans; the remaining of the sample political views were represented by libertarians, communists, socialists and anarchists. Social conservatives accounted for about 9% of the sample. Surprisingly, about 14% of the respondents reported having no interest in politics (see [Table G10](#)).

The religiosity and religious beliefs of the respondents were also explored in this study. [Table G11](#) shows the results for the religious views of the participants. Most of the respondents professed having

some form of religious beliefs, while one fourth declared not being religious at all.

Swinging Experience

The variables in this section were divided into group variables and individual variables. Group variables considered the responses as representative of the experiences of a couple's activities (responses to these variables are not reported to reflect the differences between men and women respondents). Individual variables reflected the respondents' own individual experience within the swinging context.

The results for the swinging experience questions suggest that most of the respondents in this sample held a favorable view of swinging, and that the great majority had been swinging for some time. Nearly one-third of the respondents had been participating in swinging anywhere from four to seven years while one-fourth had been swinging for over twelve years (see Figure 6). Most of the respondents in this study held a favorable attitude towards their swinging experiences. Swinging satisfaction for both men and women was closely matched in this sample of swingers. More than half the men and women reported being highly satisfied with their swinging experience albeit close to 45% of the men and women reported enjoying swinging only occasionally. Less than .5% of the respondents said they did not enjoy swinging (see Figure 7).

The responses to the question of who first introduced the idea of swinging to the relationship show that more than two-thirds of the men reported having introduced the idea of swinging to their spouses; in contrast, less than one-third of the women admitted to having done so (see Table G13). Regarding the rationale for swinging, most of the respondents cited sexual fantasies or sexual variety as the reason why they engage in swinging. Of these, about half the men and women reported pure sexual variety as a reason for swinging while a quarter of the men and the women offered sexual fantasy as a rationale for engaging in swinging (see Figure 8). Less than 1% of the respondents reported engaging in swinging to satisfy their partners.

Most of the respondents reported swinging a few times a year with fewer than 12% engaging in swinging activities more than once a month. It seems that, for the majority of this sample, swinging is not a regular occurrence (see Table G14). About half of the respondents in this study frequent swingers' social clubs. Private parties accounted for the remaining context in which swingers interact (see Table G18).

The sexual activities of the respondents had engaged in at least once during swinging sexual activities were explored. About two-thirds of the men and women reported swapping partners at least some of the time. One-third of the men and women had engaged in-group sex activities at least once. Fewer than 7% of both men and women reported never swapping partners. About one-quarter of both men and women engaged in *soft swing* at least some of the time (*Soft-swinging* is a term used in swinging circles to denote couples or individuals that engage in sexual contact with others either manually or orally only, and watch or are watched by others while having sex with their partners).

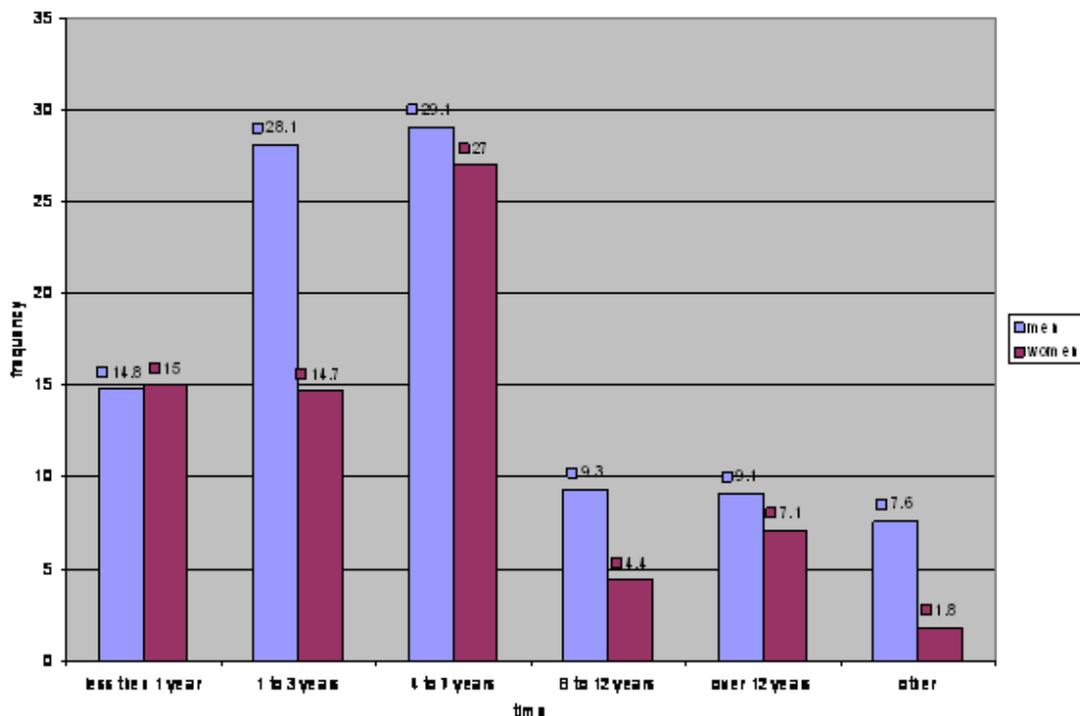


Figure 6. A comparison of how long men and women in the sample had been swinging.

The term denotes no-penetration sex while swapping partners. About half of the women engaged in woman-to-woman play only (homosexual contact), while about 8% of the men reported engaging in man-to-man contact only (homosexual contact). About half the men and women had participated in threesomes. In this sample, half of the men and women had participated in either man-woman-man threesomes (MFM), or woman-man-woman threesomes (FMF) (see [Table G15](#)).

Orgasm frequency was considered to denote sexual satisfaction during swinging activities. Over two-thirds of both the men and the women in this sample of swingers reported reaching orgasm while engaging in swinging, either always or most often. The results on this variable were evenly distributed between men and women. Less than one-tenth of the men and one-fourth of the women reported seldom reaching orgasm, or never reaching orgasm at all (see [Figure 9](#), [Table G16](#)).

How swingers find other swingers to interact with was also of interest to the researcher. The literature suggests that swingers utilize several means of communicating and interacting with other swingers. In this sample, the participants identified several strategies for finding other swingers. Internet websites were identified as a means to find other swingers by about two-thirds of the respondents. Other ways of *hooking-up* were swingers clubs, private parties, or other swingers. Print media as a means of contact was mentioned by less than 5% of the responses. It appears that swingers mostly use the Internet as a means of communication with other swingers (see [Table G17](#), [Table G18](#)).

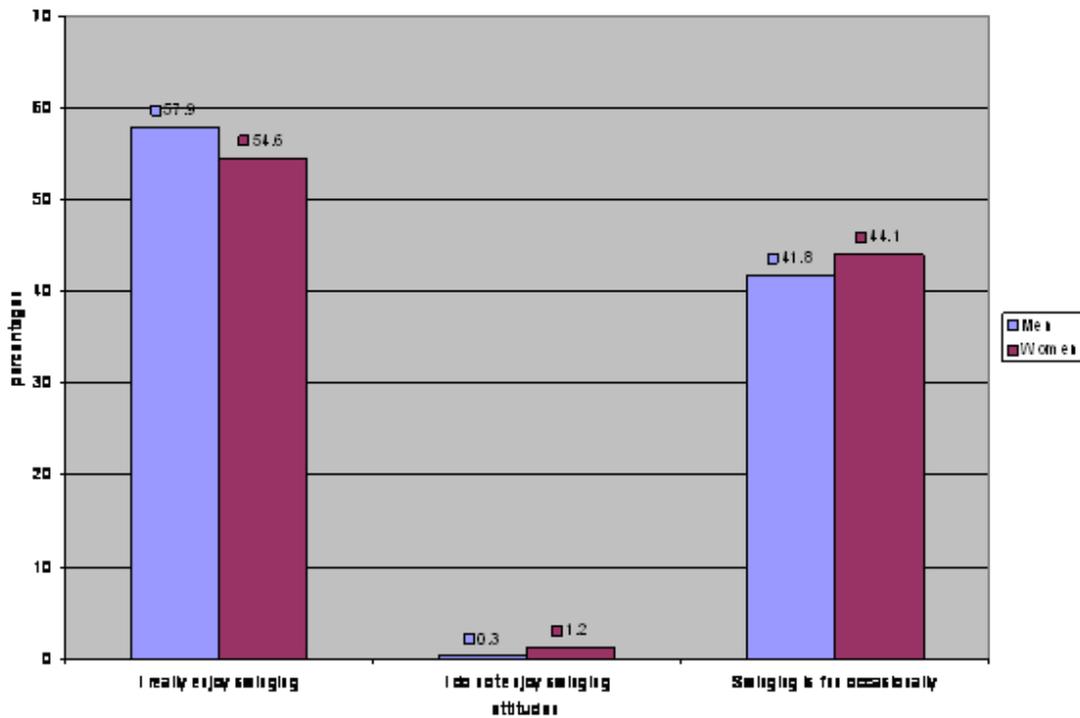


Figure 7. Comparison of the responses of men and women respondents regarding their attitude towards their swinging experiences.

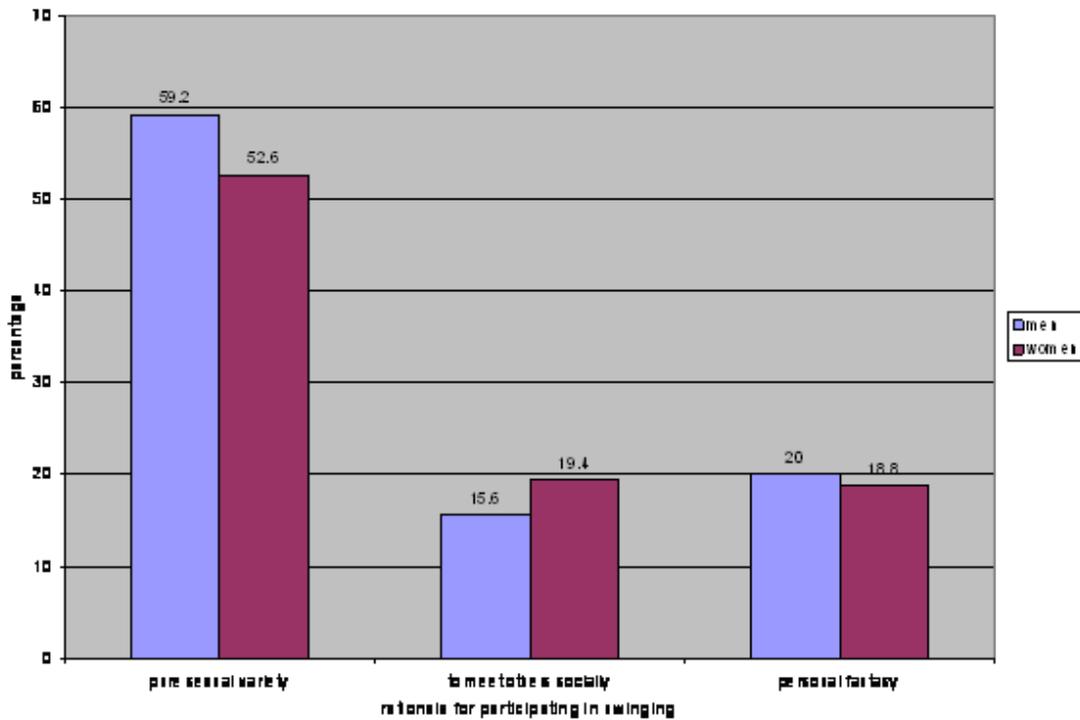


Figure 8. Comparison of the responses of men and women in the sample regarding their rationale for

engaging in swinging activities.

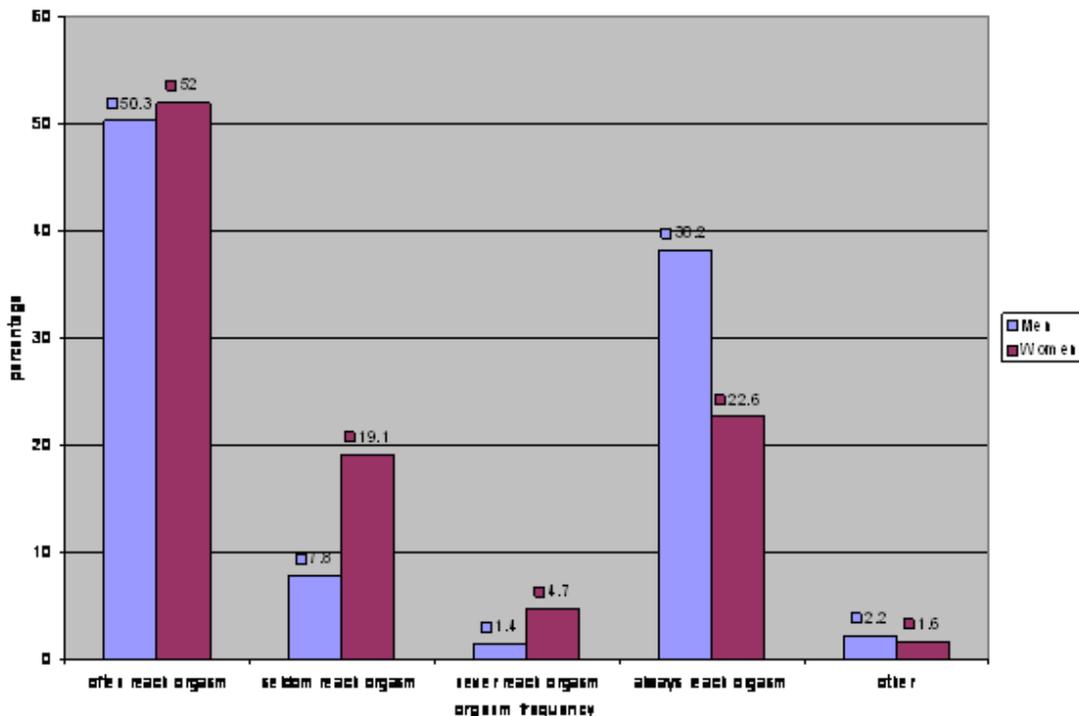


Figure 9. Orgasm frequency of men and women in the sample during their swinging sexual activities.

Marital Satisfaction

One of the main areas of interest in this study was the marital satisfaction of swingers. The IMS was used to evaluate the level of marital satisfaction in this sample. It was hypothesized that there would be a statistically significant difference between the marital satisfaction scores of men and women with men reporting lower levels of marital satisfaction than women. The summary item results in Appendix AD show that the sample scored high on marital satisfaction ($M = 85.596$, $SD = 14.9307$). Reported values above 70 show high levels of marital satisfaction. A t -test was conducted to compare the scores of men and women. As hypothesized, men scored lower on marital satisfaction than women. The mean satisfaction level of the men was 84.35 ($SD = 15.12$). The mean satisfaction level of the women was 86.84 ($SD = 14.73$). From the value of t and the degrees of freedom an estimate of Cohen's d was computed (Cohen's d is the standardized difference between means in standard deviation units and reflects the strength of effect size). The results are as follows: $t(1223) = 2.517$, $p = .012$, $\hat{d} = .166$, $CI .95 = .036, .295$. Cohen's conventions for d are: .2 is small, .5 is medium, and .8 is large. Although a statistically significant difference was found between the scores of men and women, $t = 2.1517$, $p < .05$, Cohen's d score suggests at the 95% confidence level that the difference between the means is trivial or small. The results of the t -test are shown in [Table 1](#).

Sexual Satisfaction

The second question in this study was the level of sexual satisfaction of the respondents with their primary relationship. It was hypothesized that there would be a statistically significant difference between the sexual satisfaction scores of men and women, men would report lower levels of sexual

satisfaction than women. The sexual satisfaction of the participants with their primary relationship was measured using the SSS. The summary item results indicate that in this sample the respondents showed high levels of sexual satisfaction with their relationship ($M = 4.261, SD = .823$). The closer the score was to five, the higher the level of sexual satisfaction. A t -test was conducted to compare the responses of men and women. The mean sexual satisfaction level for men was 4.17 ($SD = .832$). The mean sexual satisfaction level for women was 4.38, ($SD = .72265$). From the value of t and the degrees of freedom an estimate of Cohen's d (effect size, difference between means in standard deviation units) was computed. The results are as follows: $t(1199) = 4.079, p < .001, \hat{d} = .270, CI .95 = .140, .401$. Cohen's conventions for d are: .2 is small, .5 is medium, and .8 is large. Although difference was found between the scores of men and women in this sample ($t = -4.079, p > .05$), the Cohen's d score suggests at the 95% confidence level that the difference between the means is trivial or small. The results of the t -test are shown in [Table 2](#).

Table 1

Marital Satisfaction Scale Scores (T-Tests)

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Std. Error Mean
Male	917	84.3514	15.12369	.49943
Female	308	86.8424	14.73773	.83976

Independent Samples Test

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances t-test for Equality of Means

	F	Sig.	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	1.743	.178	-2.517	1223	.012	-2.49096	.98970
Equal variances not assumed			-2.549	539.940	.011	-2.49096	.97705

Independent Samples Test

t-test for Equality of Means 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference

	Lower	Upper

Equal variances assumed	-4.43265	-.54927
Equal variances not assumed	-4.41024	-.57167

Table 2

Sexual Satisfaction Scale Scores (T-Tests)

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Std. Error Mean
Male	896	4.17132	.832089	.02780
Female	305	4.38918	.722647	.04138

Independent Samples Test

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances t-test for Equality of Means

	F	Sig.	<i>t</i>	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	6.959	.008	-4.079	1199	.000	-2.17863	.05342
Equal variances not assumed			-4.370	598.886	.000	-2.17863	.04985

Independent Samples Test

t-test for Equality of Means 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference

	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	-3.2266	-.11307
Equal variances not assumed	-3.1576	-.11996

Chapter V: Discussion

Introduction

In this chapter, the findings of this study will be discussed starting with a brief synopsis of swinging, an evaluation of the sample, and a discussion of the demographic data and swinging experience. Finally, the results of the marital and sexual satisfaction scales will be evaluated.

The central purpose of this study was to explore the marital relationship and sexual satisfaction of swingers and to determine the current demographics of the participants. The results indicate that both men and women swingers scored at the high end of the marital and sexual satisfaction scales. However, there was a significant difference found between the scores of men and women on both scales. Men score lower than women on measures of marital and sexual satisfaction, confirming the hypotheses put forth in this study.

Sample

The sample of swingers in this study was derived from a self-selected convenience sample and therefore may not be representative of swingers everywhere. The individuals in this sample chose to voluntarily participate by completing the on-line survey. Personal motivation to participate may have created a bias in the sample. Individuals who held positive views of swinging may have wished to convey those views to the researcher. Similarly, those individuals whose swinging experiences were negative may be under-represented in this study since they are no longer engaging in swinging and less likely to be found in the swingers' web sites.

Past research on swinging has relied on similar samples of convenience. Moreover, the data in this study bear a striking similarity to previous studies. Those similarities include demographic variables, attitudes towards swinging, and relationship satisfaction. Taken together, these studies have provided for a comprehensive understanding of the swinging population at large.

About seven out of every ten respondents in this study were men. The reasons for the gender imbalance are difficult to determine. However, it must be noted that samples in prior research have shown similar gender bias (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Jenks, 1998). While the unit of analysis in this study was individual swingers, it is possible that the gender bias in responses could be explained by the maintenance dynamics of "couple" sites. Men may be more likely to maintain the couple's profile and consult the dating sites daily, more so than women. In addition, men may be more willing to participate in an on-line survey. Moreover, as suggested by Bergstrand and Williams, men may have completed the questionnaire as the representative of the *couple*, hence expressing the views and attitudes of both partners. Further research in this area is necessary to evaluate this discrepancy and offer possible explanations.

Finally, the sample was not randomized and therefore does not allow for inferences to the larger swinging population. However, given the size of the sample and its geographical diversity – this sample includes for the first time respondents from other geographical areas other than the United States – the researcher feels confident that the results of this study represent some of the current trends found in the larger swinging population.

Marital and Sexual Satisfaction

In this study, a relationship marital satisfaction scale and a sexual satisfaction scale were used to

measure swingers' levels of satisfaction on both variables. The respondents reported high levels of marital and sexual satisfaction in their relationship with their partners. Prior research had yielded evidence that swingers reported being happy with their marital relationship and that swinging had strengthened their marital relationship (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000). Swingers who were satisfied with their marriages before swinging had increased their level of satisfaction after starting swinging (Bergstrand & Williams; Gould, 1999; Jenks, 1998).

In this study, men were slightly less likely to be satisfied with their marriages than women were, but the difference was well within the satisfaction parameters of the scale and can be considered as minimal. Both men and women reported high levels of sexual satisfaction with their relationships. However, men reported lower levels of sexual satisfaction than women. Once again, the differences between men and women scores can be considered as very small. There seems to be no indication as to why men were more likely than women to recommend swinging to their spouses as reflected by the answers to the question of who introduced swinging to the relationship. Perhaps, the husband's willingness to witness the wife's bisexual behavior may serve as sexual motivation for him.

If both men and women seem satisfied with their marital relationship, as suggested by the results of this study, why would they engage in swinging? A possible explanation for the desire to engage in swinging could rest with a lack of sexual satisfaction with the primary partner or habituation to the sexual activity with the primary partner which could lead to routine sex. Routine sex traditionally leads to a sense of boredom. However, as the results of this study indicate, both men and women reported high levels of sexual satisfaction with their primary relationship. Since both men and women were sexually satisfied in their marriage or relationship, perhaps lack of sexual satisfaction is not the motivator for engaging in swinging. Prior research suggests that although some men report that their sexual satisfaction with their mate declines with the length of the relationship, they still find their mate sexually attractive (Chien, 2003; Klusmann, 2002; 2006). Logically, one could then pose the question; can sexual attraction and sexual satisfaction be mutually exclusive in a relationship? Can one be sexually attracted to one's mate but be dissatisfied with the sexual experience? More research is necessary on this topic. The question still then remains, why would people go outside the primary relationship to procure additional sex?

The answer given by the respondents in this study asserts that the motivation, or rationale, given for swinging is based on either a desire for sexual variety or sexual fantasy fulfilment. Traditionally, people seeking added sexual stimulation that cannot be satisfied by their marital partner often engage in *affairs* outside the primary relationship. In the swinging context, neither individual has to resort to an adulterous affair to fulfil his or her sexual desires or fantasies; they do it together as a couple. Hence, swingers often defined themselves as *play-couples* (Gould, 1999; McGinley, 1995).

But, is fantasy fulfilment that important in a relationship? Ellis and Symons (1990) argued that men's sexual fantasies often involve multiple and anonymous partners and may be more likely to involve sexual variety. Goetz et al. (2007) have suggested that the sight of two women engaging in sexual interaction also arouses men. The possible availability of additional women in swinging may serve as a motivational factor for men to engage in swinging.

Another possible explanation could be found in an evolutionary hypothesis suggested by the work of Baker & Bellis. Baker & Bellis (1995) proposed an empirical evolutionary biological thesis they named sperm competition, which may indeed be relevant to understanding why at least some men may engage in swinging. Baker and Bellis suggested that sperm competition is an evolved mechanism designed to ensure paternity assuring the promulgation of a man's genes. According to Baker and Bellis the results of their research provides evidence that human male sexual psychology has evolved to address the possibility cuckoldry. According to Baker and Bellis, sperm competition is process that allows the sperm production in a man to be enhanced by the separation from his partner for some time.

According to the researchers, the separation maximizes the woman's opportunity to engage in adulterous behavior, hence the possibility that her partner is now competing with another man's sperm to impregnate her. Further, the theory proposes that men adjust the number of sperm in each ejaculate according to the length of time they have been separated from their mate, anticipating the possibility their partner's unfaithfulness while absent. Thus, for men, this strategy may be responsible for higher levels of motivation to engage in sex with one's partner when there is present knowledge of extra-dyadic sexual activity. Knowing that your partner has had sex with other men may serve as sexual motivation, or turn-on, for some men in the swinging context. Although this is a speculative hypothesis, Pound (2002) posited that sperm competition could be the cue for sexual arousal in males by providing increased copulation with one's partner. Pound (2002) hypothesized that, in some males, watching pornography may increase the cues for sperm competition. Thus, some of the men in swinging contexts derive pleasure from watching their wives having sex with other men may be experiencing a displaced sense of sperm competition, hence maximizing their motivation for engaging in sex with their spouses after the fact.

If men in a swinging context do indeed experience increased sexual arousal when confronted with the possibility of sperm competition, that could explain why men in this study suggested fantasy and variety as rationale for engaging in swinging. Baker and Bellis (1995) further suggested that humans may indeed be pre-disposed towards non-monogamy; hence, the increased sperm production is one of the mechanisms used by males to counteract the possibility of cuckoldry. Interesting to note that male swingers report a higher level of sexual arousal towards their spouses after a swinging episode (Gould, 1999), which could be explained by the increased sexual motivation towards one's own spouse as suggested by the theory of sperm competition. Moreover, in some cultures, men experience higher sexual arousal when witnessing their partner interacting sexually with other men (Talese, 1980).

If indeed men are aroused by sharing their spouses with other men, then male-female-male sexual interaction, which was chosen by a large part of the respondents in this study, could be understood in terms of the sperm competition scenario. Although sperm competition as an explanation to why some men in swinging may derive sexual motivation, it is still a speculative hypothesis albeit it is worth exploring in more detail at some point. However, it is plausible at this time to suggest that swinging may provide a context in which some men may experience a higher degree of desirability for their spouses by activating mechanisms associated with sperm competition.

If sperm competition provides a possible explanation for why men may engage in swinging behavior, what would be the motivation for women? It is understood how bisexuality among women may serve as a motivator for their engagement in swinging. However, other options must also be considered. Klusmann (2006) has documented that woman's sexual desire for her partner declines with the length of the relationship. Perhaps in swinging sexual desire towards a new partner fuels the psychological sexual motivation and activity for both men and women by providing short-term variety of partners and enhancing sexual fantasies.

Also, it must be noted that some women engage enthusiastically in sex with several males, a fact that could be explained by Baker and Bellis (1995) sperm competition theory; the theory does suggest that women may retain the ejaculate of a preferred partner when engaging in sex with several men. Perhaps it is the enhancing opportunity to be impregnated by the winner's more fit sperm that motivates this serial coital activity. However, more research in the motivation of women to engage in swinging is necessary.

Since not all sexual decisions stem from a rational point of view, erotic feelings and sexual motivation may be part of an irrational mechanism that promotes individuals to procure sexual satisfaction with willing partners (Abramson & Pinkerton, 1995). When discussing swinging, one must consider the pleasurable aspect of sexuality. Abramson and Pinkerton suggested that there is a duality to human

sexuality, in what they posited is the long-standing tension between the procreative and pleasurable aspect of sexuality. Abramson and Pinkerton argued that although the pleasurable aspect of sexuality is overlooked, the procreative aspect is often overlooked as well in the heat of passion sometimes resulting in remorse and concern about unintended pregnancy. However, research on sexual behavior suggests that sexual enjoyment is most often pathologized if it occurs outside the accepted boundaries of social norms (Abramson & Pinkerton, 1995).

Although sex has been thought of as a mechanism necessary for pair-bond formation, the prevalence of extra-monogamous and extra-marital sexual activity suggests there may be other motivational forces behind sexual intercourse (Abramson & Pinkerton, 1995). The function of sex also includes the attainment of sexual pleasure within the confines of one's erotic paradigms or *lovemaps* as suggested by Money (1986).

Since the matter of marital sexual fidelity is dependent on societal norms, the role of culture in shaping sexual attitudes is paramount. While some cultures promote the idea that love and sex can be independent of each other, in other cultures the two are completely intermeshed (Abramson & Pinkerton, 1995). In North American culture, for the most part, people hold the attitude that sex and love are intermingled and cannot coexist separately, especially for women. As swingers are part of the larger culture and subjected to the same folklore, customs, and expectations as part of the larger social conditioning process, it is interesting that swingers seem to have separated the two concepts into distinct behaviors. The sample of swingers in the current study managed to experience marital satisfaction, which suggests a strong commitment to their partners. The swingers appear to be willing to explore the realm of sexual possibilities outside their immediate relationship. As a result swinging might then be understood as a context in which the fulfilment of the individual erotic paradigm is associated with sexual pleasure, separate from the emotional bond between the couple.

Abramson and Pinkerton (1995) also posited that sex is often considered in our society the domain of men, controlled by men, and enjoyed mostly by the men. The idea that men force sex on women reduces women to a passive or submissive sexual role, a view that is still widespread in today's society (Abramson & Pinkerton). This erroneous perception may extend to the swinging context as viewed from the perspective of the general population. Many people in the society still view swinging as being a male-dominated activity in which women are forced to participate in sexual activities that may be degrading to them (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Gould, 1999; Jenks, 1998).

In our society women often seem to be assigned the role of moral and sexual gatekeepers. Women who participate as willing partners in any sexual conduct or context not sanctioned by societal rules run the risk of either being considered of low moral standards or being perceived as victims of men's sexual whims or pressure (Abramson & Pinkerton, 1995). Thus, women's sexual pleasure, as well as their willingness to engage in sexual behavior outside of the accepted social norms, is often marginalized, pathologized, ridiculed, or thought of as a product of childhood sexual abuse (Abramson & Pinkerton). Bergstrand and Williams (2000) in their research found no evidence that women in swinging are the victims of prior sexual abuse or are forced into swinging by their husbands. In this study, childhood sexual abuse was not explored.

Thus, according to prior research, swinging provides the opportunity for both men and women to experience added sexual pleasure and stimulation in a context that is safe and secure (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Gould, 1999; Jenks, 1985, 1998; Butler, 1979). The motivation is the pleasure goal for both individuals. Swinging allows the couple to experience sexual variety to realize particular sexual fantasies. This goal is achieved consensually, and the sexual adventure of the couple becomes rewarding to both individuals.

Moreover, swingers show a lack of cognitive dissonance, which would be reflected by a discrepancy

between beliefs and actions. As with most individuals, one would expect that if there is a disconnect between traditional social values and expectations, and what would be construed as deviant sexual behavior, that disparity could prove to be emotionally disconcerting to the individuals involved bringing about a state of cognitive dissonance (Jenks, 1998). Surprisingly, swingers seem to be cognitively consistent in their sexual behavior and sexual attitudes. Somehow, it seems that they have separated recreational sex from love, and retain emotional monogamy (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Gould, 1999). The results of this study suggest that in this sample of swingers there seems to be no conflict between sexual attitudes, sexual behaviors, and marital and sexual satisfaction.

Demographics

The demographic profile of the swingers in the study revealed that they were mostly white, between thirty-six and fifty-five years of age, mostly college educated, currently married between eleven and twenty years, and with an average household income between \$40,000 and \$200,000. Individuals in the sample held varied occupations. Most professions were represented, from blue-collar and white-collar jobs to advanced-degree professionals. Some individuals were self-employed; others worked in public organizations such as health facilities and educational institutions. The demographic findings of this study parallel, for the most part, those of previous studies. As swinging becomes more mainstream it is not surprising to find a cross-section of the general population represented in this sample. The numbers of articles and documentaries that have shown up in the popular media dealing with the topic can attest to the present popularity of swinging. Shows such as *Swingtown* (CBS) are a prime example of how the topic has become accepted by the mainstream media.

In this study, specific demographic variables were introduced. These included sexual orientation, length of time in present relationship, educational level and occupation, political and religious attitudes and affiliations, size and type of communities where individuals in this sample resided as well as geographical location. Some of these variables had not been considered in prior research.

The sexual orientation in this sample was for the most part heterosexual. Although most of the men reported being heterosexual a small minority considered themselves bisexual. The majority of the women considered themselves bisexual and only a small minority reported being exclusively heterosexual. For the most part, female bisexuality is well accepted within the swinging lifestyle; however, male bisexuality is discouraged and not welcomed (Gould, 1999; McGinley, 1995). Perhaps one of the reasons why women are attracted to swinging is the opportunity to express their bisexuality in a safe and accepting environment. More research in the area of sexual orientation is necessary with this population to determine the incidence of bisexual behavior among men and women and to explore the possible relationship between sexual orientation and swinging.

As expected, most swingers in this sample were married or cohabiting, which suggests an emotional attachment between the partners and a willingness to engage in a long-term relationship. The great majority had been in a relationship for an extended period, well over ten years, and for most, this was their first marriage. A small number of the respondents had been married more than once. There were no apparent differences between men and women in the length of and frequency of marriage. For a large part of the respondents swinging had been a part of the marital relationship for some time as indicated by the results show. Since the majority of the respondents indicated that they had been swinging anywhere between three years and twelve years, it could be concluded that swinging has not been detrimental to the longevity of the marital relationship, at least for the individuals in this sample. A longitudinal study would be able to determine with more precision the impact of swinging on the marital relationship.

Past research has shown a strong positive relationship between swinging and education level (Bartell, 1971; Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Gould, 1999; Jenks, 1985, 1998). In this study, varied levels of

education and professions were represented. It appears that swingers come from a variety of socio-economic strata and that education may not be a strong factor in the willingness to engage in swinging. Often, permissive and liberal attitudes have been associated with higher education (Bergstrand & Williams; Gould, 1999; Jenks, 1998). Thus, the findings of this study are well in line with the findings of prior research regarding education levels. Perhaps education level is not the only variable affecting a permissive view of swinging.

Since swinging is often characterized by a more permissive attitude towards sexuality, a characteristic often associated with individuals who hold liberal social views, one would expect the swingers in this sample to hold a more "liberal" bias regarding their social and political affiliations. However, the findings of this study were in line with those of past research that suggest that swingers hold political views that run the gamut of the political spectrum. Past research found that the views of swingers are not predominantly liberal overall (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Jenks, 1998). The political views and affiliations of the respondents in this study were evenly split between conservative and liberal points of view. The results suggest that swingers are not a politically homogenous group. Rather, swingers hold disparate political ideology, from social conservatism to liberalism and socialism with a certain percentage holding no political views at all. Thus, one could conclude that the social and political views of swingers may not influence their swinging lifestyle.

These findings may appear counter-intuitive since there seems to be a disparity between the social and sexual views usually associated with conservatism. Conservative individuals espouse strict sexual morality and monogamy, which contrasts the non-monogamous sexual behavior of swingers. It would be of interest to research the level of cognitive dissonance of the more conservative elements of the swinging population.

As well, since swinging is often considered as adultery, the idea of extra-marital sex, albeit consensual, runs contrary to the teachings of most religious groups. The religiosity of swingers regarding religious beliefs and attitudes was explored in previous studies (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Jenks, 1998). The swingers in this study reported being somewhat religious, about a quarter of the respondents claiming to have no religious affiliation at all. Bergstrand and Williams found that religiosity in their sample of swingers was no different from that of a sample of the general population. Moreover, some swingers seem to be rather religious while others show indifference to religion altogether (Bergstrand & Williams; Jenks). It appears that swingers' religious affiliation do not interfere with their willingness to engage in the swinging lifestyle. Religiosity may not be positively associated with monogamy when it comes to this population.

Most of the participants in this study lived in urban and metropolitan communities with a population between 50,000 and 500,000. Swingers are no longer restricted to suburban communities a finding that is consistent with past research. Swinging, it appears, has made in-roads in rural communities as well. About one-fourth of the respondents reported living either in a rural setting or in a community with less than 50,000 people. In this sample, most of the respondents reported living in the northeast and southeast of the country.

It seems that swingers are part of mainstream society and are indistinguishable from other individuals in the general population. As Gilmartin (1975) and Jenks (1998) suggest, the next door neighbors or a co-worker could be swingers and no one would know it or suspect it. The profile of swingers in this study is representative of the general population regarding education, occupation, age, marital status, religiosity and political views. If swingers are indeed represented in the larger society, then why is it so difficult to identify them? It is likely that one of the main reasons may be that most swingers keep their activities hidden from friends and family for fear of social repercussions as previously suggested by Jenks (1998).

The answers of men and women regarding demographics revealed no significant differences except for sexual orientation and bisexuality.

Swinging Experience

This study also explored the behaviors and attitudes of the respondents regarding their swinging experience. How swingers felt towards their swinging activities, what rationale was given for engaging in swinging, and what types of sexual behaviors were common to the swinging sexual context.

The decision-making process that encourages individuals to enter the swinging lifestyle has not been appropriately explored in prior research. It has been suggested that couples begin swinging because of dull social lives and a lack of sexual self-confidence and desperation Roberts (2003). Moreover, Roberts (2003) suggests that swinging has been considered the domain of the middle-aged, married person.

In this study, the researcher explored the rationale for swinging. Several variables dealing with the dynamics of swinging were termed by the researcher as the *swinging experience*.

As suggested in prior studies, swinging allows couples to engage in consensual non-monogamous sex within the confines of an otherwise monogamous emotional relationship. As well, swingers are open and honest about their sexual relationships (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Gould, 1999; Jenks, 1985, 1998). Prior research posits that the behavior of both partners is consensual and reflects honesty in the relationship albeit most researchers have relied on the responses of single individuals instead of couples (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Gould, 1999). However, swinging could be construed as a crucible that forces the partners to come to terms with their feelings, their sexual desires, and each other through a process of differentiation and compromise. But what prompts an individual or couple to enter the swinging lifestyle in the first place? In addition, what happens once individuals start swinging? How do they go about finding other swingers and how do they feel about their swinging activities? What types of sexual activities are common to the swinging context?

As reported in Chapter IV, the majority of the respondents in this sample reported entering into the swinging lifestyle at the suggestion of the couple's male partner. About two-thirds of the men reported having suggested swinging to their female partner. Less than one-fourth of the women admitted to having done so. Knowing the rationale for an individual's involvement in the swinging lifestyle contributes to an overall understanding of the swinging experience. The respondents in this study cited pure sexual variety and personal fantasy as the main reason they engage in swinging. It would be of interest to explore swingers' sexual fantasies in order to understand how swinging is able to provide for sexual experiences that transcend a couple's sexual repertoire.

The results of this study suggest that the great majority of the women classified themselves bisexual, which could account for their interest in swinging since swinging could present them with a context in which they could explore their bisexual tendencies, and offer an opportunity to engage in sexual interaction with other women. It would be of interest to find out if the husbands (and, in fact, the wives themselves) knew about the wives' bisexual interests before suggesting swinging, or if the wives only discovered their bisexual tendencies after engaging in swinging activities. It is possible that the husbands' perception of their wives bisexual orientation served as an opportunity for suggesting swinging. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most often men who introduce swinging to the couple sometimes find initial reluctance from their spouses; however, a large number of the wives will be more likely to continue the couple's involvement with swinging activities even when the husbands later try to get out of it (Jenks, 1998; Gould, 1999).

Regarding common swinging sexual activities, most individuals engaged in partner swapping and

group sex activities. However, a small number of the respondents reported never swapping partners. It is possible that this group restricted their involvement to voyeurism, touching, or engaged in sexual intercourse with their marital partner only. This suggests that some swingers may use the swinging context as a catalyst to enhance their personal sexual activities with their partner, and are not interested in having sex with anyone else.

The next category explored homosexual behavior among the respondents. About one-third of the women reported engaging in woman-on-woman sexual activity at least some of the time. Perhaps the swinging context provides women with the opportunity to explore their homosexual desires within a safe context. Regarding male homosexual activities in the swinging context, men reported engaging in man-on-man sexual activity less than eight percent of the time. In the swinging community, men engaging in homosexual behaviors are not accepted. However, similar activities by women are often encouraged (Bergstrand & Williams, 2000; Gold, 1999). Perhaps, women's sexual fantasies, which may include bisexual fantasies, contribute to an overt display of bisexuality that has become part of the mainstream of the swinging community. Of course, woman-on-woman sexual activity interaction may happen within the context of other sexual modalities outside of the swinging context. More research is needed to define which other patterns of sexual behavior in the swinging population, for example sadomasochism and bondage and domination, are deemed acceptable or unacceptable, and why.

As reported in this study, the majority of the respondents in the sample enjoyed their swinging experience. There was no difference between the levels of swinging satisfaction of men and women. However, the fact that three times more men than women completed the survey is still troublesome and may distort the actuality of the swinging experience for women.

Overall, a large number of the respondents reported having been involved in swinging activities for over ten years, which suggests that swinging might not be an incidental event in their marital relationships. However, some individuals had been swinging for less than one year, which suggests that individuals are continuing to be attracted to the swinging lifestyle and adding to its population. A small number of the respondents reported swinging alone without their spouses, a choice that could reflect the involvement of single individuals (not partnered) in swinging activities with couples or groups. Some of these individuals may be part of a couple where only one individual engages in swinging without the knowledge or consent of the other partner. In the swinging community, married individuals that swing without the knowledge or consent of their partners are usually ostracized and are not considered part of the swinging lifestyle (Gould, 1999). As the literature on swinging suggests, there are also single individuals that participate in swinging activities with couples or groups. These individuals tend to be accepted as *swingers* and allowed to participate in swinging activities (Gould, 1999). Although this study obtained data from individual swingers as representative of the couples' perspective, it is of interest, nevertheless, to understand the involvement of singles in a swinging context since unattached singles, especially bisexual women, are part of the swinging community. Moreover, it was important to report the percentage of individuals from the sample that fit in the *singles* category.

Most swingers found other swingers through Internet swinging dating sites. Now, this is a new finding that contributes to the understanding of how the swinging lifestyle is propagating so rapidly. The Internet affords individuals the opportunity for varied, and quite often, instant communication. The availability of on-line swingers' dating sites may serve as a ready-made vehicle for those individuals interested in exploring swinging activities. In prior research, the traditional method for procuring other swingers had been newspapers or specialized swingers' magazines. Research in the seventies showed that swingers in those days had to rely mostly on underground newspapers and magazines to find other swingers, a slow and lengthy process of communication. It appears that the ease of access afforded by the Web allows for quick contact and communication and this may be the reason why the great

majority of swingers choose it. Research on the role, and impact, of the Internet on the development of social interactions amongst gay men reveals that gay individuals use this medium to find other gay individuals to interact with socially and sexually (Ciesielski & Flynn, 2002; Kalnins, 2000; Keen, Westacott, Duffin, Gilmour, Ryan, Murphy, & et al., 2002). Moreover, the Internet has become an international medium with its own social culture, values, and rules where anonymity motivates individuals to initiate new sexual connections (Toomey & Rothenberg, 2000). It seems that swingers are using similar strategies to procure novel sexual partners.

For the most part, the swingers in this sample reported that they did not frequent swingers' clubs on a regular basis. Most swingers engaged in swinging about six to eight times a year. This suggests that swinging is not an everyday event and that perhaps the concept of swinging as recreational sex may indeed reflect the rationale for the behavior. The results of this study further suggest that both men and women swingers have, for the most part, a positive attitude towards swinging and are happy with their swinging sexual experiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study are consistent with those of previous research on swinging that suggest that swingers have high marital and sexual satisfaction. Although there is still a strong societal disapproval of swinging and a belief that swingers have unsatisfactory marriages and are unhappy with their primary relationships, there is no evidence to support such a claim (Jenks, 1998). Swingers seem to be no different from other individuals in the general population regarding their basic demographic characteristics.

Swingers in this study have been engaging in swinging for an extended period and reported being satisfied with their swinging activities. Moreover, swinging may have far-reaching implications in its ability to add a new dimension to marital satisfaction.

This study provides insight into a possible new social paradigm regarding the dynamics of marriage and consensual extra-marital sex. It is possible that swinging is bringing about a re-definition of marriage and a change in the traditional expectation of marital monogamy. Future research on this topic is warranted and necessary to understand the changing dynamics of marital relationships.

Limitations of the Study

In this study the sample was derived from on-line swingers' clubs and participation was voluntary. While on-line research allows researchers to gather large quantities of data from many respondents, there are some drawbacks such as lack of control over the sample integrity. In this study it is possible that the sample may not be representative of the larger swinger population. Moreover, the sample may prove biased by including only those individuals that have positive attitudes towards swinging. The sample unit was individual swingers and not couples. It is possible that although one member of the couple may be satisfied with swinging, the other may not. Three times more men than women participated in this study suggesting that perhaps men are more involved, or have more to gain from swinging. Also, this study does not allow for a longitudinal evaluation of swinging over time.

Suggestions for Future Research

There is a need for further research with the swinging population in order to determine the viability of this lifestyle and its ability to strengthen, weaken, or have no discernable effect on the marital relationship. Particularly, comprehensive longitudinal research would yield useful information on the long-term effects of swinging on the marital relationship. Also, research with former swingers (those that have dropped out of swinging) would be of interest. An examination of their rationale for

engaging in swinging and then dropping out would be of interest to evaluate the swinging lifestyle.

Currently, it is very difficult to establish a viable estimate of how common is swinging in the general population, Future research should consider developing a model to determine with more accuracy the incidence of swinging and delineate trends and demographics. Noonan (1998) suggested that a complex-systems approach to sex research using chaos theory could provide a modelling methodology to more accurately predict a range of possible and probable outcomes of any particular variant of the biopsychosocial sphere of sexual activity. The utilization of such a model may prove beneficial when applied to swinging.

Moreover, there is also a need for more in-depth research, including case studies, and face-to-face interviews with focus groups to determine with more accuracy the parameters of the swinging population. Future research should also consider the motivational factors that drive individuals towards swinging. Simpson et al. (2004) suggest that an individual's sociosexual orientation, a trait-like collection of beliefs and behaviors about sex, guide their sexual decisions and interactions. People high on sociosexual orientation (unrestricted sociosexual orientation) are more likely to procure, and engage in, sex without love and commitment. It would be important to determine if the level of sociosexual orientation of swingers is a factor on their decision to engage in the swinging lifestyle.

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